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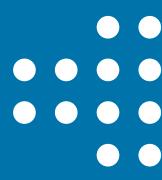
NEXT CONFERENCE

34th Annual International HUPE Conference
November 20–21, 2026

Zagreb, Croatia

Editor's Foreword

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we present this new issue of *HUPEzine*. As we all know, our publication is shaped by the dedication, creativity, and professional commitment of our ESL teaching community.

To begin with, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our hardworking colleagues who, day after day, bring learning to life in their classrooms. We are equally grateful for their valuable contributions to this issue of *HUPEzine*, which reflect both their expertise and their willingness to share, inspire, and support one another.

In this issue, our contributors explore a rich variety of topics that reflect the realities of language teaching today. You will find insightful articles on eTwinning and Erasmus+ projects, showcasing international collaboration and innovative practices beyond classroom walls. Practical examples of good teaching practices, effective classroom strategies, and classroom management approaches offer ideas that can be readily adapted to diverse learning contexts.

Equally important, this issue places a strong emphasis on teacher and student wellbeing and motivation. Through topics such as mindfulness, storytelling, and reflective practice, our authors remind us that caring for ourselves as educators is essential to sustaining our passion, resilience, and effectiveness in the classroom.

We hope that this issue of *HUPEzine* will inform, encourage, and inspire you.

On behalf of the editorial team, we wish you an enjoyable read and extend our warmest wishes for a restful and joyful winter holiday season.

Warm regards,

The HUPEzine Editorial Team

Extensive reading in English class

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Introduction

We all know that reading in any language is important for language development as well as for the development of reading skills. In general students don't like reading books, especially books assigned for book report. My intention was to motivate students to read books in English. I wanted them to strengthen their reading competencies through reading as much as possible, to practice writing techniques, and connect the books that they read to the topics we cover in English class. I also wanted them to present the book they read in class, thereby practicing oral presentation skills. I have decided to do this little project with the small class of sixth graders that learn English as their second foreign language. We had double lesson of English class once a week.

What books to read?

I wanted reading to be easily accessible to students so I decided to use Oxford Reading Club for extended reading in my class. Firs students registered on the Oxford Reading Club webpage after which they had a digital library at a palm of their hand. They could choose from hundreds of titles covering a wide range of English language levels. After registration they did a short test to see at what level of reading are they and to get recommendation for books to read. Next step was to choose books to read. I wanted to connect topics we cover in English class to the books they read at home. I have chosen three topics to be covered by the end of the year:

- Earth Day (Ecology)
- Traveling, holidays
- Food

Reading and presenting in the classroom

The reading started in the second term. We went through the digital library together at school and children chose the books they are going to read at home. Firs topic was *Earth Day (Ecology)*. Students have chosen these titles to read: *Earth, Pollution, Save the Earth, The Recycled Boat Race, Trees, trees, trees!, Protect the environment*. Some children have chosen the same book. They had to read the book they have chosen and make a poster about it. Then they all presented their posters and talked about the books they have read in the class. The second topic was *Traveling, holidays*. The students have chosen these books to read: *A Nice Trip, Visiting friends, A Holiday in Kangaroo Country, Tanya Travels to South America, Summer camp, Going to visit Grandfather, Travel around*. The last topic was *Food*. The students read these books: *Yummy!, The Chocolate Challenge, Fruit, You Are What You Eat, Healthy eating, Let's go shopping, Your Body, Candy for Breakfast*. The students got graded for writing and speaking.

Downsides

Time consuming – students have to have extra time to read books and make posters.

It isn't free – you must pay a certain amount of money to get access to the Oxford Reading Club digital library.

Conclusion

Although it is time consuming and it isn't free the students enjoyed reading books. They enjoyed making posters and presenting them in the classroom. With extensive reading in my English class I covered reading, writing and speaking in English. The students expanded their vocabulary and practiced language structures. At the end of the school year they asked me if we will do this the next year, that's how much they loved extra reading tasks.
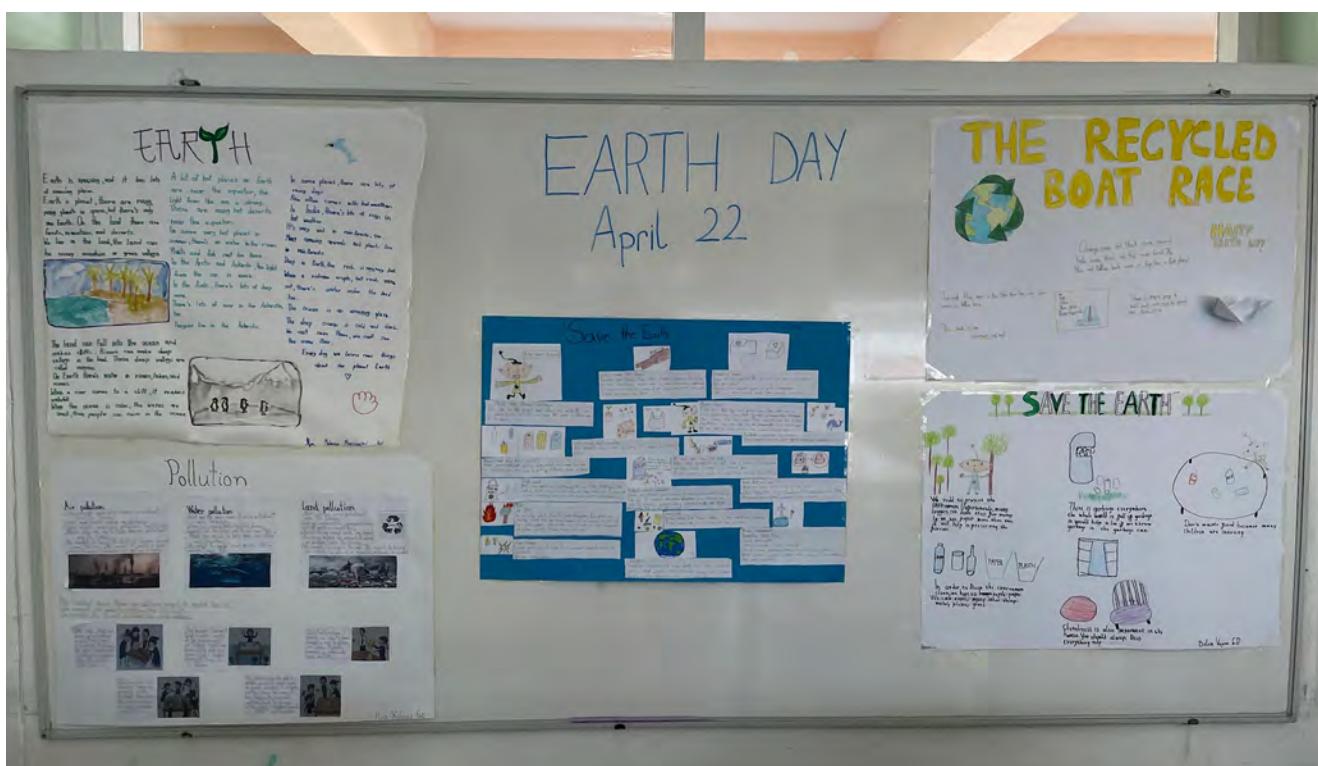
Tropical Haven: A Student-Made World of Culture, Nature, and Diversity

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In the school year 2024-2025, three seventh-grade students from Josip Kozarac Primary School in Soljani, Croatia, participated in an international eTwinning project called *Unity Islands* as part of their English Club activities led by English language teacher Adrijana Roždijevac. They carried out the project in collaboration with partner schools from Portugal and Ukraine by successfully achieving its aims — creating their own imaginary island with its geographical and cultural features, developing all language skills, creativity, and digital competencies through the use of various digital tools, as well as forming new international friendships.

The project was divided into seven thematic modules, preceded by introductory activities on e-safety and introducing the countries, hometowns, schools and students. The students first discussed internet safety and how to behave politely in a digital environment during the project. They created digital posters and mind maps in Canva and Coggle, outlining netiquette rules and useful tips for staying safe online. To introduce themselves to other project partners as Team 2 from Croatia, the students used Bitmoji and Chatterpix to create animated self-portraits, and used Canva to design so-called Chinese portraits, metaphorically describing themselves by comparing themselves to various objects, and places. You can watch their introductory video here: bit.ly/UI-Team2CroatiaIntro.

The students showcased their creativity and imagination by fully designing and presenting their own tropical island, *Tropical Haven*. They developed detailed geographical features of their island country, designed its flag and anthem, created a capital city, and invented native animals and plants (*Flodda* and *Paradise Star*). They also wrote the island's detailed history, illustrating it with images generated by Bing Image Creator (Microsoft Copilot) and NightCafé AI Art Generator.

In addition to providing basic information about the island, the students presented it as an attractive tourist destination. They designed a logo and slogan ("*Embrace the beauty of a tropical paradise*") and showcased various types of accommodation — from beach hotel resorts and overwater bungalows to boat and tree houses, modern tents, eco-friendly camp trailers, apartments, guest houses, village cottages and traditional huts. Their accommodation video can be viewed here: bit.ly/TropicalHavenAccommodation.

Situated in the tropical climate of the Indian Ocean, the island boasts stunning natural landmarks such as sandy beaches and lagoons, sea caves, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, mountains, cliffs, rainforests, and an active volcano called *Firestorm Titan*. They also highlighted other attractions, including museums, art galleries, markets, adventure parks, outdoor escape rooms and mazes. To keep visitors entertained, they proposed a variety of activities — scuba diving, surfing, sailing, paragliding, zip-lining, cave diving, zip-lining, camping, hiking, observing the native animal flodda in its natural habitat, dolphin and whale watching, sunset watching, open-air cinema, traditional cooking and dance classes, street art tours, aqua parks, and more. A video of the attractions and activities can be viewed here: bit.ly/TropicalHavenAttractions.

Visitors can take home a piece of the island with souvenirs such as handmade jewellery, eco-friendly bamboo bags, decorated pebbles and seashells, local artwork, tribal masks, wooden sculptures, flodda toys, model replicas and puzzles of landmarks, as well as postcards, travel guides, magnets, mugs, and T-shirts featuring the island's logo.

No tourist experience would be complete without local cuisine. For *Tropical Haven*, the students imagined a unique blend of Asian and Croatian dishes, enriched with tropical and Balkan flavours and spices. The national dish, Haveneshie, consists of roasted octopus with crispy fried avocado and mixed roasted vegetables. Other delicacies include *sarmachi*, *burek dumplings*, *Slavonshi rolls*, *ćevakos*, *čorbanci*, *pašticada curry*, *match krafne*, and *match*

kremšnite. Dining options range from seaside restaurants and family eateries to hidden cave bistros, rainforest cafés, patisseries, and street food stalls, offering Euro-Asian fusion dishes and treats.

The students also created profiles of notable figures — heroes and heroines of the island — who contributed to its development. From courageous Croatian explorers and tribal leaders to talented artists, writers, doctors, and athletes, these personalities preserved tradition and enriched the island's culture. You can read more about them here: bit.ly/TropicalHavenHeroes.

Their rich imagination was also expressed through legends, myths, and tales about *Tropical Haven*, from ancient civilizations and mythical creatures to the origins of dances and dishes. They illustrated these tales using NightCafé AI Art Generator and recorded themselves reading them. All of the stories are compiled into an e-book created in Book Creator: bit.ly/TropicalHavenLegends.

For the final project module, they designed a year-round event calendar for the island, featuring festivals, food days, competitions, craft fairs, cultural celebrations, sports events, concerts, and family activities. Some of the events include Bookworms Book Fair, Global Sweet Bake-Off, Beach Bonfire Night, Island Vibes Carnival, Family Fun Fiesta, Endangered Marine Species Day, Island Legends Day, Tropical Blossom Flower Festival, Sleeping Competition, Ocean Wave Seafood Festival, Hope for Africa Fundraising Day, Tribal Heritage Day, Fusion Delights Food Fest, and others.

Beyond their own island, the students also created numerous digital materials about parts of the partner schools' islands — postcards, fake Instagram posts, attraction tickets, restaurant menus, book covers, event posters, and games using Canva, Genially, Padlet, Book Creator, and similar tools. They also explored the partner islands in detail, leaving positive comments in English as if they were tourists who had visited.

At the end of the project, the students produced a promotional video showcasing *Tropical Haven* in its best light, highlighting the island's beauty, rich culture, and all the activities they had created. You can watch the video here bit.ly/TropicalHavenPromo, as well as read about all the features of *Tropical Haven* on the island's website here bit.ly/TropicalHavenIsland.

The final collaborative task was to create a project journal featuring all the stages of the project, as well as displaying all the partners' islands and their features in the Unity Islands Archipelago (Portugal's *Coral Island*, Ukraine's *Dream Island*, and Croatia's *Tropical Haven*) through promotional videos and 'official' island websites created in Google Sites.

The project journal can be found here: bit.ly/UnityIslands-Journal.

All students and teachers took part in evaluating the project, giving it positive feedback and expressing a wish to join new eTwinning projects next school year. Students particularly enjoyed collaborating in international teams, creating digital project activities, researching and inventing island content, and using various AI tools.

 The project has received both the National Quality Label and the European Quality Label, recognizing the hard work and dedication of the students — Maša A., Dora P., and Tomislav V. — as well as their creativity, strong English and digital literacy skills.

From a Simple Board to AI: Transforming Language Teaching at INTERA

INTERA, a language school from Zlatar started its Erasmus+ journey back in 2022 at ADRIES, a conference for school owners, teachers, and other professionals in the education industry organised by Jantar, a Split based language school. Inspired by the work our colleagues from every corner of Europe had already done, we joined and were backed up by a small circle of Croatian language schools experienced in carrying out EU projects we applied for, won the grant and recently completed ours with the topic of **innovative methods, tools and skills in language teaching**. Through three mobilities in two countries, our team explored how traditional and cutting-edge methods can reshape language teaching—and how these experiences revitalised our classrooms and collegial collaboration.

Bologna, Italy – Reimagining the Classroom

Our first mobility took place in Bologna, where **Jasna Polanović** attended a training course from July 28 to August 3, 2024, focused on innovative approaches in language teaching. From student-centred strategies and digital tools to outdoor learning through the *Action Bound* app and *Project-Based Learning*, the experience was rich with practical inspiration.

Among the highlights were the *geese method* for managing group work and a deeper understanding of formal, non-formal and informal education. Most importantly, this mobility provided space to share perspectives with fellow educators from Spain, Germany, Finland, the Czech Republic, Poland, and even a Croatian colleague working in Germany—an exchange of ideas that continues to inform our practice.

Dublin, Ireland – Teaching 21st-Century Skills

From August 3 to 10, **Mateja Posavec** joined a course dedicated to integrating 21st-century competencies into language education. Her sessions focused on fostering learner autonomy, increasing engagement, and designing flipped classroom models.

The course also included cultural elements—Irish dance, sharing Croatian delicacies (Cedevita was a surprising

hit!), and collegial discussions with teachers from Croatia, the USA, Czech Republic, Italy, and Germany. Memorable teaching strategies such as the *7-word biography*, *thinking hats*, and *optimist/pessimist debate* turned out to be highly transferable, especially for adult learners who began applying them instinctively—even beyond the scope of the lesson plan.

Dublin, Ireland – Artificial Intelligence in Education

The third mobility brought **Sandra Gregurić** deep into the frontiers of AI in education. Guided by a passionate facilitator from *Europass Teachers Academy*, she explored tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, Krea (for visual content), Suno (for music), as well as classroom-specific assistants like Twee and Diffit.

Beyond tools, what resonated most were the ethical debates on AI in the classroom and the empowering idea that "the only limit is your imagination." This sparked critical reflection on how we as teachers must guide—not fear—these technological shifts.

Long-Term Impact in the Classroom

Throughout the yearlong project (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025), the INTERA team implemented what we had learned in ways that were both meaningful and playful. Adult learners, some returning to education after 50 years, rediscovered the joy of learning through gamified lessons, group dynamics, and creative uses of AI.

We witnessed how engagement rose when learners felt seen, heard—and occasionally surprised.

Strengthening Our Educational Community

This Erasmus+ project was more than a professional upgrade. It strengthened our institution's capacity, enhanced our transversal competences, and showed us how important cross-border cooperation in education is.

It also brought us, as teachers and colleagues closer to one another—reminding us that collaboration, curiosity, and courage to try something new are at the heart of both teaching and learning.

As a tangible result of the project, we created a **booklet with activities** for classroom use. It includes practical, easy-to-implement ideas for language teachers—from group work strategies and creative writing prompts to AI-supported learning tasks. The handbook is freely available to all members of the teaching community and can be accessed through the **Teaching Materials** section on the official HUPE website.

Fostering student motivation and engagement 1

Dajana Jelavić
EFL teacher mentor
Jure Kaštelan high school Omiš

As a seasoned English teacher in vocational programs, I have observed the following issues among my students: a lack of desire to achieve success and reluctance to invest any effort to reach a goal; insufficient interest in most topics; and a very short attention span, which often leads to behavioral problems and ultimately poor academic performance.

Working daily in such an environment has motivated me to make changes and introduce new models, methods, and teaching strategies aimed at sparking curiosity and a thirst for knowledge in my students. To achieve this and make my lessons engaging for a larger number of students, I decided to expand my knowledge by participating in a massive online open course (MOOC) titled: **Fostering Student Motivation and Engagement (FSME)** by the University of Oregon, which is part of the OPEN (Online Professional English Network) program sponsored by the U.S. government.

The purpose of this article is to share the knowledge and insights I gained with colleagues facing similar challenges in their work, offering them new ideas and solutions that could transform the classroom atmosphere and motivate students to learn.

KEY CONCEPTS AND THE ARCS MODEL

The topic of this article revolves around motivation and engagement, so let us begin by defining these key terms.

Motivation consists of the desire, will, and enthusiasm that drive goal-directed behavior.

Engagement refers to the level of attention, optimism, and energy that a student demonstrates in the classroom.

According to psychologists, there are three fundamental human needs connected to intrinsic motivation: the need to feel competent, to have autonomy, and to experience a sense of belonging. In the context of teaching, we must consider these needs and create an environment that allows students to fulfill them.

Furthermore, students may experience varying types of motivation—**intrinsic** or **extrinsic**—at different times. Both types of motivation are valuable and serve their purpose. If a student takes responsibility for their learning and moves beyond the need for immediate rewards or punishments, their extrinsic motivation gradually transforms into intrinsic motivation, becoming their own and independent of the teacher.

Developing a growth mindset is a very useful approach for motivating students, as they tend to avoid challenges, easily give up in the face of obstacles, and disregard teacher feedback, often perceiving it as criticism that makes them uncomfortable. By praising effort, persistence, and supporting mistakes as an integral part of the path to success, the teacher models new ways of thinking and perspectives on personal intelligence development.

John Keller (2010) offers the ARCS model for maintaining motivation in the classroom. ARCS is an acronym for Attention - Relevance - Confidence - Satisfaction. These terms—attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction—align with three basic human needs (competence, autonomy, belonging). Keller suggests that we capture students' attention through an element of surprise, humor, a short story, or an image, and then maintain it by asking questions and offering diverse activities. It is also important to explain the purpose of the activity itself and connect new knowledge with what students already know, align with their goals and interests, and always provide opportunities for them to make independent decisions wherever possible.

Instructions and outcomes need to be clearly articulated to build students' self-confidence. It is crucial for students to be aware of their progress and the fact that they control their own learning, as this will allow them to feel happiness and satisfaction after successfully applying what they have learned.

The ARCS model should always be considered when planning lessons, relying on the four fundamental areas of motivation. Additionally, this model describes a ten-

step process for creating a motivational plan. The first four steps involve analyzing motivation and existing materials to identify problems. The next four steps follow a traditional procedure; the first task is to determine which student behavior (based on the motivational problem identified in the previous step) you wish to influence. Then, you select the appropriate tactic for achieving the goal that fits into the teaching material. Steps nine and ten are intended for evaluating the success of the motivational tactic implemented.

Motivation is a complex and changeable concept, influenced by various factors that can be grouped into four categories: the structure of the lesson, fostering student autonomy, creating a positive classroom atmosphere, and the teacher's behavior and knowledge.

A teacher can positively influence student motivation by clearly explaining the goal and purpose of learning, assisting students on their path to success, and offering diverse activities that cater to different learning styles, interests, and current topics. The teacher should connect the material to students' personal experiences, encourage curiosity, and create challenges. Frequent feedback and fair grading are important, as well as encouraging students to reflect on how they like to learn and giving them choices about what and how they want to learn. Teachers should support students in setting goals and planning how to achieve them, while also developing skills such as time management, project planning, metacognitive skills, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving. Additionally, teachers should promote digital literacy, flexibility, and other 21st-century skills, as well as strategies for self-motivation and independent learning.

Establishing clear classroom rules and involving students in creating these rules, as well as appropriate disciplinary measures, is crucial. A teacher should support respectful communication, organize activities in various formats (individual, pair, group), and encourage collaborative learning and a healthy competitive spirit. Recognizing and praising every achievement is important, as is using classroom management techniques to maintain an uninterrupted teaching process.

Finally, teachers demonstrate enthusiasm for learning (specifically in subjects like English), fairness in applying rules, and respect for students. They should be available and willing to help students who need assistance, offer advice based on personal experience, and incorporate humor and digressions when appropriate. Showing a high level of expertise in the subject matter and teaching methodology further enhances the teacher's effectiveness in motivating students.

CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

In a classroom with strong connection and unity, students are more active, can rely on their peers for help, achieve goals through teamwork, and have greater self-confidence and belief in their abilities. Such a classroom experiences fewer disciplinary problems because students are responsible for one another and have no need to disrupt. The teacher's role is to help students create a positive learning environment that ensures progress and growth, which is achieved through various approaches and techniques that strengthen relationships, encourage collaboration, and build trust, such as classroom rules, moments of kindness, getting to know each other better, working together toward a goal, and creating classroom rituals.

By analyzing needs, we get to know our students and adjust our teaching to meet their needs. The information we gather is used when selecting texts, creating teaching materials, and assessing knowledge. Teachers can collect data on students' needs, interests, goals, and learning methods through surveys, reflection and self-assessment during the school year, individual conversations, and group discussions. When students' needs are met in various areas, their motivation will consequently increase.

SETTING GOALS

Goal setting can become a powerful tool and motivator. It is important to help students discover what they truly want to achieve from the very beginning. The goal should be specific, measurable, relevant, planned within a time frame, and most importantly, attainable. Achieving the goal brings a sense of accomplishment, increases satisfaction, and leads to better performance, grades, and overall success.

Fostering student motivation and engagement 2

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Motivation and engagement are key factors in effective learning, and educators are increasingly turning to diverse strategies to foster these qualities in students. Following are several powerful approaches that cater to different learning styles and encourage active participation.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a proactive and inclusive approach to teaching in which all students can learn successfully. Each student is a unique combination of strengths and weaknesses, deficiencies and talents. UDL is adaptable and offers numerous opportunities for participation and learning. Some students feel included when learning exciting and new things, while others feel more engaged in their routine. Some are more motivated when working in groups, while others prefer to learn alone. Universal Design for Learning gives students the opportunity to choose the learning method that works best for them and aligns with their individual needs. An environment that meets the student's basic needs is a prerequisite for increasing motivation to learn.

DIFFERENTIATED MATERIALS AND TEACHING

Differentiated teaching is a method of instruction where the teacher recognizes differences among students and plans lessons that will meet all their needs. It is carried out in three basic ways: differentiating content, where the teacher uses the same type of activity and topic but with tasks of varying difficulty; providing continuous support and materials in different forms (visual, auditory, kinesthetic); differentiating processes, where the teacher creates different tasks (e.g., learning stations, puzzle activities), and the student decides whether to work alone or in pairs; and differentiating products, where students are allowed to demonstrate their knowledge in various ways. The benefits of this approach include reducing student frustration due to overly difficult or inaccessible materials, increasing motivation through topics that in-terest them, and enhancing engagement because the content is appropriately challenging—slightly above the students' current abilities, but achievable with support (scaffolding). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the difference between what a student can do independently and what they can achieve with appropriate support from peers or the teacher. Understanding this concept allows the teacher to better prepare lessons and adjust resources available to students.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Through collaboration on shared tasks, students develop important skills necessary for future life and work, such as creativity, communication, critical thinking, and cooperation. Their relationships are strengthened, and self-confidence increases as they achieve success in a supportive environment, using everyday language (negotiating, exchanging information, discussing). For students to feel competent, tasks should be moderately challenging, and expectations should be clearly articulated. The sense of belonging is influenced by how groups are formed and their size. Additionally, students should have a certain degree of autonomy even when working in groups, such as the option to choose the type of project or establish their own group rules. Learning is inherently a social activity, and knowledge is acquired through interaction with others—learning with and from them. Collaborative learning motivates students as they are more engaged in the work. Interaction with the instructional material increases, and students do not simply memorize facts but explore and apply knowledge, which involves higher-order thinking processes. They invest more effort to achieve outcomes they share responsibility for, and therefore strive to contribute as much as possible.

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL)

PBL is a teaching method where students engage in an authentic task, solving a problem or creating a shared final product. After the teacher introduces the project's expectations, outcomes, necessary steps, and timeframe,

students take an active role and organize their own learning while the teacher monitors, provides feedback, and directs the learning process. Students are responsible for their learning, create new values, and present their newfound knowledge to a broader audience. They actively participate in peer evaluation or help create rubrics before the project starts, which helps them maintain focus on the theme until the end. Rubrics are used to evaluate both the process and the product of the project. Students are motivated by the fact that their product will be seen and evaluated by a wider community, which drives them to deliver a quality result. Yazdanpanah (2019) describes a framework for high-quality PBL based on six criteria: intellectual challenge and achievement, authenticity, collaboration, project management, reflection, and a public product. To encourage critical thinking and effective communication, students must be given opportunities and motivating learning experiences that will allow them to develop the necessary skills. PBL has a far-reaching, positive impact on students' lives and is well worth the effort invested in its planning and execution.

GAMES IN TEACHING

Using games in teaching can motivate students to continue learning and mastering content they might otherwise abandon because they consider it too difficult. During games, students will participate and remain engaged, knowing exactly what they need to do, seeing the purpose and meaning of the task, which must be appropriate for their knowledge level (e.g., of the English language). If further clarification is needed, a peer can offer it. To avoid conflict within the group, it is beneficial to assign different roles or responsibilities to students, helping them focus on the desired outcome. The competitive element and relaxed atmosphere within the group help maintain motivation until the end, when it is recommended to discuss with students and gather feedback on parts of the game that were too easy or too difficult. Game-based learning "lowers the affective filter, encourages creative and spontaneous use of a foreign language," and "strengthens group dynamics" (Lengeling and Malarcher, 1997). In addition to external motivation (points, progress rankings), games also foster internal motivation by integrating individual choice, strategic thinking, and teamwork. Negative feelings such as stress, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence can hinder learning (Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen, 1985). On the other hand, positive feelings like trust, kindness, playfulness, and relaxation promote learning, especially when it comes to foreign language learning, where students' self-esteem is often most vulnerable when trying to speak a foreign language (Arnold, 2009).

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Formative assessment provides an opportunity for growth, and frequent, thoughtful feedback will increase students' intrinsic motivation because their efforts are recognized, and the teacher shows interest in supporting their progress. In the educational context, one of the teacher's primary tasks is to give feedback aimed at improvement and progress. This does not mean correcting every mistake, as that would not be motivating. Only information focused on the purpose of the activity (e.g., during a discussion, the teacher should focus on the student's ideas or ask for further clarification) will have a positive effect. The teacher can correct the student explicitly or implicitly, or praise them by highlighting what was done well. When commenting on a student's work, it is helpful to use the "sandwich method," beginning with praise, followed by correction or suggestions for improvement, and concluding with a summary so that the student retains a sense of competence and motivation.

The teacher is not the only one who evaluates student performance; students also engage in self-assessment (enhancing the motivational aspect of autonomy) by reflecting on their strengths, weaknesses, and the steps they need to take (metacognition). Peer evaluation is useful if clear guidelines are provided and can consist of praise-suggestion-commendation (enhancing the motivational aspect of belonging).

Feedback should be aligned with outcomes, provided in moderation, and at the right time, maintaining a balance between positive comments and corrections, as the manner in which this is done significantly influences motivation and effort.

REFLECTION AND METACOGNITION

In the educational context, reflection means thinking about oneself and one's work, especially when connecting thoughts about past experiences to plans for the future. Metacognition is the awareness of our thinking processes; the awareness and understanding of our own thoughts and other cognitive processes.

"We do not learn from experience… we learn from reflecting on experience." (John Dewey, 1933)

For this reason, reflection should become a habit for students. An exit ticket at the end of each class can positively impact motivation and guide further learning in the right direction. Thinking about learning and taking responsibility for it can strengthen the sense of autonomy and competence. Learning how to learn is perhaps the most valuable of all skills, and it should be taught in schools to prepare students for lifelong learning. Students need to recognize what they know and what they

don't know, what is still unclear, identify different levels of understanding, track their progress, and reflect on learning strategies, adjusting them when necessary. Successful students are those who have mastered the skill of self-regulation with the help of metacognition.

Motivating students to learn and actively participate in class presents a significant challenge for every teacher, even though there is a wide range of strategies and activities that can influence them.

How motivated are you to apply these in your classroom?

Sources:
Fostering Student Motivation and Engagement (FSME) online course provided by the University of Oregon as part of the Online Professional English Network (OPEN). This program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. government and administered by FHI 360.
Park (2018), Motivation Theories and Instructional Design
Ramin Yazdanpanah (2019), Exploring and Expressing Culture through Project-Based Learning

I am not a teacher, but an awakener.

-Robert Frost

Stations as a Management Tool in the English Classroom

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Abstract: This paper explores the benefits and practical implementation of the station method as a teaching strategy in the English classroom from personal experience. It begins by defining stations and highlighting the advantages. The paper also provides a guide for organizing a station-based lesson, offering two main modalities and practical tips for success. Emphasizing the student-centered nature of this approach, the paper concludes that station teaching is an effective, flexible method suitable for both small and large classes, enabling teachers to create diverse, active, and engaging learning experiences.

Why I Turned to Stations

In my opinion, one of the advantages of being a teacher is that at the beginning of each new school year, there is a chance to start fresh, abandon old practices that weren't effective enough and to embrace new teaching strategies. However, station teaching is one of those methods I have always kept in my toolbox. If I had to define this method, I would say that it is a teaching strategy in which the classroom is divided into different activity areas (or stations) and students work on them, usually by walking around the classroom from one station to another, in pairs, groups or individually. Each station focuses on a specific skill, topic, or activity, which allows for a variety of approaches within a single lesson.

As a teacher with over 20 years of experience, I have used stations for a long time, and it has proven to be the single most efficient method throughout the years and the one which I do not see abandoning any time in the future. There are many reasons for that, and I will try to list them here based on my experience.

From time to time, I have felt that my classroom is too teacher-centered, even when the students were working with partners or in teams. An efficient seating arrangement helped a little with that, but I still had a strong sense that students were focusing too much on me and my instructions and that they had little independence to work at their own pace or even to choose which activities they would like to do and at what time. I sometimes felt

that I did not give much autonomy or choice to students, despite the choice boards or topics to choose from for their writing assignment. So, when I first came across stations, I felt it was exactly what I was looking for.

The Benefits of Using Stations in a Language Classroom

One of the first things that immediately comes into focus when using stations as a teaching method is that there is an element of movement which takes care of the kinesthetic students' needs, but also an element of surprise as students usually don't know what is waiting for them at the next station. Students are definitely more active than during a teacher-focused lesson, and it is an easier way of incorporating differentiated tasks for different levels of language. This way a student can choose the level at which he or she wishes to do the task, and it is done in a more inconspicuous way so as not to bring focus to students who need more practice or who choose to work on a lower level of language.
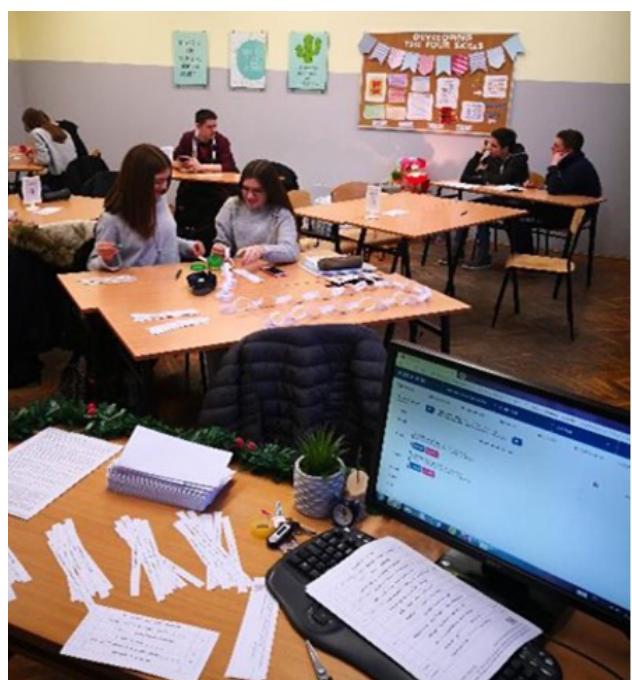
Another upside to this method is that students can be given a choice to either work alone or with someone else. Although we need to encourage students to communicate in order to advance in their language, there are some situations that can be allocated for some alone work time, especially for students who prefer to work that way. Also, by working on stations, students learn how to take more responsibility for their work, and they develop their independence. They do need to finish all the tasks, and this can be challenging, but with proper planning and feedback, students have to push themselves rather than being pushed by the general pace of the lesson, which teaches them to be more independent in their work.

When such a lesson is well-planned and structured, students will be more engaged and won't get off-task, especially if this method is applied regularly. In this way, stations provide a predictable routine, which helps maintain order in the classroom. Incorporating digital tools e.g., listening to podcasts or doing interactive grammar games, which enhance student engagement is quite easy with the stations method, and it also helps them be more motivated for work.

One other reason why I find stations extremely useful is that it gives the teacher some extra time to work with students individually, offering more personalized feedback. When using stations, I always have a teacher station, and I make it mandatory. Students can approach me any time during the lesson and ask questions, get additional help, or just showcase their work.

Finally, stations can work well with small as well as large classes with appropriate planning, and they can be designed for various topics, themes, or skill levels, making them versatile for any classroom, not just a language classroom.

Designing Stations for Success in the Classroom

The way I organize my lessons as stations is that I usually choose a topic that I would like my students to work on. The lessons are more or less comprised of the same types of activities as in any conventional lesson: tasks for the development of different skills, language and grammar tasks, critical thinking assignments, creativity development tasks, games or quizzes, videos or podcasts, all depending on the topic. The most prominent difference between a conventional lesson and the stations method is that it shifts the focus away from the teacher as the central figure in the classroom to the student who is an active participant.

In a conventional lesson, the teacher leads the instruction, while students mostly listen, take notes, or perhaps

participate in some pair or group work activities. This way, the teacher controls the pace of the lesson, and all the students typically engage in the same activity at the same time.

In a station-based lesson, the focus shifts to students. The classroom is divided into multiple stations where students engage in a variety of tasks, which can be organized as independent or teamwork activities, and they can work at their own pace. The teacher acts as a facilitator, providing guidance and feedback as needed.

I usually use two main modalities in stations. The first one gives students more choice, and they can spend as much time as they need on each station. This way, they don't need to stress about timing, and they can work on a certain concept until they have managed it. However, the major issue with this approach is that some students will finish their work more swiftly, so it is important to have extra tasks ready for fast finishers.

The second modality is more controlled, because I time each station. I usually do this by displaying a count-down on the interactive board, so the students know exactly how much time they have before moving to a different station. The downside of this approach is that I have to organize another final lesson at the end of all activities, during which students finish up what they haven't had enough time for during station work.

Why You Should Try Stations in Your Classroom

In my experience, there are some mandatory elements for a well-conducted stations lesson. First off, make sure that you either give a worksheet to students or that they take note of their work in notebooks. This seems to be an obvious and extremely efficient way of making sure students are on task because they will be asked to show their work to the teacher.

The second thing is that one of the stations should always be the teacher station, where students bring their

worksheets or notebooks to the teacher to show their work. Also, the teacher station is a valuable space in the classroom because the teacher can have one-on-one time with students when and if necessary.

Last, but not least, it is quite possible that students will go through more material and finish more activities this way, so the teacher should always be prepared for that and have extra work for fast finishers. This extra activity needs to be something fun because students should be motivated to do their work on time.

Conclusion

Station teaching is an engaging and effective method that can transform a traditional classroom into a dynamic, student-centered environment. By providing opportunities for movement, choice, differentiation, and collaboration, stations encourage students to take ownership of their learning while allowing teachers to address students' individual needs. Although this method requires careful planning and organization, the benefits far outweigh the effort, so that is why I encourage teachers of any subject to use this method.

STATIONS WORKSHEET

topic		date	
name		class	

STATION 1	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
STATION 2	1. 2. 3. 4.
STATION 3	1. 2. 3.
STATION 4	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
STATION 5	1. 2. 3.

Learning about culture in ELT classroom

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When teaching a language, a teacher can not just teach their students about spelling, grammar, some new words, and practice the four skills. Learners can not learn a language without getting themselves very familiar with aforementioned categories. But, it is equally important to immerse our students in the culture of countries whose language they are learning.

Our students actually love this part of learning, it is interesting, motivating, it can be something that will prompt those students that are not so keen on learning English to embark on this journey.

In my teaching career, I have always tried to give them these bits and bobs of culture every year, sometimes through classes, and sometimes incorporating it in a project.

I try to go about it by connecting it to a festival that is celebrated like Christmas, Easter, Saint Patrick's Day, Fourth of July, or learning about traditions, food, transport, cities, the list is endless.

In a way, the first step I take is some sort of an introduction, I show my students pictures and videos about the cultural element we will discuss further. I explain in detail about the cultural element. Then, the next step is to try to do some quizzes or handouts. There are a lot of examples that are free to use as teaching resources, and sometimes I make my own handouts and quizzes. It all depends on the availability of resources and also the time and bandwidth I have.

After that, my students really get creative and they explore on the Internet and make presentations and post-

ers on the cultural topic we taught in the classroom. Sometimes they also like making videos about it.

In the classroom, they present their findings and then we discuss it in great detail. Those lessons tend to be the most interesting ones, and students really memorise that moments.

Some of the most memorable classes we had was when we had Saint Patrick's Day party. Students and I brought green food and drink, we did a quiz about Saint Patrick, and they tried dancing traditional Irish dances. Students talked about this for days afterwards. Also, one year we had a tea party to celebrate European Day of languages, students brought traditional British cookies and made English Breakfast tea with milk and sugar. It was also interesting and most importantly a lot of fun for the students. Additionally, they really loved doing presentations
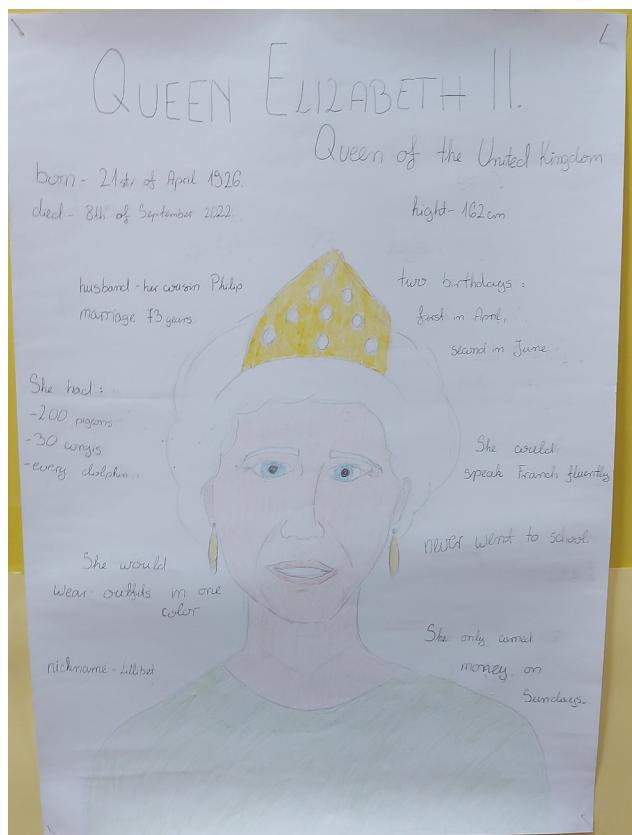
and posters about the differences in Croatia and English speaking countries in celebrating Christmas and Easter.

Furthermore, we explored topics such as means of transport in Great Britain, strange animals in Australia, different natural resources and nature parks in America, and of course different school systems.

The benefits of incorporating cultural lessons in your classes is motivating students, learning about cultural nuances, in the end, also improving the understanding of the English language, because sometimes, some texts, phrases and notions can only be understood by learning about the culture of the people speaking that language. One of the examples of this is learning about the royal family and their impact on the British, or learning about baseball, rugby and their importance in everyday life of every American. It is important to pay close attention to the needs and ideas of our students, and explore cultural topics they are mostly interested in. In that way, we will get the top-quality outcomes in the end.

Making a Difference Locally – The Power of School Projects

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Introduction

Reading comprehension is widely recognized as a fundamental skill for all English learners, regardless of age, learning context, grade, or CEFR level. It is an essential aspect of daily teaching: learners are expected to develop it, teachers to assess it. Coursebooks typically include reading materials on a variety of topics, accompanied by comprehension questions and a limited set of tasks. We often focus on teaching reading techniques like skimming and scanning, and we develop strategies and tips for mastering intensive reading. Yet, how often do we truly integrate extensive reading into the language teaching process? Constraints such as limited time, rigid curricula, and assessment demands have, over time, unjustly diminished the importance of a crucial aspect of effective reading practice: pleasure.

Have your students heard of reading for pleasure? Have you ever motivated them to read a book in English? Have you talked to them about the benefits it has for their language acquisition? Have you ever recommended a book in English? Have you informed them where to find and how to choose a book? Have you guided or assisted them through the process of extensive reading in English? Have you nourished and cherished a love of reading itself? Before we all start looking for excuses (there are already too many legitimate ones provided by the program restraints), remember that it's never too late to start. After all, aren't most of us language – and literature teachers?

Inspiration for the project

A couple of years ago I was teaching fourth grade primary – the entire generation of almost a hundred children. We faced our share of challenges, successes, and setbacks. I found this number a meaningful sample for informal research, particularly when observing behaviors during exams. Over half of the students tended to finish exams too quickly. To address this, I brought additional tasks, offered harder and longer tests, and reluctantly allowed the familiar "Can I take a paper for drawing?" routine. While this disrupted both class dynamics and exam performance, it was clear that fast finishers simply couldn't help themselves.

Determined to preserve a quiet environment for those who needed the full allotted time, while also keeping fast finishers engaged in English, I decided to try something new. I brought around twenty children's books in English from my home library to their next exam. Showing my bag full of exams and books, I announced: "Here is our little mobile library." The word "mobile" itself piqued their curiosity. I arranged the books on the windowsill and set clear rules: those who had double-checked their work could borrow a book to read quietly. About twenty minutes later, something remarkable happened. Students lined up at the windowsill library, quietly returning to their seats with books. They remained engaged until the end of class, many eager to stay even after the bell. This pattern repeated in all four classes, multiple times. Eventually, the number of fast finishers increased, as nearly everyone rushed to finish the exam for a chance to borrow a book. Reading for pleasure proved more enticing than completing reading comprehension tasks. Children respond to what they are offered; given the opportunity, they do read.

One boy was particularly disappointed he didn't have enough time to finish the book. I told him – *It's OK, you may take it home. Bring it back when you finish it*. He looked at me in disbelief and shyly asked – *Really?* with his eyes full of gratitude and excitement. *Of course* – I replied - *I know you'll take good care of my book*. The expression on his face was priceless – one of a child getting the best present ever. That day, I felt something had to be done. I decided to create a small English-language library for students like Ivan — and that's how it all began.

About the Project

The English Corner in the school library was imagined and realized as a school project that commenced in the

academic year 2024/2025 and is currently ongoing. The primary objective of this initiative was to establish a resource for all students and teachers with a keen interest in English and reading. The goal was not only to promote reading for pleasure in English but also to enhance accessibility to books in the language.

From the very beginning, participation has been entirely voluntary for all interested teachers and students. The establishment of the Corner was made possible through generous book donations and fundraising efforts. Remarkably, the English Corner was officially opened for use within just six months. It is situated within the school library, functioning in accordance with its regulations. To date, we have successfully collected, organized, catalogued, and shelved seven hundred books available for students to borrow.

Project Stages

This was an ambitious project, particularly as it had to be done from scratch, without any budgetary resources. Achieving this would not have been possible without a grand vision and a strong personal drive to turn that vision into reality. As with any project, it involved significant brainstorming, writing, planning, managing, facilitating, and communicating.

However, the first critical step in a school project is obtaining approval from the principal. I was fortunate to receive not only permission but also invaluable moral and practical support. Although I was prepared to undertake the project independently, it soon became evident that collaboration was essential. Thus, motivating and persuading others to participate became another crucial step. Fortunately, enthusiasm proved to be contagious—resulting in fifteen teachers and approximately eighty students engaged in various tasks at their own pace.

While collecting books was not the most challenging aspect, it certainly proved to be the most time-consuming. Countless inquiry letters were sent to publishers, associations, embassies, etc. Social media posts can be precarious, but we carefully shared information exclusively within closed, book-related groups, with the name of the school and project details communicated solely through personal messages. Additionally, personal contacts provided another vital source of books, with friends and fellow teachers contributing. The Christmas Fair fundraising event also provided a wonderful opportunity to raise funds for the Corner. Though the budget was modest, it was spent wisely and frugally on second-hand books.

Once the books were collected, the next step was to transform them into a cohesive library. The books were examined, organized by genre, labeled, and shelved. Without the immense assistance of the school librarian and volunteer students, this process would have taken considerably longer. It was completed in just one month. Students and the art teacher diligently worked on decorating the space.

The Corner was officially opened after only six months of dedicated effort, and it has continued to grow and develop ever since the grand unveiling (Ivan had the honor of cutting the red ribbon). The final task remains to encourage and guide students in utilizing the Corner. This ongoing effort aims to inspire children to read and nurture a love for reading in English.

Project Outcomes

The results achieved throughout the project have exceeded both subjective and objective expectations. The Corner now houses seven hundred children's books, including picture books, comics, chapter books, graded readers, horror, mystery, fantasy, science, classics, bestsellers, and more. A vibrant, safe, and child-friendly place has been created, and our students adore it!

In the first two months alone, 142 books were borrowed, with our most avid reader, T.V. (nine years old), setting a record of 15 books read. Within six months, 269 borrowings were recorded. Lower primary students have shown the greatest enthusiasm for exploring the Corner. Statistically, approximately 10% of children borrow books, indicating that about ninety students now read for pleasure in English! Teachers have gained access to an invaluable resource, offering a diverse array of books for use in classroom, extracurricular activities, projects, or optional book-related assignments.

The English Corner has also become a gathering space for students not enrolled in elective subjects, where they can find a variety of board games in English. Additionally, it serves as a venue for school social events. Besides the grand opening, we organized an Open Doors Day in the Corner, aimed at informing, promoting, and encouraging use of the resource among children, parents, and teachers.

This project has also inspired further initiatives; this year, we are holding a literary competition titled "Once Upon Your Time," to reward our most enthusiastic and creative readers. The Corner also welcomed guests from a neighboring school, providing an opportunity for children to socialize with peers who share an interest in English and reading. Three workshops were conducted during teacher education events and conferences with the goal of sharing project ideas. These workshops inspired several educators to initiate similar projects, meaning more English corners are being worked on!

Conclusion

The school project, English Corner of the School Library, has proven to be an outstanding success, exceeding all expectations and demonstrating that school initiatives can be both impactful and transformative. The journey was not without its challenges; the primary drawback was the inherent unpredictability of the project, which relied heavily on human involvement. Additionally, managing such a demanding endeavor—one that required significant time, effort, and energy—without a dependable budget often proved formidable.

Nevertheless, the benefits gained far outweighed any obstacles encountered. An invaluable and enduring resource has been established, fostering not only spontaneous and enjoyable language acquisition but also personal growth. A crucial aspect of this project was the opportunity it provided for children to volunteer, contribute, witness the immediate impact of their efforts, and feel truly valued. Furthermore, the initiative brought the participants together and enhanced team-building, teacher-student relationships, and the overall sense of community.

The way I see it, it has rekindled my faith in people, underscoring the presence of remarkable individuals who recognized the project's goals as meaningful and generously donated children's books. The experience has inspired and fulfilled me both personally and professionally. Moreover, it gave me wings for future projects. My greatest sense of achievement lies not in the Corner itself, but in witnessing children read and derive joy from it.

In the end, the true power of a project does not reside in its resources or funding; nor does our profession find its essence in curriculum or paperwork. Rather, the strength of any initiative lies in the dedication of the individuals involved, individuals who care. The potential of teachers is found in their ability to effect small, meaningful changes within their local context, changes that ultimately matter.

(Further information available at: https://os-akovaci-ca-zg.skole.hr/engleski-kutak/)

Podcasting in Education: From Idea to Airwaves
HUPE International Conference 2025

Nina Rezo and Marina Sertić
Vugroveckašina primary school, Zagreb

For over three decades, the HUPE International Conference has been bringing together English teachers, lecturers, and educators, offering them a space to explore new teaching approaches, best practices, and innovations in education.

English teachers Nina Rezo and Marina Sertić from VugrovecKašina Primary School have long been active contributors to HUPE, showcasing their school's projects and the creative integration of technology in language learning. This year, they presented a session on the topic of podcasts and radio as versatile educational tools.

The Power of Sound in Learning

Podcasts, as dynamic and accessible media, are excellent didactic resources — whether teachers use existing materials or engage students in the creative process of podcast production.

For years, students at VugrovecKašina Primary School have explored sound and radio production through extracurricular programs (*Journalists, Media Club, In Medias Press*), regular classes, and participation in national competitions such as LiDraNo and Make it Heard.

Within the project "Be a STEMfluencer," students studied the science of sound while developing communication and collaboration skills. Older students guided third graders into the world of recording, editing, and sound design, culminating in the creation of the podcast "Skileraj," produced in a professional studio.

Building on this experience, teachers launched the eTwinning project "Podcast is a Blast", promoting all three goals of the school's Erasmus accreditation — media literacy, sustainable development, and cultural heritage — through collaboration with partners across Europe.

To celebrate World Radio Day (February 13), they created an online showcase of their achievements, available here: https://new.express.adobe.com/webpage/mYkA-VTZ16eC9d/

Learning from Barcelona: Erasmus Mobility

From 30 September to 4 October, 2024, three teachers — Dijana Požgaj, Nina Rezo, and Marina Sertić — participated in a structured course titled *Podcast and Streaming as Educational Tools* in Barcelona.

They gained valuable insight into methodological approaches and the technical process of producing and broadcasting live podcasts. Visits to a Catalan radio station and interviews with university students at the Faculty of Philology enriched the experience. More about their trip: https://oskasinazmaj.com.hr/2024/10/09/podcasti-usrcukatalonije/

This is not the school's first venture into radio education — its teachers regularly participate in Novigradsko Proljeće (Novigrad Spring) and training programs organized by the Education and Teacher Training Agency (AZOO).

The eTwinning project "Podcast is a Blast" was also featured on the Sesvete Today web portal, and its final product, an interactive ebook showcasing the works of all participants, is available here: https://read.bookcreator.com/OEzf6YrIOkgjLkfD9CbHJIPQ9WLows0__k2RNv4tDQ/AYzZpXhERLWo1qSJQPHkmA

Why Podcasting Belongs in the Classroom

In today's world, overloaded with digital noise and visual distractions, radio remains a timeless medium — it invites us to pause, listen, imagine, and reflect. The richness of sound, voices, and themes offers fertile ground for deep, focused learning.

When integrated into language education, podcasts support the development of all language skills. Listening to stories told through sound helps students naturally acquire vocabulary, sentence patterns, and storytelling techniques. The emphasis lies on communication, com-

prehension, and active listening — skills essential for mastering any language.

Moreover, podcast creation represents a truly interdisciplinary process, connecting subjects and fostering teamwork, creativity, and media literacy.

From Listening to Broadcasting: The Three Stages of Creation

The podcasting process can be divided into three main stages:

1. Listening and Analysis – Students begin by listening critically, reflecting on what they heard and learned. Active listening demands focus on a single stimulus—sound—and develops concentration and comprehension.

2. Creation and Collaboration – Once curiosity is sparked, students begin shaping their own soundbased stories or podcasts. Through brainstorming and teamwork, they plan content, write scripts, conduct interviews, and record authentic audio. This stage blends language practice with creativity and problemsolving.

3. Editing and Publishing – Recordings are edited, enhanced with background music, and refined into a cohesive final product. The result should be concise, engaging, and thematically focused, maintaining the listener's attention throughout.

Tools of the Trade: Simple and Accessible

Podcasting requires no expensive equipment. Students and teachers can record using:

- a mobile phone
- a computer with a builtin microphone
- or an affordable voice recorder

Additionally, there are free online tools that make editing and publishing simple:

- Vocaroo – record directly in your browser, upload .mp3 files, and generate links, QR codes, or embed options.
- Audacity – a free desktop program with an intuitive interface ideal for editing and creating professional-quality podcasts. Its familiar layout, similar to Office tools, makes it accessible even to younger learners.

Broadcasting Knowledge: From Classroom to the World

The final step is publishing. Platforms such as Podbean allow teachers and students to upload episodes and even host live broadcasts.

During Erasmus Days (14–18 October, 2024), students at VugrovecKašina Primary School took on the role of radio hosts, conducting two live broadcasts that connected teachers and peers from eTwinning partner schools across Europe.

Conclusion: Every Classroom Can Be a Radio Station

Podcasting in education offers endless opportunities for creative expression, collaboration, and authentic learning. It serves as a powerful tool for evaluation and self-evaluation, encouraging both teachers and students to reflect, improve, and grow.

With a touch of curiosity, teamwork, and basic technology, any classroom can transform into a small radio station—where voices, ideas, and imagination come to life.

Mediation in English Language Teaching: Skill-Specific Practices and Formative Assessment

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Srednja škola Prelog
Martina Grgac
Gimnazija „Fran Galović" Koprivnica

Ever since the introduction of the latest Croatian educational reform „Škola za život" and the changes in the concept of assessment of students' achievements, teachers in secondary schools have been looking for strategies and methods to apply in teaching and evaluating mediation in the EFL classroom.

As outlined in the CEFR Companion Volume, mediation is not simply about translating or simplifying language—it is about facilitating understanding, enabling communication, and supporting learners as they try to comprehend meaning. When applied across the four language skills—speaking, writing, reading, and listening—mediation becomes a dynamic, learner-centred practice that encourages both linguistic and intercultural competence.

Among a variety of methods here are a few activities and formative assessment options that might make teaching English to Croatian students more motivating, educational and entertaining.

Speaking: clarifying and reformulating in real time

In speaking activities, mediation often takes the form of paraphrasing, summarising, or explaining ideas to others. For example, in a B2-level classroom discussion on climate change, one student may struggle to articulate a complex idea. A peer intervenes: "So, what you mean is that governments should invest more money in renewable energy, right?" This act of clarification supports mutual understanding and models effective communication strategies.

Formative Assessment: Use a "mediation log" where students reflect on moments they helped others understand during group tasks. Teachers can assess these logs for awareness of language strategies and interpersonal sensitivity.

Writing: summarising and adapting for a target audience

Writing mediation involves transforming content for a specific audience. At B2 level, students might read a research article on digital privacy and then write a blog post summarising the key points for a general audience. This requires selecting relevant information, simplifying technical language, and maintaining the original meaning.

Formative Assessment: Peer review with guided criteria could be applied in this case —students assess each other's summaries for clarity, tone, and appropriateness for the intended audience, fostering metacognitive awareness of mediation choices.

Reading: extracting and reframing key ideas

Reading mediation is essential when learners must interpret and relay information. At B1 level, students might read a museum leaflet in English and explain its content to a classmate unfamiliar with the vocabulary. The focus is on identifying main ideas and rephrasing them in simpler terms.

Formative Assessment: Use a "jigsaw reading" task where each student mediates a different section of a text to their group. Teachers observe and provide feedback on how effectively students convey meaning and support comprehension.

Listening: interpreting and supporting comprehension

Listening mediation involves interpreting spoken input and helping others understand it. At A2 level, a student listens to a short audio about daily routines and then explains it to a partner using gestures and simplified language. This builds both listening comprehension and communicative confidence.

Formative Assessment: Create a "listening relay" where students listen to a short clip and then pass on the message to another student, who must report it to the class. Teachers assess accuracy and clarity of the mediated message.

Across all skills, mediation empowers learners to become active participants in communication. It shifts the focus from individual performance to collaborative clarification of meaning, reinforcing the idea that language is not just a system to master, but a bridge to understanding a different mindset or culture.

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Link to additional materials (assessment of mediation activities):
bit.ly/472B1VG

EPASsionates – one of the eTwinning COMET Award winners in Croatia

Ivana Opačak
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The eTwinning project **EPASsionates** (2024/2025), a follow-up of the eTwinning projects **Down EU Avenue** (2022/23) and **Vote4Democracy Ambassadors** (2023/24), is one of the **eTwinning COMET Award winners in Croatia** (the best eTwinning project in 2024/2025 in the category "Vocational and Art Schools"), awarded at the **National eTwinning Conference in Zagreb** on Nov 11, 2025. The founders and coordinators were English teachers **Gabriela Ciolpan** (*Lazar Edeleanu* Technical School in Năvodari, Romania) and **Ivana Opačak** (Secondary School of Economics in Slavonski Brod, Croatia). The project included European Parliament Ambassador Schools (EPAS) and eTwinning Schools from Greece, Spain, Romania and Croatia, bringing into focus the importance of content-language-integrated collaborative learning (CLIL) about the EU (history, culture, institutions, values), applying Sustainable Development Goals & STE(A)M methodology.

The project was registered on the European School Education Platform (ESEP) in August 2024, and it lasted until June 2025; in August 2025 all partners were awarded the National Quality Label (and are still waiting for the European one). Partners connected on ESEP, combined their love for eTwinning and their passion for the EPAS programme – teaching about Europe for Europe – to encourage the active participation of educated young EU citizens in a democratic society. They communicated and collaborated in order to reach common goals – create collaborative learning scenarios (for general- and vocational subjects), implement & evaluate them in class/during online workshops, celebrating notable dates/weeks with European dimension

The project *EPASsionates* focused on strengthening international cooperation, European digital literacy and active citizenship. These were key concepts highlighted by the Council of Europe initiative – **2025** was declared **the European Year of Digital Citizenship Education**. The theme also aligned with the **2025 eTwinning campaign** *Education for Citizenship*, and coincided with the **20th**

anniversary of eTwinning. The project promoted the importance of collaborative planning in the educational process, integrated learning/teaching of vocational and general education content and foreign languages (*Content and Language Integrated Learning/CLIL*), using **European teaching materials**, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the STE(A)M methodology.

During the first project meeting on October 4, 2024, teacher Ivana Opačak presented a **model lesson plan**, which served as the foundation for the year-long project work. As an example of project collaboration, the two coordinators presented their experience of (co-planning) co-teaching in September 2024 – implementing a **joint educational scenario EDL – *Poetry & Wellbeing*** to mark/celebrate **European Heritage Days** and the **European Day of Languages**.

From October 2024 to May 2025, project partners communicated and collaborated in international teams to co-create, implement, and (self-)evaluate structured learning scenarios, together with their students, and

Multilingual Circle of Values (Team 4), EDL 2025

to compile a digital collection of activity proposals for teaching about Europe (for Europe). All project activities were carefully planned, systematically documented on the **project's TwinSpace** and disseminated through the project's online platforms (*EPASsionates – Secondary School of Economics*, Slavonski Brod, Croatia; **Facebook**, **Instagram**).

The **project blog** *eTwas Learning About Europe* was published on the **Linktree platform**, presenting a compilation of eight (8) educational scenarios for teaching about Europe (for Europe). These include elements of STE(A)M and CLIL methodology, focusing on the ethical and safe use of digital tools and artificial intelligence and supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the EPAS programme. The **blog's homepage**, with a list of scenario topics, reflects the comprehensive and extensive nature of the project work.

As the culmination of the project, the publication *Etwas (eTwinning & EPAS) about Europe: pedagogical guide compiled within eTwinning project Epassionates* was published on April 25, 2025. The **online edition** (49 pages, in **PDF format**) is authored by a group of contributors (project partners) and registered with the Romanian National ISBN Agency under the international standard book number **ISBN 978-973-0-41807-1**. The year-long work of teachers and students became an officially recognized publication, which will remain permanently accessible in (inter)national book databases as inspiration for all educators seeking to enrich their teaching about Europe.

Teacher Ivana Opačak is the co-author of three educational scenarios in the publication, covering seven (7) English language lessons, in correlation with Croatian language and literature (*EDL – Poetry, Language of Well-Being*), Mathematics (*EU in Riddles & Numbers*), Political Science and Economics (*Participatory Democracy*), as well as various cross-curricular topics. The **implementation of the second scenario** – during the public event *Maths Evening: EU in Riddles & Numbers* in December 2025 – was submitted to the international *Scientix STEM Discovery Campaign 2025* competition and published on the *Scientix* **event map**. Teacher Opačak is also credited with creating an **interactive image** on the Genial.ly platform, which brings together ten reports on the implementation of the educational scenarios in classrooms of project partners.

The two coordinators are also responsible for continuing a **Europe-Day-celebration tradition started the previous year**. Together with the Secondary School Konjšćina from Croatia, the *Pontus Euxinus* General High School

from Lumina, Romania, and the *Avellaneda* Secondary School from Miguel de Cervantes's hometown of Alcalá de Henares, Spain, they organized a hybrid event: **the MarEUforum Festival**, held in **celebration of Europe Day and eTwinning Day** on May 8 – 9, 2025.

Representatives of the five organizing schools participated in person at the two-day Festival in Năvodari, Romania. Croatia was represented by one second-year student at the Konjščina Secondary School, accompanied by her homeroom teacher Marija Brkić, as well as two first-year

students at the Secondary School of Economics in Slavonski Brod, accompanied by their homeroom teacher Ivana Opačak. On the second day (Europe Day), partner schools from Romania and Greece joined the event online via Microsoft Teams. In total, the festival gathered around 150 participants from four countries.

On May 9, 2025, the **75th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration** (which laid the foundation for the creation of the European Union that we know today) was celebrated across Europe. The Festival participants also celebrated the EU's 75th birthday – through work, but also with a birthday cake and song, performing the **collaborative project anthem** *Shining Together: The EPAS Anthem* (that was created in April 2025 using the Suno AI tool, based on a verse from the collaborative lyric poem *eTwas (eTwinning/EPAS) Unites Us*, available **HERE.**)

That same day also marked the **20th anniversary of the eTwinning** programme. Since the international *EPASsionates* project connected eTwinning schools that were also EPASchools, both anniversaries were celebrated with a variety of events and activities. The programme included thematic presentations aimed at disseminating final project outputs and marking the European Year of Digital Citizenship Education. Three studens from Croatia represented their schools and country excellently, delivering a workshop titled *Eurolesson*.

An art workshop was organized to create a large banner featuring the title *EPASsionates* and handprints of all project partners, followed by a drone recording; there was a flashmob performance of the project anthem, a workshop on disinformation, organized by the Romanian association *Station Europe* and a workshop on participatory democracy, organized by the Romanian *School of Values* as part of the *Digital Civic Incubator* programme. The **event programme**, including a chronological list of lectures and workshops with accompanying working materials, is available **HERE**.

The festival culminated with the presentation of the project banner on the roof of the host school and a concert by the band *Maladeț*, which united the participants' emotions in a unique, free, European spirit – true to the name of the project *EPASsionates*. The evening continued with music, dancing and cultural exchange. It was truly inspiring to witness how (not only) young people, through international cooperation, contribute to strengthening democracy and a shared European identity. A video summary of the event in Romania is available **HERE**.

The results of the **project's descriptive evaluation on the Padlet platform**, along with the **collaborative *My eTwinning Diary* on Canva**, testify to the success of the project and the satisfaction of all participants. 60 (out of 82 participating) students stated their overall satisfaction and evaluated their upgraded knowledge of the project matter in a **final evaluation Google survey**, conducted by teacher Opačak 15 – 30 May 2025. The **results** of the survey (**HERE**) showcased enormous students' efforts and contributions in shaping a better European and global society. Students significantly increased their knowledge across all project topics – **Human Rights**, **Cultural Diversity & Multilingualism**, **(De)Coding**, **STE(A)M**, **Social Entrepreneurship** and **Participatory Democracy**, **European Citizenship** and **Digital Citizenship**.

Students' average enjoyment rating was 4.45, and average usefulness rating was 4.55. What students liked most was international collaboration and teamwork; learning new skills and knowledge; using English and digital tools; engaging, hands-on activities (e.g., coding, online meetings, cultural exchange). They were proud of their presentations, teamwork, improved communication, contributions to human rights and democracy topics, learning and applying new skills. Participants praised the project for building knowledge, friendships, collaboration and digital skills. Many expressed the wish for more time for project work at school, more in-person meetings and continuation of similar projects. The last year's project has already grown into another one – eTwinning/EPAS project, of course.

In Global Education Week – Voices Go Beyond Words, Hearts Go Beyond Borders

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In August 2025, the **eTwinning project *Voices Beyond Words, Hearts Beyond Borders*** was registered on the European School Education Platform (ESEP). The project was founded and coordinated by English teachers Büşra Akdeniz (from Turkey) and Ivana Opačak (from Croatia), and it includes another school from Turkey and four schools from Romania, Poland, Italy and Tunisia.

The project promotes intercultural dialogue, empathy, linguistic diversity and shared human values that go beyond geographical and cultural borders. Throughout 2025/2026 students will have the opportunity to improve their language and digital skills, and become more active and open-minded global citizens through international collaboration, sharing personal perspectives on human rights, conflict, war and its consequences. The project's goals correspond with the **annual eTwinning theme Skills for Life** within the **European Year of Education for Digital Citizenship** (2025).

The **Secondary School of Economics** in **Slavonski Brod**, **Croatia**, has been actively and very successfully participating in the **EPAS**/European Parliament Ambassador School programme for six years (teacher Ivana Opačak being the coordinator); the **eTwinning School** holds Erasmus Accreditation. European values are the starting point and the goal of every (extra)curricular activity – the school's EP Junior Ambassadors embody these values every day.

The new eTwinning project was publicly presented – on the notice board next to the school's main entrance – during **Erasmus Days** (13 – 18 October 2025), whose central theme was ***European values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights*** (under the slogan ***Live our values, inspire our future***). On this occasion, activities from the **first project module *My Story, Our Values*** were presented.

European Day of Languages & Erasmus Days with International Partners

The first project activities were dedicated to getting to know the partners and celebrating the **European Day of Languages** (in September 2025) and Erasmus Days. On this occasion, students created "maps/walls/circles of human values" in English and in the languages of the participating partners – Romanian, Turkish, Croatian, Polish, Italian and Arabic.

Teacher Opačak designed and moderated the activities within the first (out of five) project modules – the students collaborated in mixed teams during September and October, and each of the seven teachers coordinated one team. The **final products** of all teams were gathered in the **Genial.ly interactive image** (**HERE**), demonstrating how young eTwinners share the same values despite geographical distance and linguistic and cultural differences.

In Global Education Week – Young People Celebrate Kindness & Children's Rights

As part of the **second project module** *Living in Conflict Zones – A Child's Perspective*, project partners organized *Week 4 Peace* (13 – 19 November 2025) to celebrate **World Kindness Day** (13 November) and **World Children's Day** (20 November).

Through collaborative activities and the video message *Hope in Action*, young eTwinners contributed to the celebration of **Global Education Week** (17 – 24 November 2025). This year's theme of the Week (*Shaping a Just, Peaceful & Sustainable Future – Hope in Action!*) invites every one of us to take part in creating a vision of a better world through collective action.

Collaborative Online English Lesson & Messages of Peace

At the beginning of the second project module, on 21 October 2025, teachers and students from the partner schools held a **collaborative online English workshop** *Living in Conflict Zones – A Child's Perspective* in order to learn (using authentic materials such as the UNICEF video *When Will the Fighting Stop*) about "life in conflict zones from a child's point of view." The workshop was moderated by Natalia Otulak, an English teacher from Poland.

During the workshop, students analysed and evaluated textual and video content, expressed their critical opinions and feelings, reflecting on possible solutions. They

Social justice
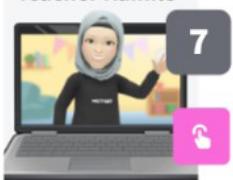
used language structures for expressing empathy and vocabulary related to conflict, peace and resilience, sharing their conclusions on a collaborative Padlet wall. They suggested further activities through which they could express solidarity and support for children around the world who are suffering and dreaming of a better future.

After the online meeting, each school/national team wrote *A Letter 4 Peace*, expressing empathy and support for children in war-affected areas. Each team then selected one paragraph, which was turned into a song using the Suno AI application and eventually became part of the **collaborative international Letter for Peace**. The national letters were compiled into the **e-collection *Letters & Songs 4 Peace*** on Canva (**HERE**), in a special format celebrating the 20th anniversary of eTwinning. The collaborative Letter is available **HERE**.

In November, project partners also created a **collaborative video message**, *Hope in Action*, to mark **Global Education Week** (17 – 24 November 2025). Its whose annual theme *Shaping a Just, Peaceful & Sustainable Future* is based on the **five pillars of the 2030 Agenda**: **People**, **Planet**, **Prosperity**, **Peace** and **Partnership**, which formed the backbone of the video.

**VOICES BEYOND WORDS, HEARTS BEYOND BORDERS - MODULE 1 (*MY STORY, OUR VALUES*)**

eTwinning project - Celebrating EDL/Erasmus Days (Sept/Oct) 2025
Students (& teachers - team leaders) present themselves & share common (universal & European) values

TEAM
1 Teacher Busra
2 Teacher Salma
3 Teacher Gabriela
4 Teacher Ivana — VALUES
Teacher Natalia
5
6 Teacher Rita
Teacher Kamile
7
Our Wall of Values
Powered by genially EDUCATION

MODULE 1 - OUR ♥ WALL OF VALUES

Week 4 Peace (13 – 19 November 2025)

The most valuable part of the project work was sharing the collaborative digital products on **project social media** during the Week for Peace… along with the hope that the students' messages would reach those who most need to hear them. The collaborative letter was sent – as a gesture of support – to the project partners in Palestine, and their response was exceptionally moving.

The **Week for Peace** is a symbolic initiative by young eTwinners, carrying the message: *Everything begins*
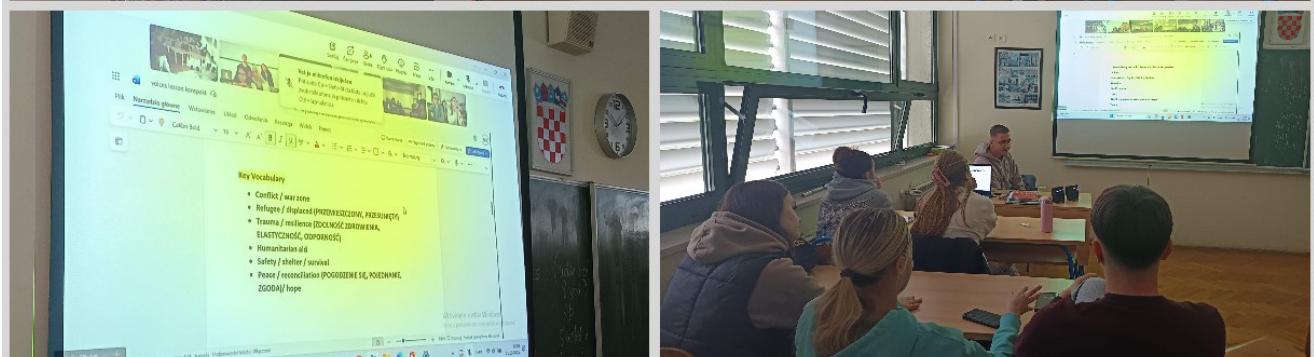
with me, with you, with us… here and now. On **World Kindness Day**, students discovered how simple it is to be kind – just one gesture, one kind word is enough – and how every person is called to be part of a chain of kindness, where peace begins. On **World Children's Day**, they shared the results of their project work (within Module 2) and what they had learned during the Week: *Everything begins with a gesture, an act(ion) by an individual, but we all share the responsibility for building a better world (children cannot do it alone)*…

Teacher Opačak got the inspiration for marking World Kindness Day in English classes from Salma Ammar, a project partner from Tunisia, whose lesson plan (on the importance and value of giving compliments) served as the basis for an **open learning scenario** *Teaching Empathy & Kindness* for 12 English lessons, published on Edutorij (at **THIS** link).

World Children's Day is UNICEF's global day of action (with children) for children, commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1959) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (also adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989). This year, once again, children around the world are standing up and speaking about their lives, hopes and rights under the slogan *My Day, My Rights*. Children speak, and adults are the ones who must listen to them, try to understand what matters to them, and recognise where they need help…

During the Week for Peace, each day from 13 to 19 November 2025, one national Letter for Peace and one Suno-AI song were published on the project's social media. On World Children's Day, the collaborative Letter for Peace was shared… and "sent" to all children who need support. The young eTwinners also shared Hope (in the *Hope in Action* **video message**). On YouTube (**HERE**), a video was published in which young eTwinners speak about the pillars of the global world, about what matters to them, and the kind of society they want.

The project partners believe that the activities within the first two project modules have planted the seeds of cooperation, the seeds of peace… They believe these seeds will bear many fruits – new creative, collaborative activities that will connect even more strongly the voices and hearts of young people from different parts of Europe and the world.

Let's Open the Door of Our Classroom: Peer Observation in Foreign Language Teaching

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KEY WORDS: bottom-up, critical-emancipatory professional development, educational values, peer observation, reflective practice

The Aim, Theoretical Background, and Activities in the Project

In the Croatian school system, once teachers pass the state exam, they usually do not have the opportunity to observe their colleagues' lessons. Their lessons are observed only by the school pedagogue and the head-teacher once a year.

Bezinović et al. (2012, p. 45) state: "The organisation of our schools, which separates teachers by classes and class-rooms, creates a culture of isolation. Teaching becomes a private matter for individual teachers. They manage on their own and spontaneously use teaching methods they believe to be effective, without the opportunity to receive feedback or comments on their work. Everyone does what they think is best and quietly copes with their own feelings of superiority or inferiority, with their own pride or anxieties."

Figure 1: Colleague Ivana and I observing our colleague Snježana's lesson

With this in mind, a group of foreign language teachers at our school opened the door of their classrooms and initiated a one-year project entitled *"How can we develop student-centred teaching through reflective practice?"* The project was based on peer observation, aiming to share teachers' knowledge and skills as subject-matter experts. Figure 1 illustrates one such observation session.

The theoretical foundation of the project was the *critical-emancipatory approach to professional development*, which includes the following principles (Bognar, 2002, p. 3):

- Autonomy and freedom
- Future (creative) orientation
- Critical-reflective thinking
- Emancipation
- Communicative approach
- Building a learning community

The project, which lasted from 1 September 2024 to 1 June 2025, involved four teachers: Ivana Hrastović Mandarić, Snježana Krišto, Anita Kočiš, and me (as a leader and participant). It followed a bottom-up approach: each teacher identified a specific learning challenge—an area of her teaching she wanted to improve based on her own educational values. Each teacher then prepared three lessons to be observed by peers in which she aimed to improve this area of her teaching. In this way, every teacher addressed the area that she thought needed improvement; thus, the model of professional development was tailored to the specific needs of each teacher.

Peer-evaluation activities were based on the phases suggested by Bezinović et al. (2012) (see Figure 2). The difference between our model and the model suggested by Bezinović et al. (2012) is that, in addition to in-person discussion, we incorporated online written documentation.

This documentation included self-reflections (in which each teacher evaluated her own lesson) and peer reflections (in which the observing teacher provided her opinion). This addition was necessary because, in our model, every participant was required to observe every other teacher's lessons, *which meant that all participants had to be familiar with* the entire group's improvement process.

Kočiš learnt how to organise activities based on project-based learning. In her own words, this helped her give her pupils more say and include them more in the planning of activities.

Ivana Hrastović Mandarić stated her learning challenge as follows: *"How can I improve speaking activities in class?"* In addition to interactive speaking activities, she also
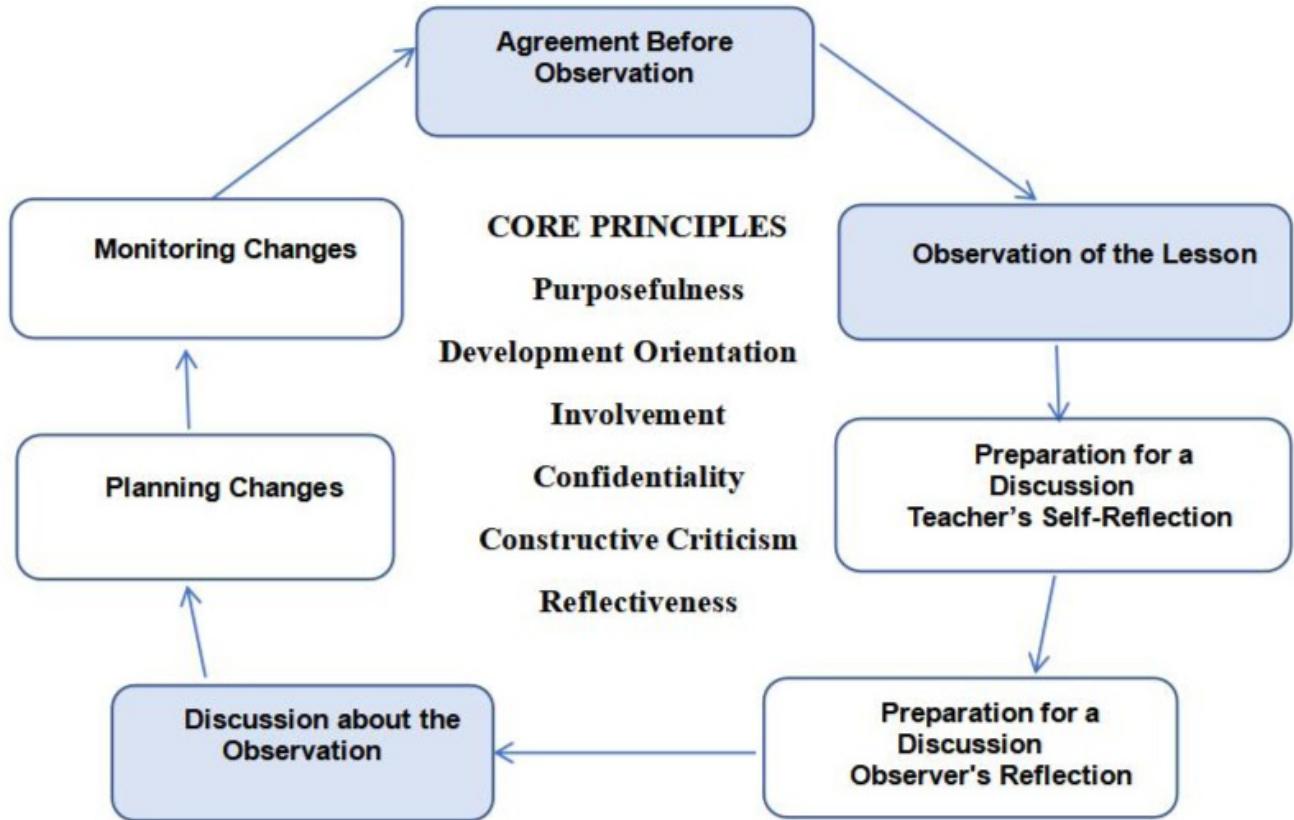

Figure 2: Phases of peer observation by Bezinović et al. (2012)

In addition to peer observation, we had four meetings dedicated to discussing specific challenges. The first meeting served as an introduction in which I presented the project to all participants. During the second meeting, Ivana Hrastović Mandarić and I held a lecture focused on the methodology of writing self-reflections and peer reflections. The third meeting was a workshop in which I presented 16 specific characteristics relevant to our teaching that we discussed in more detail. Finally, the last meeting was dedicated to the evaluation of the entire project.

How We Improved Our Teaching Practice

Each of the four teachers showed considerable improvement in the specific area of her teaching that she had chosen as a learning challenge.

Within her learning challenge entitled *"How can I prepare activities for the Hungarian Art Festival?"* teacher Anita

started implementing intensive speaking activities. Additionally, she decided to abandon group activities during intensive speaking activities, concluding that it was more effective to organise pupils in pairs.

Teacher Snježana Krišto said that within her learning challenge *"How can I develop student-centred teaching in the skill of writing?"* she had learnt a lot, but concluded that the most important aspect was to give pupils more freedom in adding their own ideas and expressing their opinions when preparing for an evaluated writing task. Previously, she prepared a template requiring students to give only factual information about a certain topic.

Within my learning challenge *"How can I develop student-centred teaching in the skill of writing?"* I started teaching pupils how to use a range of tenses in writing. I also improved in summative assessment of writing tasks by using the assessment rubric more effectively.

Additionally, we began discussions about many other aspects of our foreign language teaching practice, such as formative self-assessment and peer assessment in

the middle of the lesson versus at the end of the lesson; introduction of new vocabulary for reading/listening comprehension versus for productive skills; more critical evaluation of the coursebooks; summative assessment of productive skills; differentiated homework, and so on. These questions were not completely answered during the one-year peer observation time period, so we agreed to continue discussions about these topics in the following years.

The Evaluation of the Project by Participants

Teachers evaluated the project in the final meeting on 25 May 2025. We used a creative technique called Six Thinking Hats for the evaluation (see Figure 3 - the figure also shows colleagues who did not participate in peer observation, but took part in the workshops and discussions held at meetings within the Foreign Language Department).

Figure 3: Teachers evaluating the project How can we develop student-centred teaching through reflective practice? by using the Six Thinking Hats method

Here are some thoughts on the project:

As positive aspects (the Yellow Hat), the participants stated: cooperation, improvement in their teaching, new ideas, creativity, receiving appropriate feedback, being more confident in their own teaching. As negative aspects (the Black Hat), the participants stated: very time-consuming and energy-draining. Emotions that participants named in regard to the project (the Red Hat) were: uncertainty, stage-fright, excitement, readiness to take a risk, satisfaction. Under the creative hat (the Green Hat) the participants concluded: emancipation from the coursebook and relying more on their own intuition and knowledge, greater satisfaction in lesson planning, acquiring new ideas from their colleagues.

From the responses by teacher participants we can conclude that, although it was challenging, teachers were satisfied with the improvement of their practice and cooperation with colleagues, but dissatisfied because it was very time-consuming. Altogether, the project required around 40–50 hours of professional development

for participants and around 150–200 hours of additional engagement for me as a leader of the project. Regarding the organisation of peer observation and in-person discussions, it was difficult because of our different timetables: we would finish our teaching shift, wait for one or two hours, and then observe the lessons in the second shift. Additionally, we often had in-person discussions over the weekend via video calls.

Conclusion

Although peer observation is standard practice in Croatia during the one-year preparation for the state exam, after teachers pass the state exam, peer observation is not part of the professional development of teachers. However, teachers can improve specific areas of their teaching more effectively in this way, and their learning can be more tailored to their specific needs: specific class, teaching area, coursebook, pedagogical challenges.

In addition to having a school pedagogue and a headteacher coming to observe teachers' lessons, it is also very valuable to have experts in the field of foreign language teaching observing the lessons and giving expert feedback on the teaching methods.

However, all participating teachers agreed that it had been very time-consuming. We agreed that peer observation and further discussion on the teaching concepts mentioned in the project will remain an integral part of our professional development in the Foreign Language Department, but not as intensive as this project was.

In conclusion, we can see from the Six Thinking Hats analysis that teachers had mixed and opposing feelings during the project—on the one hand, it was frightening, but on the other hand, once the first steps had been taken all of us expressed satisfaction with the experience of collaboration and improvement in our teaching. We took a leap of faith and opened the door of our classrooms for other colleagues to see our teaching methods and critically discuss them—and it has been a priceless experience. If you feel lonely behind closed classroom doors, we invite you to open them and embark on a new learning adventure with us!

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Celebrating the European Day of Languages in Our School

Nataša Bebić Bačan, Davorka Bronzić

OŠ Župa dubrovačka, Mlini

The European Day of Languages, celebrated on 26 September, has been fostering a love of languages since its establishment in 2001 by the Council of Europe in collaboration with the European Union. It aims to promote linguistic diversity, support lifelong language learning, and encourage intercultural understanding across Europe. With over 200 languages spoken on the continent, multilingualism is an essential part of Europe's identity and an increasingly valuable skill in today's globalised world.

Celebrating the European Day of Languages in primary school is particularly important because children at this age develop essential values such as tolerance, openness, curiosity, and respect for diversity. Through engaging activities, games, and exploration, students learn that every language serves as a bridge connecting people, cultures, and traditions. Additionally, language learning fosters different skills, including critical thinking, creativity, social skills, and confidence in communication.

We have been observing the European Day of Languages at our school for many years, and each year we strive to introduce new activities that promote a love of languages and language learning. Building on this long tradition, our school hosts a special event to mark the day, bringing together students, teachers, parents, and the joy of learning new languages - whether through workshops, quizzes, filming videos, or, as we did this year, visits from native speakers.

It is an excellent opportunity to honour all languages. We place particular emphasis on the importance of preserving our own language, including the traditional Dubrovnik dialect, while also encouraging the learning of foreign languages. In addition to English, we highlight Italian and French, two optional languages taught at our school. We also take pride in the rich linguistic diversity within our school community, which includes speakers of approximately ten different languages.

In addition to the main event, students explore languages in fun and engaging ways during their English lessons. Regardless of grade level, they have the chance to compare words, discover linguistic similarities and differences, and reflect on the many ways language shapes identity and connects people across Europe and the world.

Grade 5 Activities

For our fifth graders, this year's theme was simple: **Languages are fun!** Students participated in three hands-on activities designed to help them think about English and Croatian in a new and creative way.

Activity 1: Language Mix

Students selected three English words they use every day and wrote their Croatian equivalents. This activity helped them recognise that language learning extends beyond the classroom and into daily life.

Activity 2: The Funniest Word Challenge

In the second activity, students chose a Croatian word or phrase they found funny and attempted to translate it into English. Laughter filled the classroom as they discovered how expressions often lose their original meaning - or humour - when transferred into another language.

Activity 3: Mini Poster / Illustration

The final activity encouraged artistic expression and creativity. Students illustrated their favourite Croatian word or phrase next to an English word they like, adding colours, decorations, stickers, and drawings. These posters highlighted the idea that languages help us communicate, but our own language remains a vital part of our identity.

Through these activities, our fifth graders celebrated not only their progress in English but also the beauty and uniqueness of the Croatian language. Once again, the European Day of Languages brought energy, laughter, and curiosity into our classrooms - exactly what language learning should look like.

Grade 6 Activities

The sixth graders explored their theme through a special worksheet titled **"English Opens Doors,"** focusing on why learning English matters and how it plays a role in their everyday lives.

Activity 1: English in Everyday Life

Students began by listing all the places where they see or hear English every day: on the internet, in music, games, shops, social media, movies, and even on food packaging. This activity helped them realise that English surrounds them far more often than they might think.

Activity 2: Ranking Game - Why Learn English?

Next, students ranked six reasons for learning English: travel, friends, internet, music, future career, and fun. After choosing their top reason, they explained why it mattered the most to them. Many students agreed that English helps them communicate with people around the world, explore the internet more easily, and enjoy music and movies without translation.

Activity 3: Creative Poster

In the most creative part of the lesson, students designed colourful posters titled **"English Opens Doors!"** They wrote three reasons why English is important to them and decorated their posters with drawings of flags, laptops, books, planes, and music notes. The finished posters brightened the classroom with colour and positive messages.

Activity 4: Conclusion

To conclude the lesson, each student completed the sentence: *"For me, English is important because…"* Their responses reflected confidence and motivation - from wanting to travel, to understanding their favourite songs, to preparing for future careers.

Through these activities, students became aware that English is more than just a school subject; it is a powerful tool that connects them with the world and opens many new opportunities.

Grade 7 Activities

This year, our seventh graders explored the theme, **"Languages Bring Us Together,"** focusing on multilingualism, intercultural learning, and respect for diversity.

Activity 1: Language Detectives

Students took on the role of "language detectives," trying to guess the meanings and origins of familiar international words such as *café, pasta, biblioteca, schule,* and *bonjour*. They quickly discovered how words travel between languages, illustrating how cultures influence and enrich each other.

Activity 2: Culture Quiz

Working in teams, students completed a short culture quiz featuring questions about famous foods, celebrations, monuments, and sports from around the world. The activity sparked lively discussion about different traditions and highlighted the close connection between culture and language.

Activity 3: Words of Tolerance

Students then translated positive words such as *friendship, peace, love,* and *respect* into other languages they know or hear in their families or communities. The classroom soon transformed into a multilingual space filled with words in Croatian, English, Italian, French, Macedonian, Hebrew and more.

Activity 4: Poster - My Multilingual World

To express their ideas creatively, students designed posters titled **"Languages Bring Us Together!"** They included words in different languages, drew flags and cultural symbols, and illustrated how languages connect people from diverse backgrounds. These posters celebrated inclusion, curiosity, and an open-minded view of the world.

Activity 5: Conclusion

At the end of the lesson, each student completed the sentence: *"Learning other languages is important because…"* Their answers showed empathy and understanding - languages help us make new friends, travel, respect differences, and communicate across cultures.

Through these activities, the seventh graders reminded themselves that knowing more than one language is truly a superpower - one that brings people closer together and builds tolerance.

Grade 8 Activities

Our eighth graders explored the theme, **"Languages for the Future,"** focusing on how knowing foreign languages, especially English, can significantly impact their education, travel, and future careers in a global world.

Activity 1: Jobs That Require English

Students began by compiling a list of jobs that require English. Their responses included pilots, flight attendants, computer programmers, tour guides, doctors, scientists, journalists, translators, YouTubers, and even athletes. This simple activity highlighted the fact that English is used in almost every profession today.

Activity 2: Famous Multilingual People

Next, students thought of a famous multilingual person and explained why speaking more than one language

is necessary. Many chose athletes, actors, singers, and world leaders who use foreign languages to communicate globally.

Activity 3: Languages for the Future

Then, students wrote down three reasons why languages are essential for their future - whether for securing a good job, studying abroad, communicating with people from other countries, or travelling and understanding different cultures. Afterwards, they reflected on their personal dreams and career goals, explaining whether they would need English or other languages, and why.

Activity 4: Forum Entry – The Importance of Learning English

To conclude, each student wrote a short forum entry titled **"The Importance of Learning English."** Their entries included reasons such as travel, career, communication, and education, and ended with a rhetorical question. Their texts demonstrated maturity, awareness, and motivation for future learning.

Through these activities, our eighth graders became even more aware that in a globalised world, languages are truly the key to success.

Once again, the celebration of the European Day of Languages brought creativity, curiosity, and enthusiasm into our classrooms. Through presentations, engaging word games, creative projects, and reflective discussions about the future, students of all grades realised that languages are more than just vocabulary and grammar; they act as bridges to new connections, fresh ideas, and exciting opportunities. The event also emphasised the importance of intercultural understanding, empathy, and collaboration, while demonstrating how language learning fosters personal growth and global citizenship.

We are looking forward to continuing this tradition of nurturing a lifelong love of languages and inspiring our learners to appreciate the beauty of all languages, including their own.

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Worksheets
Grade 5: Languages are Fun EDL 5.pdf
Grade 6: English Opens Doors EDL6.pdf
Grade 7: Languages Bring us Together EDL7.pdf
Grade 8: Languages for the Future EDL 8.pdf

The World of Wonder: Teaching English Through Art and Imagination

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Teaching English is, in many ways, like opening a door into wonder. When we bring literature and art together, this door opens even wider- inviting students to step into new worlds, play with language, and discover more about themselves. Integrating art and literature touches students on a deeper level than mere motivation. It creates meaningful, memorable experiences that deepen their language learning, spark creativity, and build essential life skills.

Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll is one of those books that truly welcomes playful, imaginative teaching. Its playful language, surreal characters, and dreamlike logic make it ideal for engaging students of all ages. When paired with visual art, especially the works of the surrealist painter Salvador Dalí, teachers can create lessons in which logic meets imagination, reality blends with fantasy, and language becomes an open space for discovery.

Where Logic Meets Imagination: Carroll and Dalí in the Classroom

Lewis Carroll, who was not only a mathematician but also a storyteller, demonstrated that logical thinking and imagination can coexist. In *Alice in Wonderland*, he follows strict logical rules only to twist them into humorous and surprising contradictions. At Mad Hatter's tea party, time freezes at six o'clock, words dissolve into playful nonsense, and size shifts unpredictably. Together, these elements create a world that is delightfully absurd yet strangely meaningful.

This theme of bending reality also appears in Salvador Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) (https://bit.ly/The-painting). His melting clocks challenge the idea of time as fixed and reliable, suggesting a fluid, dreamlike experience. By asking pupils to examine the clocks and reflect on why Dalí chose to distort them, teachers can guide students into deeper conversations about how dreams, imagination, and perception influence our understanding of the world. We can engage our pupils in a speaking activity by asking them the following questions:

What do you think the melting clocks mean?

What happens when we dream — does time feel different?

Have you ever experienced a moment when time seemed to pass too fast or too slow? Why?

Can you think of a time when rules didn't make sense, just like in Wonderland?

If you could draw your own version of a "melting clock," what would it look like and mean?

Making such connections helps students see that literature and art often speak the same creative language. Both Carroll and Dalí invite us to question what we think we know, encouraging pupils to express opinions, make personal connections, and use English as a tool for exploration. Because there are no right or wrong answers, students gain confidence as they express their interpretations and build on each other's ideas.

Bringing Wonderland Into Language Practice

The world of Wonderland offers countless opportunities for hands-on language activities. One engaging task involves creating stories using shuffled verb, noun, and sentence-ending cards. Students randomly select card combinations, form sentences, and then retell the story aloud. The silly sentence combinations remind students of Carroll's distinctive style, turning grammar and vocabulary practice into an engaging and enjoyable experience.

SUBJECT Cards

Alice	The White Rabbit	The Queen of Hearts
The Cheshire Cat	The Mad Hatter	The Caterpillar
The Cards	The King	The Dormouse

VERB Cards (Past Tense)

saw	followed	met
talked to	ran after	found
watched	sat with	listened to

REST OF SENTENCE Cards

a rabbit with a pocket watch.	a strange creature in a tree.	a garden full of talking flowers.
a very curious tea party.	a doorway to a tiny room.	the Queen shouting orders.
a disappearing smile.	a sleepy mouse telling a story.	a path that led to Wonderland.

Another unforgettable scene from the book, the fall down the rabbit hole, can be reimagined as a vivid sensory storytelling activity. With calm music playing in the background, students close their eyes and imagine what they might see, hear, or feel as they fall. When they open their eyes, they describe their experience or write short sentences beginning with "I can see…", "I can hear…", or "I can smell…". Older students can add reflective phrases such as "I wonder…". This not only enriches descriptive language but also strengthens students' ability to express emotions in English.

Reflective writing offers another powerful way to connect personal experience with literature. Asking students to complete the sentence "*I felt like I was falling into my own rabbit hole when…*" allows them to draw parallels between Alice's confusion and their own moments of uncertainty or change. Sharing these reflections with the class encourages empathy, listening, and storytelling skills.

Sensory writing activity – Falling Down the Rabbit Hole

Close your eyes and imagine the fall.

Then, write or say sentences starting with:

"I can see…, I can hear…, I can touch…"

Read the questions and answer them.

"Are the walls dark or full of light?"

"What objects or shapes can you touch?"

"Are things moving fast or slowly?"

"Can you hear your heartbeat, wind, or echoing objects?"

"What textures can you feel - smooth, dusty, rough, slippery?"

"How do you feel?"…

CREATIVE WRITING: "MY RABBIT HOLE MOMENT"

Reflective writing activity
"My Rabbit Hole Moment"

Alice falls into a strange new world.
Think about a time when you entered a new situation
a new school, a challenge, or something that surprised you.

" *What did it feel like?* "

Write a short paragraph starting with:
"*I felt like I was falling into my own rabbit hole when…*"

Even simple activities, such as choosing adjectives to describe Alice, can help pupils practise speaking in full sentences, justify their opinions, and expand their vocabulary in meaningful ways. When students say, '*I think Alice is curious because she follows the White Rabbit*,' they are practicing both language structures and critical thinking without feeling as though they are completing a formal exercise. We can further challenge pupils by asking them to use adjectives like *imaginative, resilient, assertive, brave, and similar* when creating sentences about the story.

Language Play: Portmanteaus and Nonsense Words

Lewis Carroll was a master of linguistic playfulness. His use of portmanteau words-combinations of two words blended into a new one-invites students to explore how language is constructed. Words like *frumious, slithy, chortle,* and *mimsy* encourage learners to listen closely to sounds, identify patterns, and guess the meaning.

Students can have fun inventing their own portmanteaus or experimenting with a digital word-generator https://bit.ly/PortmanteauGenerator

Such activities help them see language as flexible and creative rather than fixed. They discover that words carry emotion, rhythm, and imagination, and that they themselves can become creators of meaning.

Exploring nonsense words also prepares students to understand figurative language, context clues, and modern word formation. It links Carroll's playful writing to contemporary expressions and idioms, many of which originate from *Alice in Wonderland*, such as 'down the rabbit hole', 'mad as a hatter', or 'grinning like a Cheshire cat'.

Teachers can encourage students to guess the meanings of these expressions, compare them to their own languages, or use them in short dialogues or stories

Developing Critical and Creative Thinking

Activities inspired by Alice in Wonderland not only strengthen language skills but also develop critical thinking. The teacher prints four statements in different colours and displays them around the classroom, placing each statement in a separate corner: Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Then, the teacher reads the following sentences:

'' *It's okay to be curious, even if it gets you into trouble,*

Growing up means losing your imagination,

 Sometimes nonsense makes more sense than reality,

Alice learns more from mistakes than from success."

Once the pupils hear a certain sentence, they think and decide which corner to move to. The teacher then approaches a group of pupils and asks one pupil to explain or justify their choice. This activity can further develop both pupils' speaking skills and their critical thinking skills. Students also reflect on their values, emotions, and real-life situations.

Four Corners

1) *It's okay to be curious, even if it gets you into trouble.*

2) *Growing up means losing your imagination.*

3) *Sometimes nonsense makes more sense than reality.*

4) *Alice learns more from mistakes than from success.*

5) *Everyone needs a little bit of Wonderland in their life.*

Teaching as an Invitation to Wonder

When teachers bring art and literature into the English classroom, they offer students far more than language practice. They invite them into a learning environment where creativity, playfulness, and curiosity thrive. Students develop not only their English skills but also essential transversal competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, communication, cultural awareness, and the ability to learn independently.

Most importantly, *Alice in Wonderland* reminds us and our pupils that imagination is a powerful part of life. It teaches us to question, to wonder, to embrace the unknown, and to learn from our experiences. Teaching English, then, becomes an act of opening doors: doors into stories, into artwork, into personal reflections, and into the magical possibilities of language itself.

Game On: Using Gamification to Boost Student Engagement and Achievement

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Introduction

The insights discussed in this article are based on the Erasmus+ funded teacher development course *Boosting Creative Thinking and Problem Solving* held in November 2025 in Seville, Spain by Europass Teacher Academy. Teacher mobility was organized within my school's Erasmus+ project "Rastimo zajedno!" One of the goals of the project is improving teacher competencies for recognizing, supporting and developing the potential of gifted students. This course was a chance for me to learn and apply innovative work methods with my gifted students.

One of the topics in this course was gamification. Gamification in education is acknowledged as an important tool for motivating and engaging students by using game-like elements in a non-game learning environment. It motivates students, enhances focus and gives teachers a creative way to achieve their teaching goals. This article focuses on distinguishing gamification, game-based learning and serious games, and it also provides some useful tips for everyday learning situations.

What is gamification in education?

Gamification in the classroom refers to the use of game-like elements in non-game contexts to enhance learning. Firstly, we need to distinguish it from game-based learning and serious games. Game-based learning uses existing games as a primary tool to teach new skills and concepts. Its main goal is usually entertainment, but can be repurposed for educational needs. For example, an educational video game designed to teach geography, as well as many learning platforms used widely for formative assessment in real-time. On the other hand, serious games are games designed specifically to teach a skill, to raise awareness or to change perceptions and all elements of the game work towards that learning objective. For example, a serious game is a game that teaches students how to deal with emotions.

The elements of gamification in the classroom may include:

- Points and Rewards
- Competition and Leaderboards
- Badges and Achievements
- Storytelling
- Immediate feedback

The goal of gamifying is, therefore, to create a motivating environment in the classroom where students „play" and learn. Still, we need to keep in mind that students might get bored of the same gamification techniques. There is also a danger of overusing gamification in the classroom, which then results in lack of motivation.

Benefits of gamification

The benefits of gamification are multiple. Here are some of the main advantages of using game-like elements in the classroom:

1 Increased motivation

In these types of activities students generally happily participate. Since gamification provides game-like elements, students feel like they are „playing", and are eager to complete tasks and achieve goals. Leaderboards are a helpful visual aid which shows them their advancement.

2 Collaboration

Many gamified tasks include teamwork, where students learn to work together in order to "win the game". In this way collaboration and social interaction can also be one of the major advantages of gamification.

3 Enhanced learning

Through contextualized lessons students learn faster and retain information longer. Gamification improves focus, attention control and the brain's ability to process information.

BENEFITS OF GAMIFICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

INCREASED MOTIVATION

COLLABORATION

ENHANCED LEARNING

STUDENT CENTERED

INSTANT FEEDBACK
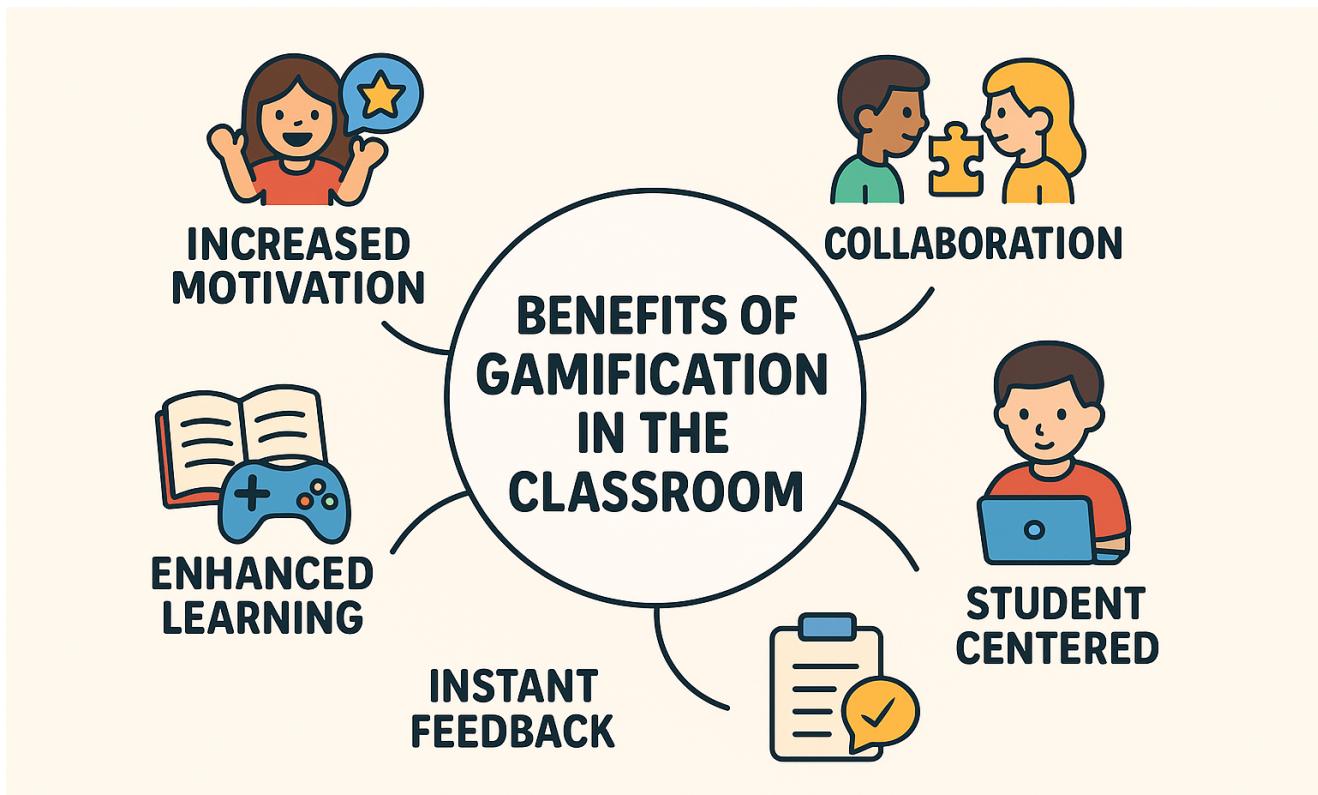
4 Student centered

These types of activities can be tailored specifically for our students. Teachers get to know their students very well so they can customize tasks to fit each class best. In this way teachers can also encourage desired behaviors through clear goals and rewards.

5 Instant feedback

Students immediately see the results of the activities, they can follow their advance on the leaderboard or see how many badges they have obtained. In this way students can also correct their mistakes and build knowledge actively.

How to gamify?

Gamification doesn't mean turning your classroom into a playground. Teachers can add playful elements, like challenges, points or rewards to boost motivation. When planned well, learning with "a twist" can help all your students participate actively in classroom activities.

Points and badges system

Students earn points and badges for homework, participation in the classroom, or excelling in class. Teacher sets clear rules since it is important that students are aware how the system works and what the desired behaviors are. This system builds motivation because students can track their progress, feel good about themselves and have sense of accomplishment.

Classroom leaderboards

In a competitive class teachers can put up leaderboards with any kind of reward system. Again, students are rewarded for homework, participation, collaboration or

helping their peers. Teachers can also create a challenge for students and set a time limit for completing the tasks. Leaderboards make learning visible by showing individual or group success. It is important to keep in mind that this system should be handled positively and encourage friendly competition, as well as highlight team efforts and not just top scorers.

Scavenger hunts

In scavenger hunt activities students look for hidden objects or words following tasks. Teacher sets the rules and provides the students with clues which they follow in order to complete the challenge. In this way we get the students moving while, for example, practicing vocabulary. In order to make it more challenging, teachers can award points for each item or offer a prize for the first person or team to finish. If the students are old enough teachers can incorporate digital elements in the game, through a mobile app or providing QR codes. An extra benefit of this activity is that it can be done outside.

Puzzle races

Another activity that uses game design elements is a puzzle race. Students make teams that race to complete word or grammar puzzles in a timed activity. Since they are under time pressure, students feel the sense of urgency. Therefore, puzzle races enhance motivation and engagement while at the same time keeping in mind the learning objectives. Students are encouraged to collaborate as well as compete with other teams, so the experience is highly dynamic.
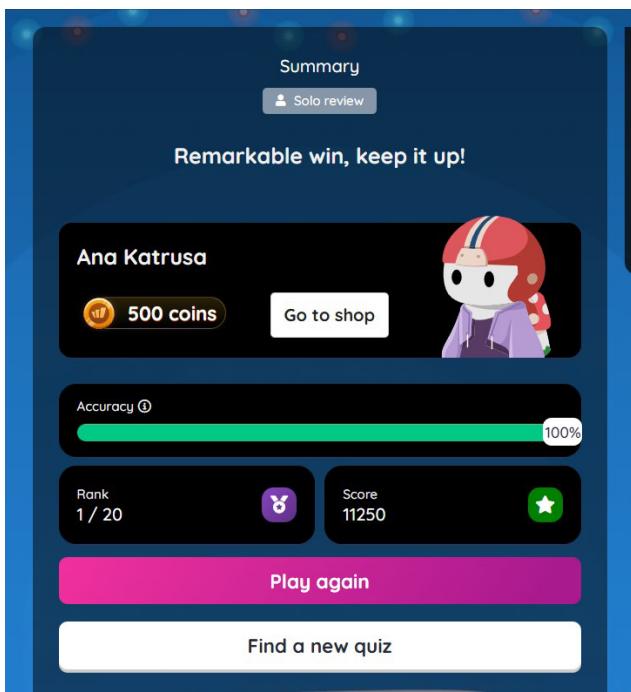
Interactive quizzes

In interactive quizzes teachers can turn regular quizzes into fun, interactive games using tools like Kahoot or Quizizz. These platforms allow teachers to create exciting quizzes where students earn points for correct answers, with live leaderboards that keep the competition lively. This makes assessments not only more engaging but also less intimidating for students. For top performers, teachers might give a reward like a "Grammar Expert" badge or let them pick a classroom privilege. Students can also choose their own avatar which makes the experience personalized and student-centered.

Conclusion

Gamification in the classroom makes learning more exciting and engaging. Still, it is not without challenges. There are some considerations to be made while planning how to gamify. For example, we need to balance competition and collaboration, avoid overemphasis on rewards, ensure a fair scoring system and be careful not to overuse it. It is an effective tool for boosting motivation, creativity and learning process in the classroom. In addition, when well thought and planned, it can be applied to any subject or field of teaching.

Keeping the Spark Alive: Why Fun Pairing and Grouping Strategies Matter in the ESL Classroom?

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In language classrooms, teachers constantly search for ways to keep learners motivated, engaged, and comfortable enough to take risks with English. One deceptively simple but highly powerful classroom practice is the way we form pairs and groups. Far from being a routine administrative step, grouping students in a fun, dynamic way can set the tone for an entire lesson and even shape the long-term atmosphere of the class.

Motivation Begins with Movement and Surprise

When students discover that they'll be working with a new partner through a game, a quick challenge, or an unexpected twist, their curiosity and energy rise. Fun pairing and grouping strategies, such as matching vocabulary cards, finding someone with the same picture, or forming groups by the same colours or other specified characteristic, create positive emotional anticipation, which fuels intrinsic motivation. Instead of passively receiving instructions, students actively do something, and the language class instantly feels less like a routine and more like an experience.

Lowering the Affective Filterp

A fun method of forming pairs and groups also reduces the pressure many learners feel when they must choose partners themselves or when partners are assigned to them by the way they always sit in the classroom. Mixed-ability classrooms often carry social barriers: strong students sometimes hesitate to work with weaker ones, shy learners fear rejection, and friends tend to cluster. Creative grouping bypasses these dynamics, promoting fairness and reducing anxiety. When students are paired "by chance," the classroom becomes a safer and more inclusive space - one in which everyone has equal value and opportunity.

Building a Positive Classroom Community

Regularly reshuffling pairs and groups using playful methods helps students get to know each other, listen to different voices, and develop collaboration skills. Over time, these experiences build trust, solidarity, and a supportive classroom climate. A class where students feel connected is a class where they are more willing to participate, help each other, and take risks with the language.

Supporting Language Development

Varied groupings expose learners to a range of accents, levels, communication styles, and strategie, mirroring real-world language use. Fun grouping activities ensure these interactions happen naturally and frequently. Students become more adaptable communicators as they negotiate meaning with partners they might not normally choose. This diversity strengthens their speaking fluency, listening comprehension, and confidence.

Nurturing Collaboration and Autonomy

Fun group formation also encourages a sense of student agency. When students move around, draw a card, or solve a quick task to find their partners, they experience choice and involvement rather than passive compliance. This empowers them and creates momentum for the collaborative tasks that follow. In addition, the teacher's role shifts from "assigner" to "facilitator," supporting a more student-centered environment.

Simple Ideas, Big Results

Here are a few ways how you can **form pairs** in the classroom.

Movement-based pairing: Tell your students to stand up, walk around the classroom and wave their right or left hand. When you give a signal (e.g. ring the bell), students touch the closest student waving the same hand and form pairs.

Vocabulary connections: Write the matching pairs on paper cards and cut each card in half. Have each student draw a card from a box or a bag, walk around the classroom and find the student with the matching half.

Matching pairs can be: pictures and words, words and definitions, uppercase and lowercase letters, matching synonims, adjectives and their opposites, similies (e.g. as busy as ... a bee), stories and fairy tales (e.g. Beauty and ... the Beast).

Emoji matchups: Prepare two sets of identical emojis. Have each student take one emoji from a box or a bag, walk around the classroom and find the identical emoji - two identical emojis make a pair.

These are some ideas how you can form groups in the classroom.

Color matching: Students pick cards in different colours and form groups with others holding the same colour of the card. There should be as many colours as the number of groups you want to form.

Movement-based grouping: First, tell your students to line up in order based on their birthmonth, without speaking to each other. Allow them to use body language, facial expressions or any other kind of non-verbal communication. Then, when the students are lined up, split the line in as many parts as the number of groups you want to form.

Spelling - Chose the word with the same number of letters as the number of groups you want to form (e.g. LOVE – 4 groups, SKY – 3 groups, CLOUD – 5 groups). Tell your students to stand in line. Say the chosen word outloud and ask your students to spell it out, so that each student in the line says (and remembers) one letter. Then, the same letters make the groups.

Untangling – Prepare bundles of rope; there should be as many ropes as there are students in the classroom, and the ropes must be connected in as many bundles as the number of groups you want to form. Hold the bundles of rope in your hands and ask your students to form a circle around you. Each student grabs one end of the rope, holds it tightly and steps back. Then, release the bundles and tell your students to untangle the ropes (without letting go of their ropes) to see which students they are connected with – they are their group members.

Categories:

Hand position (2 groups) - Students draw a card with the instruction: PUT YOUR HANDS UP or HOLD YOUR HANDS DOWN. Those who put their hands up, represent one group. Those who hold their hands down, represent the other group.

Days of the week (5 – 7 groups) - Students draw a card with the day of the week: MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY. Then, they walk around the classroom to find the others with the same day of the week and form groups.

Shouts (4 groups) – First**,** students draw cards with different instructions: Shout NO! / Shout OOPS! / Shout YAY! / Shout HA!

Then, the students walk around the classroom and keep shouting, accordingly to the instruction on the card. The students with the same shouts form groups.

Rooms in a house (4 groups) – Put the names or pictures of different rooms in four different corners of the classroom. Have your students draw wordcards with different pieces of furniture and go to the room that their piece of furniture belongs to, as to form groups.

All these techniques take only minutes to prepare but can make a big difference and dramatically shift the energy of the classroom. Fun pair and group formation isn't a distraction—it's a pedagogical tool. It breaks the usual routine, boosts students' motivation, nurtures social bonds, lowers anxiety, and supports richer communication. Students become energized, curious and eager to participate before the main pair and group activities even begin. They share fun moments, create positive memories and a sense of belonging.

For English teachers aiming to build positive, productive classroom environment, the way we group students is not just a logistical step but an opportunity to create a joyful, collaborative learning community.

Strengthening Multilingualism: Insights from Classroom Experience and European Frameworks

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Abstract

Multilingualism is a key European educational priority and one of the eight competences for lifelong learning. The discussion approaches the topic from two angles: the perspective of a primary school teacher with long-term experience in a linguistically diverse urban environment, and current European research and policy. Drawing on over twenty years of teaching English and Italian, the text contrasts conditions of language acquisition, reflects on the growing dominance of English, and considers schools' responsibility in supporting lesser-used languages. Eurobarometer data and EU policy documents highlight the broader importance of multilingualism for mobility, employability, cultural awareness, and social cohesion. The concluding section outlines recent initiatives of Croatian foreign-language teacher associations aimed at strengthening multilingual practices in local communities and aligning them with European language-education goals.

Keywords: multilingualism, foreign language acquisition, English, Italian, European language policy, Eurobarometer, primary education, linguistic diversity, teacher perspectives, second foreign language

Introduction

Multilingualism has become a defining aspect of contemporary European education and is recognised as one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning. It is associated with enhanced employability, the ability to participate actively in society, and the development of intercultural awareness. Although these policy formulations may at first seem detached from daily school practice, they closely reflect the reality many teachers encounter: that languages profoundly shape pupils' identities, attitudes, and opportunities for growth. Moreover, multilingualism promotes cognitive flexibility and problem-solving skills, encouraging students to approach challenges from multiple perspectives. In an increasingly interconnected Europe, the capacity to navigate different linguistic and cultural contexts is not only academically beneficial but socially and professionally essential.

Classroom Experience: English and Italian

As a teacher of both English and Italian with more than twenty years of experience in a primary school in Zagreb, I have closely observed how the conditions in which languages are learned influence students' motivation, progress, and long-term outcomes. In our capital city, children are constantly exposed to English through media, gaming, music, social networks, and digital environments. This implicit exposure frequently accelerates acquisition; pupils often use vocabulary or expressions they have absorbed informally, even before these have been introduced in lessons. It is therefore not surprising that national assessment results consistently show stronger performance in English than in Croatian. Croatian language education, particularly in areas requiring sustained reading and interpretation, faces challenges such as declining motivation and widespread reliance on summaries and AI-generated content. English, on the other hand, benefits from a powerful and omnipresent linguistic ecosystem that unintentionally supports both formal and informal learning.

Italian presents a markedly different scenario. In Zagreb, learners rarely encounter Italian outside the classroom. Unlike their peers along the Adriatic coast, who encounter various forms of Italian via tourism, media, or even intergenerational dialects, urban pupils depend almost exclusively on structured school-based instruction. Teaching Italian therefore requires systematic scaffolding, repeated exposure, and carefully designed activities. Yet precisely because of this limited input, pupils' prog-

ress can be particularly rewarding. When learners who began studying Italian only in the fourth grade manage, after a relatively modest number of weekly lessons, to produce coherent descriptions of themselves, their families, or their immediate surroundings, these achievements testify not only to their perseverance but also to the effectiveness of guided instruction. Additionally, incorporating cultural content—such as Italian traditions, holidays, or music—enhances engagement and helps pupils form meaningful connections with the language beyond the classroom.
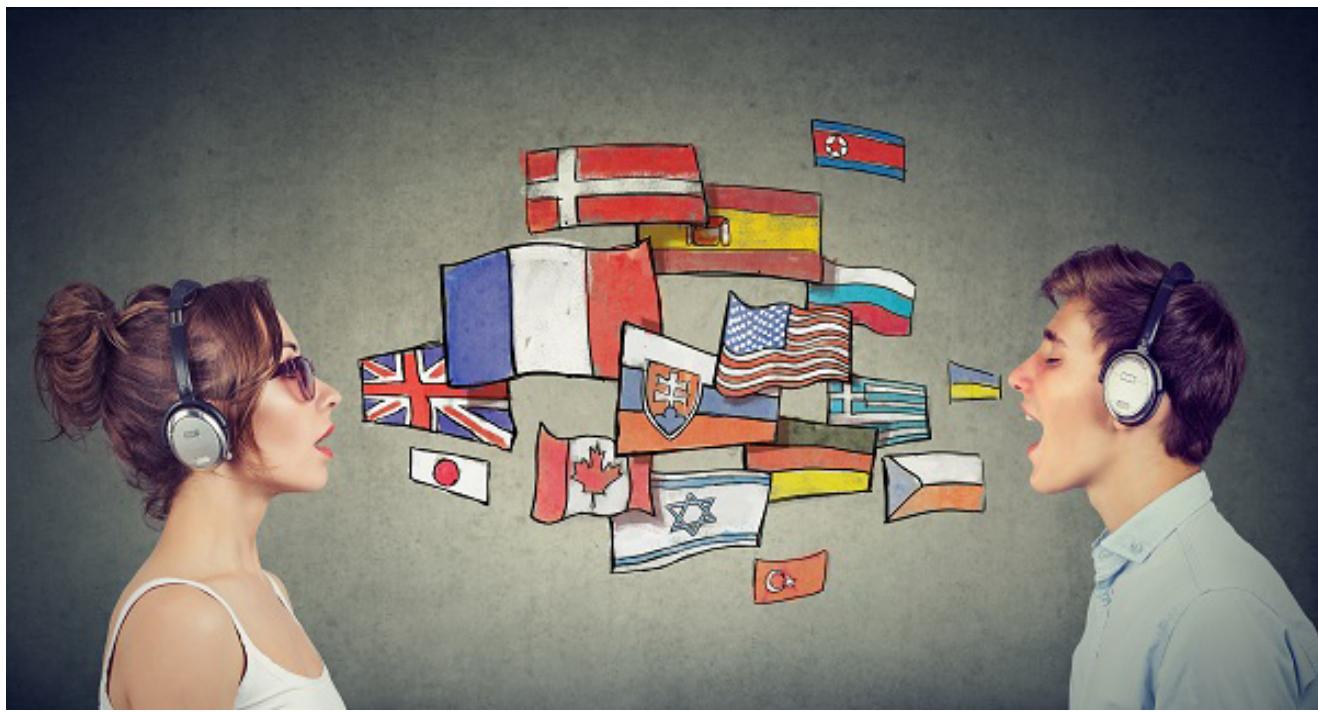
Parental Guidance and Language Choices

Such experiences form the basis of conversations I regularly hold with parents of third-grade pupils, who must choose a second foreign language for the following school year. I emphasise that today's linguistic landscape has changed significantly. English is no longer an added advantage; it has become a basic skill, almost as essential as digital literacy. The key question is therefore not whether their child will learn English, but how additional language competence can enrich their future. Parents are often surprised to learn how early exposure to multiple languages can foster cognitive benefits, improve memory, and enhance empathy toward speakers of other languages. Recent European data strongly reinforce this message, underlining the importance of starting language learning early and providing sustained support throughout schooling.

European Trends and Policy Context

The 2024 Eurobarometer survey, published by the European Commission, shows steady progress in language learning across Europe. Children begin foreign languages earlier than ever before, and 98% of lower-secondary students currently learn English, confirming its dominant status. Furthermore, 11.5% of fifteen-year-olds speak a different language at home than the one used at school, illustrating that multilingual classrooms are increasingly common. In terms of communicative competence, 59% of Europeans can converse in at least one foreign language, and 28% in at least two. This proficiency rises significantly among young people aged 15 to 24, of whom 79% can speak one foreign language and 39% two. These figures demonstrate that Europe's younger generations are growing up in genuinely multilingual environments.

English remains the most widely spoken foreign language across the EU. Almost half of Europeans report

they can speak it, and seven out of ten young people can hold a conversation in English. It is also considered the most important language for children to learn, with 85% of respondents identifying it as the key language for future opportunities. However, the Commission notes that second foreign languages require substantially more support, especially in vocational education, where provision often remains limited.

The Eurobarometer also reveals strongly positive public attitudes toward languages. A striking 86% of respondents believe that everyone should speak at least one foreign language; 76% consider the improvement of language skills a political priority; and 84% affirm the importance of protecting regional and minority languages. These attitudes are deeply aligned with the European Union's foundational principles, including the emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity expressed in the Treaty on European Union, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and various Council Recommendations on language learning.

Another important trend concerns how young people acquire languages outside the classroom. With increased access to digital content, many learners improve their language skills by watching subtitled media, engaging in online communities, or following content creators in different languages. More than half of Europeans now prefer subtitling over dubbing, with even higher rates among youth. This shift strengthens exposure to authentic language input, especially in English, but it highlights the need for schools to actively support other languages to maintain linguistic diversity. Digital literacy and responsible use of online resources have become integral skills for modern learners, linking language acquisition with broader educational competencies.

The EU's long-term educational vision is ambitious: by the end of upper secondary education, students should master their language of schooling and at least two additional languages. This target underlines the importance of multilingual competence for mobility, social cohesion, and cultural understanding across Europe.

Teachers' Role and Collaborative Initiatives

When classroom experience is viewed alongside these broader European trends, it becomes clear that teachers of foreign languages hold a crucial role in shaping a multilingual future. Our responsibility is not only to teach grammar and vocabulary but also to cultivate curiosity, resilience, and intercultural openness. A second — and ideally a third — foreign language enhances cognitive flexibility, supports global awareness, and provides learners with valuable tools for future academic and profes-

sional choices.

Recognising this, foreign language teacher associations in Croatia — including associations of English, German, Italian, Spanish and French teachers — have recently initiated discussions on strengthening cooperation. Motivated by the growing European emphasis on multilingualism, we are currently developing joint projects designed to connect teachers and learners across languages. One such project is already being prepared, with the aim of promoting multilingual practices within local communities and gradually expanding them to broader levels. By collaborating across language disciplines, we hope to contribute meaningfully to the multilingual goals outlined in European policy and to create learning environments in which linguistic diversity is not only encouraged but lived daily. Furthermore, involving students in cross-cultural projects, virtual exchanges, and language competitions has proven to increase motivation and deepen engagement with less commonly taught languages.

Conclusion

Finally, languages are powerful connectors. They bridge cultures, broaden our perspectives, and help young people engage with the complexities of an increasingly interconnected world. As educators, nurturing multilingual competence is one of the most impactful contributions we can make — not only to our pupils' academic development but to their lives as future European citizens. Encouraging multilingual learning fosters empathy, critical thinking, and intercultural communication skills, equipping learners to thrive in diverse social, academic, and professional environments. By combining classroom experience with European policy initiatives, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to become a confident and capable multilingual citizen.

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Iva Rončević

Last school year, I wanted to give my students an opportunity to connect English language learning with a meaningful, real-life context. I believe this is something all of us English teachers strive to do, and frankly, something that the subject we teach truly allows us to embrace. It is remarkably easy to connect English with almost anything happening around us. However, this time I wanted to encourage my students to think as young entrepreneurs and develop their own business ideas and plans. I had been doing similar projects for a few years, but this time I felt it was necessary to take a step forward and bring an authentic, real-world element into the classroom.

It is undeniably challenging nowadays (at least for me) to come up with group project ideas that require meaningful work outside the classroom—especially in the era shaped by the AI revolution and its infinite possibilities. I cannot be entirely certain whether my students used AI for this project or not, but I can say that they invested a great deal of time, effort, creativity, and teamwork to present themselves in the best possible way. As teachers, we often find ourselves navigating a delicate balance between encouraging the use of modern tools, and preserving authentic „old school" student effort. In that sense, this project was a reminder that genuine creativity cannot be repleced by shortcuts. Even in a world where AI can generate ideas within seconds, students still value the ownership of their work, sometimes perhaps more than we expect.

Let me take you back to the beginning. In the coursebook I use with my students, there was a lesson about opening a restaurant. It seemed like an excellent starting point for a larger project. For context, I teach English in „Franjo Petrića" High School in Zadar, a school filled with ambitious, hardworking students who consistently impress me with their level of English knowledge. Working with them is genuinely a pleasure, so I knew they would embrace any idea I presented. Over the years, they have developed a classroom atmosphere that values initiative and open mindedness, which makes project-based learning particularly rewarding.

Since encouraging young minds to „think outside the box" is always worthwhile, I began shaping the assignment. I wanted the task to mirror real-life situations as closely as possible. My goal was to create a framework

Gimnazija Franje Petrića Zadar is 😎 feeling cool.
Jun 11 · 🌐

Kako zadnji dani nastave (ipak) mogu biti i zanimljivi i korisni i zabavni i poučni: profesor(ica) da prijedlog - Iva Rončević, učenici prihvate - 3. C i 3. B. I onda na satu engleskog i na engleskom izlažu svoje zanimljive i inovativne ideje i planove kako bi pokazali (i) financijsku pismenost i poduzetnički duh... Ali to nije sve! Njihova su izlaganja pratile i komentirale i specijalne gošće, (obje naše bivše učenice💕) dvije djelatnice OTP banke - Karmen Prtenjača Mažer i Jelena Zubčić Gašpar. Ni to nije sve! Najbolje su nagradili prigodnom poklon paketima. Hvala im na dolasku, komentarima, prijedlozima, pohvalama i nagradama☺️

that would push them to think critically, collaborate effectively and communicate their ideas in a structured and convincing way. Here were the rules they needed to follow:

- Groups of 3–4 students
- A complete business plan for their company
- Two weeks to complete the project
- A presentation of their idea to a "bank" in order to request a loan
- A clear strategy explaining how and when they would return the loan

Their business had to have a name, a specific location (in Zadar or another city), a detailed explanation of how much funding they needed, and most importantly - a convincing argument why the bank should approve their loan and why they believed their business would be successful.

I must admit that this wasn't an easy task. However, my students were thrilled and accepted the challenge enthusiastically. I had assigned similar projects before, but this time I wanted to elevate the experience. I decided to invite real bankers to the classroom while I remained a neutral observer. I called a friend who works in a bank and explained the idea. She immediately supported it, and the bank even prepared gifts and goodie bags for the best groups. When I announced this to my students, their motivation skyrocketed; suddenly the project felt real, important, and competitive.

The first part of the project took place in the classroom. During those 45 minutes of group work, they brainstormed, sketched initial ideas, divided roles, and set informal deadlines. After that, I stepped back and let them take ownership. What I later found out was that they had

been meeting in each other's homes, online, and even during breaks at school, working on their projects with remarkable dedication. They were motivated not only to impress me and their peers but also to present something meaningful to our outside guests, the bankers who would evaluate their ideas and award prizes.

After two weeks, the big day finally arrived. The students were well-prepared, visibly excited, and a little nervous. Our guest bankers had 45 minutes per class (and we held two sessions), so the presentations needed to be concise and effective.

Each group had 5 -7 minutes to present their business idea.

After the presentations, our guests took a few minutes to comment on the ideas, offer professional insight, and announce the winners.

Some of the ideas included:

- A full-service agency for renting apartments to tourists; offering cleaning, laundry, transportation, booking management, and guest communication.

- A niche perfumery combined with a café in Zadar - a place where customers could try exclusive perfumes and then enjoy some coffee while seeing how the scent develops on their skin.

- Several unique restaurant concepts - such as exotic cuisine options or a restaurant on a boat, offering both a dining experience and a scenic view of the Adriatic.

- „Coffee on Wheels" - a mobile coffee service that comes directly to the customer, perfect for busy mornings or workplaces far from cafés.

…and many more creative concepts.

Needless to say, our guests were absolutely thrilled with the students, their ideas, and the level of preparation. Besides listening to the presentations, the bankers used the opportunity to give real-life advice on financial literacy, something young people truly need, yet often lack. They talked about responsibility, budgeting, risk assessment, loan conditions, and long-term planning. It was refreshing for the students to hear these things from professionals rather than just from their teachers.

Interestingly, one of the bankers also works as a professor at the University of Osijek. She shared that her university students had recently done a similar project, but their ideas differed greatly from those in Zadar. While many of my students focused on tourism and hospitality, young people in Osijek leaned more toward agriculture, food production, and local industry. This comparison sparked an interesting discussion about regional differences, market needs, and economic influences on entrepreneurial thinking.

In conclusion, this project brought countless benefits, from students spending quality time together, collaborating, debating, and supporting one another, to broadening their horizons and pushing them to think beyond what they normally encounter in their daily lives. They learned about entrepreneurship, the banking industry, and financial responsibility, all while using English in a real, authentic communicative situation. Presenting to an audience outside their usual classroom comfort zone was a valuable experience that built confidence and communication skills.

In an educational climate where students often feel overwhelmed by theory, projects like these remind them that learning can be dynamic, relevant and genuinely enjoyable. For us teachers, it serves as a reminder that stepping outside traditional lesson formats can lead to some of the most meaningful learning moments. It was also a wonderful collaboration between our school and the bank, and having such engaging, practical, and innovative projects is truly rewarding for everyone involved. I fully intend to repeat this activity with future generations, perhaps with minor adjustments, but following the same core principles. If this story inspires even one of my colleagues to try something similar in their classroom, I will consider it a great success.

Where Words Meet Images: Picture Books as Bridges Between Words and Young Learners

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Abstract

Picture books are an engaging and highly effective tool for developing young learners' oracy. Drawing on my research exploring educators' perceptions of picture book use in preschool English teaching, this article highlights how the synergy of words and images fosters vocabulary development, emotional engagement and spontaneous speaking. Practical guidelines are provided for teachers wishing to integrate picture books into playful, meaningful early English learning in both preschool and early primary school.

Why Picture Books Matter Now

Global mobility, exposure to new cultures and evolving early education policies have made language learning at a young age increasingly important. Teachers seek resources that are not only pedagogically sound but also emotionally meaningful. Picture books, which combine visuals, rhythm, language, humour, predictability and surprise, naturally spark speech. Yet despite their proven value, many educators perceive picture books as suitable only for preschool, underutilizing them as children transition to primary school. This article aims to show picture books as a powerful tool for fostering speaking skills and to invite colleagues to explore my dissertation for practical guidelines.

How Picture Books Foster Speaking

Picture books are much more than text plus illustrations. **Sipe (1998, 2008)** describes the dynamic interplay between image and text, which invites interpretation, prediction and conversation. Children become active meaning-makers, retelling stories and commenting on illustrations. **Nikolajeva (2013)** emphasizes the emotional dimension of picture books, noting that illustrations convey mood and character psychology, which motivates children to speak. **Nodelman (1988)** highlights that children decode images in sophisticated ways, encouraging verbalisation and peer interaction. **Mourão (2015, 2019)** demonstrates that picture books provide authentic language input and can be adapted for diverse speaking activities, including role-play, storytelling and collaborative discussions.

Study Findings

My research included 150 educators teaching English to very young learners. Questionnaires and focus group discussions revealed several patterns. First, emotional engagement is a key driver of speaking. Teachers reported that when children connect with characters, they naturally want to express themselves, even with limited language skills. One educator noted: *"When children really like the characters, they want to talk about them, even if their English is not perfect."*

Second, interactive reading strategies transform listening into speaking. Rather than simply reading aloud, teachers encouraged prediction, description and retelling, creating multiple opportunities for children to articulate ideas and practice vocabulary. Third, drama and role-play were consistently cited as effective extensions of picture book reading. Acting out scenes, using character voices and inventing alternative endings sparked spontaneous speech and creativity. Finally, several challenges were identified, including limited time in curricula, insufficient access to quality English picture books and varying teacher confidence in leading interactive or dramatic activities.

A notable finding was the decline in picture book use as children enter primary school. Many educators perceive them as "too simple," missing the opportunity to leverage picture books for structured oral interaction across age groups. Yet picture books can support vocabulary expansion, pronunciation, storytelling, critical thinking, collaboration and intercultural learning, making them relevant well beyond preschool.

Practical Guidelines for Teachers

Based on the study and classroom experience, several strategies can enhance oracy through picture books:

Interactive Reading: Use open-ended questions, prediction prompts and peer discussion to make reading active.

Emotional Engagement: Select stories that evoke empathy, curiosity and humour, encouraging children to articulate feelings about characters and events.

Drama and Role-Play: Act out scenes, mimic voices or invent alternative endings to increase speaking opportunities.

Scaffold Language Use: Support children with sentence starters, gestures and modelling, gradually reducing scaffolding as confidence grows.

Collaborate and Share Resources: Share books and activities within professional networks to overcome limitations in access to English-language picturebooks.

Conclusion

Picture books are far more than aesthetic or entertainment tools; they are powerful catalysts for speaking in early language learning. The synergy of words and images, combined with emotional engagement and interactive, playful activities, creates rich opportunities for oral language development. Though this study focused on preschool settings, its implications extend to early primary education. Picture books can bridge the gap between playful early learning and structured language instruction, offering meaningful, joyful, and authentic contexts for communication. When words meet images, children speak — and that speech is the foundation of confident, lifelong language learning.

Additional Resources for Readers:

The full dissertation, titled *Picture Books in Early Foreign Language Learning*, is accessible via the University of Zadar institutional repository. The results of our focus group — guidelines for using picture books in early English language learning, along with a recommended list of picture books for children up to 9 and up to 14 years — are available via the QR code below. Scan to access the full material, which I am happy to share with fellow educators and future enthusiasts of picture books in early primary education.

"Rockin' Around the Classroom: Integrating Culture and Language in EFL Christmas Lessons

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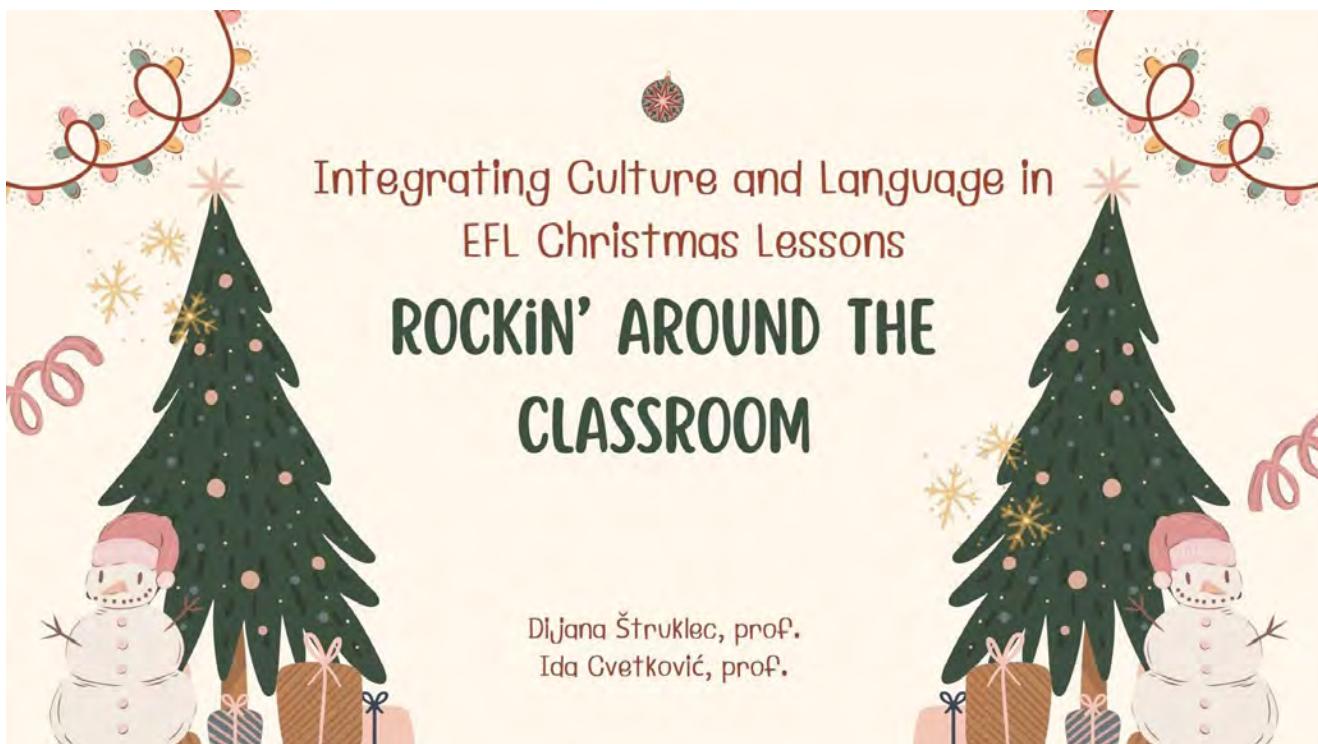
Abstract

Christmas offers language teachers a uniquely inspiring period within the school year. Beyond the festive atmosphere, the holiday season provides meaningful opportunities to connect language learning with culture, creativity, and critical thinking. In our workshop *Rockin' Around the Classroom*, we explored practical, engaging approaches for integrating Christmas themes into well-structured EFL lessons. The activities we present aim to support language development while promoting intercultural awareness, learner autonomy, and communicative competence. By balancing festive enjoyment with pedagogical value, these lessons demonstrate that holiday-themed classes can be dynamic, student-centred, and linguistically rich—transforming the Christmas period into an ideal time for integrated EFL teaching.

1. Introduction

Christmas, as a theme in foreign-language teaching, can be much more than seasonal amusement — it can serve as a motivational framework that integrates language, culture, creativity, and critical thought. In EFL contexts, such an approach allows students to build language skills through meaningful and relevant content, while also raising their awareness of cultural diversity and cross-cultural practices. The aim of this paper is to present a range of practical, thoughtfully structured classroom activities that integrate Christmas motifs into EFL lessons — achieving a balance between holiday spirit and pedagogical purpose.

2. Methodological Approach / Workshop Description

The *Rockin' Around the Classroom* workshop is designed as a collection of modular activities adaptable to different age groups and proficiency levels. Each activity is intentionally structured to:

- introduce a cultural or contextual framework (Christmas customs, traditions, history)
- develop language skills via receptive (reading, listening) and productive tasks (writing, speaking)
- encourage communication, creativity, learner autonomy, and intercultural competence
- in some cases, integrate cross-curricular content (CLIL), such as sustainability, science, or media literacy

The approach is learner-centred and flexible: activities can be combined or used individually, depending on students' age, language level, and available class time.

3. Description of Activities / Workshop Content

3.1 "The Story of Christmas" — Cultural and Historical Framework

Through texts (history of Christmas, myths, origin of traditions) and discussion, students explore the historical roots and symbolism of the holiday. This introduction supports vocabulary development, receptive-skill practice, and critical thinking about the meaning and evolution of traditions.

3.2 Comparing Traditions: Local vs. International Christmas Customs

Students explore Croatian Christmas traditions alongside traditions from other countries, describing and comparing similarities and differences. This activity fosters intercultural competence and builds vocabulary related to celebrations, food, rituals, and customs.

3.3 Vocabulary Building through Interactive Exercises

Categorisation tasks, matching activities, "taboo" games, and speaking prompts provide an engaging way to acquire Christmas-related vocabulary. The inclusion of visuals, digital tools, and game elements enhances motivation.

3.4 Authentic Input: Reading, Listening, Multimedia

Christmas stories, carols, advertisements, and short video clips supply authentic language input. Tasks may include gist and detailed comprehension, sequencing, tone recognition, and distinguishing fact from opinion. Such materials support comprehension skills and maintain learner engagement.

3.5 Writing: "Dear Santa… But Make It Academic"

Writing tasks encourage students to create letters to Santa using appropriate register and structure. Examples include:

- a complaint letter about a delayed gift
- an application for an imaginary job at the North Pole
- a persuasive letter stating why they deserve a particular gift

These humorous yet structured tasks reinforce functional writing skills.

3.6 Speaking: Interviews, Debates, and Imaginary Roles

Elf Yourself: Students design CVs for imaginary Christmas jobs (reindeer trainer, cookie-quality inspector), write job descriptions, and engage in mock interviews or selection panels.

The Great Christmas Debate: Topics such as *"Is Santa a good employer?"*, *"Should Christmas gifts be limited to reduce waste?"*, or *"Is Die Hard a Christmas movie?"* encourage structured speaking, argumentation, and critical thinking.

3.7 Literature, Music, and Creative Tasks

Short Christmas-themed literary texts enable analysis of characters, themes, and values such as generosity. Rewriting carols or creating modern versions enhances creativity and language play, supporting learner expression.

3.8 CLIL and Contemporary Themes — "Green Christmas" and Sustainability

Students examine environmental impacts of holiday traditions, develop a "sustainable Christmas" guide, or pitch eco-friendly alternatives. These tasks integrate real-world issues into language learning.

3.9 Additional Creative and Skills-Based Activities

Media-literacy tasks (e.g., analysing real vs. fake Christmas headlines), festive escape-room grammar challenges, and film-based activities (rewriting Christmas scenes in a different genre) support collaboration, creativity, and student-centred learning.

4. Pedagogical Value and Potential Benefits

Christmas-themed lessons can support language development, intercultural competence, motivation, creativity, and learner autonomy. Integrating contemporary topics such as sustainability and media literacy further strengthens their relevance.

4a. Why Christmas Lessons Work in EFL Teaching — Benefits

High motivation and engagement.

 The festive context is familiar, colourful, and emotionally positive for most learners. When students are excited, their willingness to speak, read, and participate increases — particularly among quieter students.

Rich cultural learning.

 Christmas provides a natural gateway to discussing traditions from English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. Comparing these with students' own customs builds intercultural competence and cultural curiosity.

Authentic vocabulary practice.

 Students encounter seasonal vocabulary widely used in English media, films, songs, and advertising. Learning adjectives (festive, grateful), verbs (wrap, decorate), and nouns (stockings, wreaths) in meaningful contexts enhances retention.

Strong listening opportunities.

 Songs, short films, and stories support pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation awareness. They allow students to practise both gist and detail listening with high interest and motivation.

Integration of all four skills.

 Christmas topics naturally link speaking, reading, writing, and listening: discussing traditions, reading about global customs, writing letters and messages, and engaging with multimedia content.

Supports creative and communicative tasks.

 Games, role-plays, quizzes, crafts, and storytelling create meaningful communication without performance pressure. Students express authentic ideas while practising English.

Builds classroom community. Festive lessons encourage positive emotions, collaboration, and humour — strengthening group cohesion and improving the learning climate, especially in the busy December period.

Ideal for end-of-term revision.

Christmas themes provide a natural context for revising grammar (present simple, past tenses, conditionals), helping students consolidate their learning in an enjoyable way.

Inclusive when designed thoughtfully.

 By focusing on global winter traditions, values of kindness and gratitude, or contemporary issues such as sustainability, Christmas lessons can remain culturally sensitive and inclusive for diverse learners.

5. Discussion — Implications and Potential Limitations

While Christmas-themed lessons offer numerous benefits, they must remain pedagogically grounded rather than purely entertaining. Their effectiveness depends on thoughtful planning, adaptation to group age and proficiency, and sensitivity to cultural diversity. Not all activities can be implemented in every classroom; therefore, modularity and flexibility are crucial. Further empirical research—through student surveys, classroom observations, or pre/post language assessments—would help verify the impact of such lessons on motivation, learning outcomes, and intercultural competence.

6. Conclusion

Well-designed Christmas lessons can serve as valuable teaching tools, combining meaningful language practice with intercultural learning, creativity, autonomy, and contemporary educational themes. The *Rockin' Around the Classroom* workshop illustrates how festive content can be transformed into serious, authentic, and dynamic EFL instruction — enriching the curriculum and fostering motivated, engaged, and culturally aware learners.

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Teacher Motivation in ELT

Silvija Pećanac Bačić

Teaching is often described as a calling, a vocation, or a passion. But as every teacher knows, passion is not a permanent state. Teacher motivation is frequently discussed in terms of passion, energy, or personality, yet in reality, it's something we develop rather than something we either possess or lack. English teachers face unique challenges like overloaded timetables, constant assessment, the emotional labour of caring for students, our school culture, our personal lives, and even global trends such as rapidly advancing technology. Different types of motivation enable us to be effective in goal setting. Extrinsic motivation, like financial rewards or support from school leadership, would definitely spark any teacher's motivation, but this is not likely to happen any time soon. So, what can English teachers use to maintain or rekindle motivation throughout the school year? Rather than emphasising major reinventions of practice, some strategies focus on realistic, small-scale changes that support well-being, enthusiasm, and professional satisfaction, because motivation grows not from heroic efforts, but from sustainable habits.

As teachers, we tend to focus on big outcomes: improved exam results, completed projects, or visible leaps in student proficiency. These milestones matter, of course, but they are rare and spaced out across the year. Relying solely on major achievements for motivational fuel is like living only on birthday cake, and it is simply not enough.

Micro-wins, on the other hand, occur every single day, but we often fail to notice them because they appear small or ordinary. Never have I met a teacher who does not have at least ten different cups with motivational quotes printed on them. I can proudly say that I possess even more, and there is no better start to the day than with a nice cup of coffee with a motivational quote bought on a trip with a colleague. And then a student finally pronouncing a difficult word correctly, a reluctant learner participating in a group task, or a quiet class suddenly becoming lively during a speaking activity adds to these micro-wins. They are not dramatic, but they are evidence that learning is happening. Intentionally acknowledging these moments can significantly strengthen teacher motivation. A simple habit is to end the day by asking yourself, "What went well today?" Even identifying just one positive moment can shift your perspective from stress towards progress.

Traditional goals can be rigid or unrealistic. When a teacher plans every lesson a week in advance or gives written feedback for every assignment, a lot of pressure is created, which can lead to burnout. Instead, motivation comes from goals that are flexible, achievable and connected to values. Compassionate goals respect the reality of teaching life and reduce guilt-based pressure. A teacher can decide to plan an activity which reduces talking time and thus prevents sore throat, an ever-present teacher's condition. It is also good to reduce preparation time to protect personal energy.

We teachers often think motivation requires brand-new activities or complicated materials. But even small changes are not time-consuming, and they can refresh our teaching as long as we add novelty without adding workload. What works for me is starting lessons with a surprising question, or sometimes students can choose between two activity options. Game-like activities are their favourite ones. In this way, they feel as if they participate in their knowledge acquisition. Novelty stimulates the curiosity of both teachers and students, and we teachers enjoy the feeling of trying something new that adds to the classroom dynamics.

As an English language teacher, I like the autonomy we were given after the last curricular reform because it gives me a sense of control over our actions and choices. Some teachers prefer less autonomy, but I like personalising lessons in my own style or expanding some interesting topics with more activities. Collaborating with colleagues to share ideas or even have classes together gives me motivation. Using different digital tools to freshen up my lessons is also very much welcomed. I believe when teachers feel empowered rather than restricted, motivation flourishes. Even tiny amounts of autonomy like choosing a new activity, rearranging a lesson sequence, or adopting a teaching method you love, can make a significant difference.

There is a widespread belief that motivation disappears because teachers stop caring. In reality, motivation often fades because teachers run out of energy. Emotional exhaustion, work overload, and relentless pressure drain the mental resources needed to stay enthusiastic. I have recently attended a workshop led by one of my colleague teachers, who presented us with different brain breaks that work both with teachers and students. A 30-second breathing pause, a stretch, or simply standing at the window can reset our focus. What is crucial is to set boundaries around work time and try to limit evening work.

Weekends should be a self-time whenever possible. I often tell my students that on Fridays, I shut down. This also includes understanding that they should have weekends for themselves, so no homework is given to do on weekends. Teachers also need to learn to say "no" whenever it feels appropriate because not every extra committee, club or event needs our involvement. I am still working on this area of possible improvement, but I feel this might come next because I understand now that my energy is not an infinite resource. Energy management is the silent partner of motivation. When energy is preserved, motivation tends to return.

Teacher motivation rises and recedes throughout the school year in cycles. At the start of the year, many teachers feel energised by fresh classes and new routines that September brings. This energy level lowers as administrative tasks accumulate, assessments begin, and extracurricular responsibilities intensify. By mid-winter, motivation often reaches its lowest point. Shorter days, illness, disrupted schedules, and the volume of work drain even the most enthusiastic teacher. Understanding that this is normal and not a personal failure helps prevent the guilt that often accompanies it. Spring usually brings a slight recovery, and students become more independent and want to end all the projects. Late spring can also be challenging, especially with exam pressure, end-of-year deadlines, and the emotional weight of seeing students move on. Recognising these seasonal shifts allows teachers to plan support for themselves. It is important to simplify routines during these low-energy periods, setting lighter goals in winter months, or saving particularly engaging lessons for times when motivation lowers. When teachers expect motivation to rise and fall rather than remain constant, they can work with the rhythm of the school year instead of resisting it. I prepare fun activities like watching the Friends Christmas episode or Mr Bean's Christmas, which always makes students laugh. I also have games with challenges, and I can say that my students started to expect a certain shift in activities as the holidays approach.

In the end, I have to add a personal anecdote that helped me move on. I like to travel and engage myself in projects that involve travelling and meeting my colleagues from across Europe. There was this class of 15 students that I took to England and different Erasmus projects, and years after, one of them approached me and told me that if it weren't for me, he would never have ended his education the way he did and chosen the career he did. This was such a boost to me that I felt unstoppable for months afterwards. Whenever I see some of my former students, they ask me about my projects and Erasmus, as well as other travels I organise and this helps me move on. I see the idea of the famous saying "Keep calm and carry on".

To conclude, teacher motivation is not something we have or lack. It's something we grow through small, intentional practices. By focusing on micro-wins, maintaining simple reflective habits, setting compassionate goals, rediscovering our purpose, introducing small new elements, embracing autonomy, and safeguarding our energy, we can keep our enthusiasm alive even during tough times. English teachers have a unique role. We help students communicate, connect, imagine, and grow. That work is significant, but meaning does not erase challenges. What sustains us isn't perfection but awareness, support, and sustainable strategies. Maintaining our motivation doesn't require grand actions. It means noticing the small things that are already present.

The Power of Storytelling Spoons: Boosting English Language Skills Through Interactive Narratives

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Introduction

Today, fortunately, more and more teachers see the benefits od using stories to teach language skills. When children encounter English through stories rather than isolated vocabulary lists or grammar drills, they receive the language in a purposeful, context rich setting. Stories have a narrative logic and with its repeated structures and predictability they help students anticipate meaning and understand unknown words. Literature is also culture and cultures carry ways of viewing the world. Using literature in the classroom broadens children's perspectives and helps them develop interpretative habits alongside language skills. Our main aim in the ELT classroom is to encourage a positive attitude towards learning English. Language learning needs to be a fun and enjoyable experience. In this paper I am going to show how using a simple tool like a spoon in storytelling can help boost language development and confidence in a low-pressure and playful way.

Choosing a text

When choosing a text, we must think about the length and clarity, language level, thematic relevance, and potential for tasks. If we want to understand descriptive language, we choose rich, detailed picture books. If we want to practice sequencing, we choose stories with clear chronological progression. If we want to develop emotional competences, we choose narratives with moral dilemmas or strong character development. Whatever we want to accomplish we should try it using authentic literature. According to Bland children need high-quality language input which well told stories can offer. Language needs to be comprehensible, substantial in quantity and valuable in quality. As Narančić Kovač points out we do not teach grammar but in cumulative tales past tense forms naturally reinforce verb patterns long before children formally study them. There is no need to simpli-

fy or elicit certain vocabulary of grammatical structures from those texts. Because grammar structures are taught in chunks, linked to the vocabulary and the context, children memorise and use them without knowing it. Finally, when choosing a text, we should choose something that is fun and enjoyable, not only for our pupils, but for us as well.

The narrative

One simple, yet effective narrative which I use in the classroom is a folk tale *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, retold by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury. It is a story that takes the reader through swishy-swashy grass, thick-oozy mud, and swirling-whirling snowstorm into a narrow- gloomy cave where a bear lives. When the protagonists (and the reader) find the bear, they run away from it going back through all the places they came from (the cave, the snowstorm, the forest…) and conclude that it was dangerous to go on a bear hunt and will not go on a bear hunt again. The picture book itself provides strong visual support that helps young learners understand the story. It's repeated structures and onomatopoeic words invite the readers into this story world and activate language production in a natural way. Bland argues that the dynamic rhythm, rhyme, and onomatopoeia delight children and are memory anchors at the same time. The story also has a clear chronological progression which is great for practicing sequencing.

In the classroom the story was introduced with a riddle: "One shiny wet nose, two big furry ears, two big googly eyes… It's a…?" The answer was of course – a bear. Children had to think of one word to describe a bear. Words used were big, brown, dangerous, scary, hungry, white… Then the pupils did a vocabulary matching activity. There were pictures of the places through which the family went when hunting for a bear and the matching words. After that the pupils focused on the sounds of the grass, river, mud, forest, snowstorm, and cave since in the nar-

rative there are repeated onomatopoeic words for the places through which the family goes. The pupils had to write down the sound, which was an interesting, fun, and cognitively engaging activity. When the pupils listened to the story, they imitated sounds and did the movements showing going over, under and through different scenery. Storytelling spoons helped the pupils listen actively for the first time, retell the story after reading it a couple of times and create a new story which was the final activity.

Storytelling spoons

In my classroom I often use puppets for role-playing and storytelling. Puppets and other props boost engagement, motivate pupils to speak and stimulate imagination and creativity. When "hiding" behind a puppet even the shyest pupils tend to speak because they are speaking as their character and not as themselves. Props make stories multisensory – they are visual, tactile and can be physically manipulated. After reading *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* for the first time, I thought about a prop that is simpler and less expensive than a puppet. I saw a picture online of a wooden ladle that was transformed into a character from a book, and then I thought of a spoon. Spoons, like other props, are storytelling tools used to comprehend, retell, and create a story. What I like about them is that they are small, simple to make and can be used over and over again. They bring something new and interesting to the classroom.

The spoons can be used in several ways. Pupils can draw the characters from a story, or they can design their own character. Other than role play, pupils can play various games using the character spoons such as *Spoon puppet guessing game*. In this game a pupil hides a spoon behind his/her back and gives clues like: "I am a girl. I have got a red hood." Other pupils guess the character based on its description. Another game to play is called *Hot seat*. A pupil sits on a chair and shows the spoon character. Others must ask him/her questions. Questions can be simple such as: "What's your name? What's your favourite colour? Have you got a brother or a sister". They can also be a bit more complex like: "How did you feel when going through the forest?" Spoons can be used for retelling the story. One way to retell is to pass the spoon around. It the story *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* a pupil holds a spoon and tells the first line ("We're going on a bear hunt"), the second pupil continues ("We're going to catch a big one."), the third pupil continues ("What a beautiful day! We're not scared."), and so on. This can be done in smaller groups or with the whole class. The other way to use spoons for retelling is sequential retelling. Pupils need to put the spoons in the correct order and then retell the story. The spoons can be used to retell the story from an-

other perspective, for example, the bear's point of view. Storytelling spoons can be creative tools as well. Pupils can think of other characters or places and draw them on the spoon. This could be an incentive to other speaking or writing activities.

The first time we read *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* pupils were each given a spoon and they had to draw a scenery from the story: grass, river, mud, forest, snowstorm, or cave. The visual cues helped them understand the story and actively listen since their task was to stand up when hearing their word and do the accompanied movements and sounds. On the spoons they wrote the onomatopoeic words such as tiptoe, stumble-tip, squelch-squerch. This helped the pupils follow the story and retell the story later.

The second time we used the spoons in this story was to create a new story. Each pupil got a spoon. They had to draw and write a new scenery. In this activity they had to think of two adjectives and one onomatopoeic word. Some of the examples were: a deep, blue ocean; a small, rustic farmyard; a big, vast space. They thought of sounds they could hear there and wrote some onomatopoeic words like bubble-gulp for the ocean, or oink-oink, for the farm. With the visual cues and words written on the spoon, they could now tell a whole new story.

Conclusion

Storytelling spoons are a tool we can use in the classroom to boost oral fluency, build confidence, and help with language acquisition. They are an inexpensive prop that can be used repeatedly. If we want to involve pupils and support creativity, they can create their own spoons. They work as external memory cues that help follow a story, recall the plot, and use language in a meaningful way. They tend to increase motivation and willingness to participate in the lesson. They are fun, and when learning is fun and playful pupils will want to repeat it which is what happened with our "bear hunt". Combining interactive narratives and simple props like spoons helped pupils "live" the story through sound, movement, and art. It made the learning experience fun and rememberable. It reminded me that when integrated thoughtfully literature can help achieve a whole range of learning outcomes, engage children, and foster their love for the language.

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Museum Learning in Istanbul

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During our last mobility* where we participated in an Erasmus+ course hosted by Anatolia, "Learn in Museum," I embarked on an unforgettable journey to Istanbul, a city where millennia of history meet modern innovation. The core objective was to move beyond the traditional "look and listen" museum visit and develop dynamic learning scenarios that integrate technology, placing students at the center of educational scenarios.

The five museums we visited—the Archaeology Museum, Rahmi Koç Museum, Pera Museum, Museum of Islamic History and Science in Gülhane Park, and the new Museum of Islamic Civilizations at Camlica Mosque—provided the perfect backdrop to test a fusion of physical artifacts and Augmented Reality (AR) apps. By connecting the rich heritage of the Islamic Golden Age in science, maths, medicine, and geography with cutting-edge mobile technology, various engaging educational experiences were crafted.

Next are the selected apps that were used to create the learning scenarios with the use of AI. The name of the app has the link to Google Play store where each app can be downloaded on smartphones. Educational goals and places were given to the prompt and by selecting different museums, the following learning scenarios were developed:

| Educational App	Subject Focus	Learning Scenario
EyeJack	Art, History, Creativity	Bringing static artwork or historical statues to life with student-created digital animations.
AR Bilgi Kartları	Science, Maths, Geography, History	Using AR flashcards to instantly display 3D models of inventions next to their historical context.
Virtuali-Tee	Biology, Medicine, Health	Exploring human anatomy in 3D as a modern extension of the pioneering work of Islamic physicians.
SolarSys	Science, Astronomy, Geography	Using AR to project the Solar System, connecting to the significant advancements in astronomy and cartography found in the exhibits.
QuiverVision)	Art, History, Fine Motor Skills	Students colour in print-outs of historical figures or architectural details, then watch their unique creations animate in 3D.
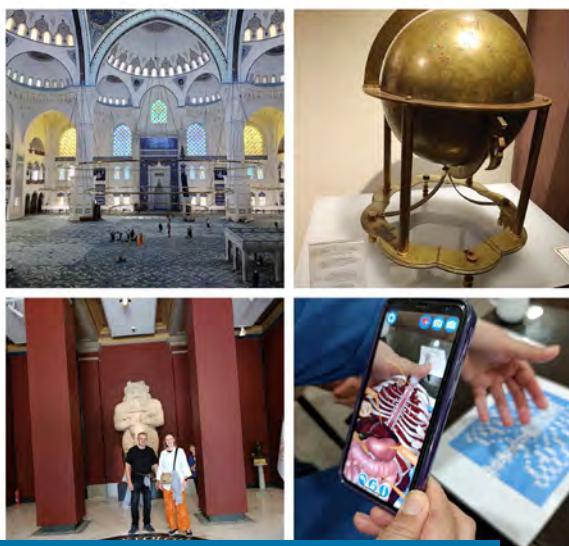
Figure 1 Camlica Mosque Museum, Archeology Museum, a globe from Science museum and Virtuali-Tee app

Archaeology Museum in Istanbul contains over a million artifacts from ancient Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Hellenistic/Roman periods. Highlights include the famous Alexander Sarcophagus, the Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women, ancient treaties, and huge collections of statues and coins. To help students understand the concept of time, displaying Greek statues of gods or understanding ancient cultures like Greeks, Romans, or Egyptians can be made by using AR animation. On the other hand, students can make their stories with these apps to interact with historical evidence (how broken pots and statues tell stories). The scale of the artifacts and sarcophagi provides visual "wow" moments perfect for AR animation with EyeJack or learning about ancient art (Quiver Vision).

Rahmi Koç Museum (Industrial Museum) is an interactive museum dedicated to technology and engineering. Col-

lections feature vintage cars, full-size aircraft, old railway carriages, steam engines, and even a real submarine. The museum shows how things work (mechanics, steam power, electricity) and how technology has changed life (from horse-drawn carts to airplanes). If you want to foster curiosity about science, physics, and maths, use the planetarium and historic scientific tools within the SolarSys app.

Pera Museum features paintings by European and Ottoman artists, focusing on the cultural exchange and views of the Ottoman world. To teach visual literacy, storytelling through art, and different perspectives, students can use EyeJack to bring painted subjects to life.

Museum of Islamic History and Science houses replicas of inventions from the 9th to 16th centuries. It showcases the profound contributions of Islamic scholars in fields like astronomy, mathematics and geometry, geography, medicine, physics, and engineering, including surgical tools, world maps, clocks, and astrolabes. Through Turkish app AR Bilgi Kartları for maths/geography and Virtuali-Tee for medicine, making abstract concepts is enabled and visible through physical models on smartphones.

Museum of Islamic Civilizations at Camlica Mosque was the most impressive museum I have visited. It collects over 600 artifacts from across Islamic history, including significant items like rare, illuminated Qur'an manuscripts, calligraphy, sacred relics, Ottoman textiles, carpets, and fine ceramic tiles from Iznik. To expose students to the beauty and depth of Islamic art and craftsmanship,

we can highlight the importance of calligraphy (writing as art), textiles, and geometric patterns (linking to maths/geometry) used in religious and daily life across centuries. It provides rich visual details perfect for art analysis and design work using Quiver Vision app.

Integrating AR technology into museum visits transforms passive observation into an active, investigative process. The apps mentioned are more than just digital toys; they are pedagogical bridges that connect the physical, historical world of Istanbul's museums with the abstract concepts of science and maths. To conclude, I would like to share a lesson plan idea that you can use with your students to teach about tolerance, famous religion (Islam) and famous inventions.

Lesson Plan: Tolerance, Religion, and Innovation (Ages 10-13 / A2-B1 English Level)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

Define and discuss the concept of **tolerance** and **respect** for different beliefs.

Identify basic facts and core values associated with **Islam**.

Recognize and describe at least three famous **Islamic inventions** that impacted the world (using new vocabulary).

Use comparative adjectives to discuss the past and present.

⏳ **Lesson Duration: 90 Minutes**

Phase	Time	Activity & Procedure	Resources & Teacher Notes
I. Warm-up & Introduction	15 min	**1. Tolerance Brainstorm (5 min):** Ask: "What does it mean to be tolerant?" Write student ideas on the board (e.g., *respect, kindness, listening*). **2. Quote Analysis (10 min):** Present a quote on tolerance (e.g., "Tolerance is giving to every other human being every right that you claim for yourself." – *Robert Green Ingersoll*). Students discuss in pairs what the quote means.	Whiteboard/Projector, Tolerance Quote. Focus on *speaking* skills.
II. Reading & Vocabulary	25 min	**1. Introduction to Islam (5 min):** Briefly introduce Islam as one of the world's major religions, emphasizing its core values of peace, learning, and charity. **2. Reading Passage (10 min):** Students read a short passage about the Islamic Golden Age (7th to 13th centuries) focusing on its contribution to knowledge. **3. Vocabulary Focus (10 min):** Highlight key vocabulary from the text (e.g., *scholar, invention, civilization, astronomy, contribution*). Students use the new words in simple sentences.	Handout with Reading Passage. Vocabulary list.

Phase	Time	Activity & Procedure	Resources & Teacher Notes
III. Main Activity: Famous Inventions	30 min	**1. Group Research (15 min):** Divide students into three groups. Assign each group a famous Islamic invention: Group A: The Astrolabe/Cartography, Group B: Algebra/The Concept of Zero, Group C: Surgical Tools/Hospitals. **2. Presentation (15 min):** Each group presents their invention, describing: a) What it is, b) Who invented it, c) Why it was important for the world. Students can use simple visuals.	Handouts with simple facts/images about the three inventions. Clarify the link between inventions and the Museum of Islamic History and Science.
IV. Consolidation & Connection	15 min	**1. Comparative Discussion (10 min):** Ask students to use comparative adjectives to discuss how these inventions changed the world: e.g., "Astrolabes made navigation **easier** and **more accurate** than previous methods." "Old surgical tools were **simpler** but **less safe** than modern ones." **2. Linking to Tolerance (5 min):** Discuss the idea that knowledge and science are global. *Question:* "How does learning about contributions from different cultures help us become more tolerant?" (Answer focus: we all rely on shared knowledge and history).	Comparative Adjective practice. Class discussion.
V. Wrap-up & Homework	5 min	**1. Quiz:** Review the new vocabulary and three inventions. **2. Homework:** Write a short paragraph (5-7 sentences) titled **"A World Without Inventions"** describing which of the three inventions you think is the most important and why.	Homework handout/Journal entry.

Reading Passage Example

The Golden Age of Learning

Between the 8th and 13th centuries, many parts of the Islamic world, especially cities like Baghdad, were at the center of learning. This time is known as the **Islamic Golden Age**. Scholars, who were often Muslim, Christian, and Jewish, worked side-by-side in places like the **House of Wisdom** in Baghdad.

These scholars loved knowledge. They translated books from ancient Greek, Roman, Persian, and Indian thinkers. But they didn't just translate—they improved and invented! They made huge **contributions** to **astronomy**, maths, and **medicine**. For example, they were the first to use **hospitals** as places to treat patients and teach new doctors. Their love of learning helped **civilization** grow and change the world.

Vocabulary

Word	Definition
Tolerance	Accepting differences in beliefs and opinions.
Scholar	A person who studies and knows a lot about a subject.
Invention	Something new that someone has created.
Contribution	Something you give or do to help something be successful.
Astronomy	The scientific study of stars, planets, and space.
Civilization	A well-organized and developed human society.

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Self-Made Booklets in the Teaching/Learning Process

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Booklets are often an underutilized tool in the teaching and learning process, yet they have a unique ability to enhance student engagement, foster better understanding, and facilitate effective revision. This article explores the various ways in which booklets can be used to benefit both teachers and students, the advantages they offer, and how educators can easily create and incorporate them into their classrooms

The word "booklet"

According to the *Collins English Dictionary* (2012), a booklet is defined as „a small, thin book that has a paper cover and that gives you information about something."" The primary purpose of a booklet is to provide specific information on a particular topic in a compact and accessible format.

In the context of teaching, a booklet serves as an excellent resource for consolidating information, organizing content, and presenting material in a visually appealing and user-friendly manner. The limited number of pages makes it less overwhelming for students and provides opportunities for active engagement with the content.

What is the difference between a book and a booklet?

Although books and booklets share similar characteristics, there are key differences that set them apart.

- **A book**, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, is "a set of pages fastened together in a cover to." Books are generally larger in size, contain more pages, and offer a more in-depth exploration of a subject.

- **A booklet**, on the other hand, is defined as "a small, thin book that contains information." Booklets are typically smaller, more concise, and focus on a specific topic, making them ideal for quick reference or targeted learning.
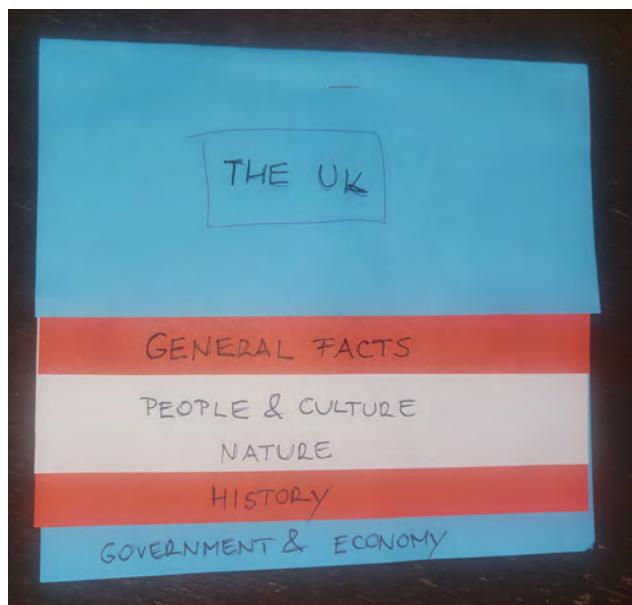
The primary difference, therefore, lies in the length and depth of the content. A booklet is designed to be brief and to the point, making it an effective tool for presenting information without overwhelming the reader.

What is the use of booklets in teaching and why are they important for students?

Booklets offer several distinct advantages for both teaching and learning.

1. **Maximizing lesson time**

   One of the most significant benefits of using booklets in the classroom is that they help maximize lesson time. By providing students with a compact version of the material, teachers can focus on deeper discussions and more interactive elements of the lesson, without having to spend excessive time explaining content. This also allows students to spend more time reflecting on what they have learned and engaging in meaningful dialogue.

2. Reducing cognitive load

Booklets serve to reduce cognitive load, making learning more manageable for students. By breaking down complex topics into bite-sized chunks, booklets support quality teaching that minimizes the mental strain of having to process large volumes of information all at once.

3. Better understanding

Booklets help students to better understand and remember important concepts. The clear structure and visual aids often found in booklets make it easier for students to make connections between different pieces of information. This can be particularly beneficial when studying for exams or revisiting topics later in the course.

4. Reference tool

A booklet can also serve as an invaluable reference tool for students. Having a well-organized booklet allows students to quickly locate key information without having to go through multiple sources, making it easier to revise and reinforce their understanding of the material.

Advantages of a booklet (according to students)

From the perspective of students, booklets offer several key advantages:

- **Revision is easier**: Booklets provide a concise summary of the content, making it easier for students to review and retain information. Instead of reading through textbooks or class notes, they can quickly refer to their booklets for essential points and concepts.

- **Easier if absent**: For students who may miss a class, having a booklet ensures they do not fall behind. The booklet serves as a compact version of the lesson, helping them catch up on the material at their own pace.

- **Less writing, more thinking**: Booklets help students spend less time writing and more time engaging with the content. With key points already outlined in the booklet, students can focus on higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

- **Organized**: A booklet forces the content to be well-organized, which helps students better process and understand the material. Clear sections and headings allow them to navigate through information quickly and easily.

- **More efficient use of lesson time**: By streamlining the content, booklets make lessons more efficient. Teachers can cover more material in less time while ensuring that students still engage with and understand the key concepts.

Booklet creators online

There are several tools available online for creating booklets, allowing teachers to design and print booklets quickly and easily. Some popular booklet creation tools include:

- **Adobe InDesign**: A professional desktop publishing software ideal for creating high-quality, customized booklets.

- **BookWright**: A free tool from Blurb, which is great for creating printed and digital booklets.

- **Microsoft Word**: A user-friendly option for creating simple booklets, especially for teachers on a budget.

- **Scrivener**: A writing tool often used by authors, but useful for compiling and organizing content for booklets.

- **Canva**: A design platform with easy-to-use templates for creating visually appealing booklets, brochures, and other resources.

- **FlipHTML5**: An online tool that allows you to create interactive digital booklets.

- **BookletCreator**: A free tool specifically designed for creating booklets.

- **Google Docs**: A free and accessible option for creating basic booklets with text and images.

These platforms make it easy for teachers to create visually engaging booklets, which can be customized to fit the needs of their students and curriculum.

How to make your own booklet easily and quickly?

Creating a booklet doesn't have to be difficult or time-consuming. In fact, it can be done quickly with just a few basic materials and steps.

What you need:

- Papers in different colors (for added visual appeal)

- Stapler

- Pen/pencil for adding any handwritten content
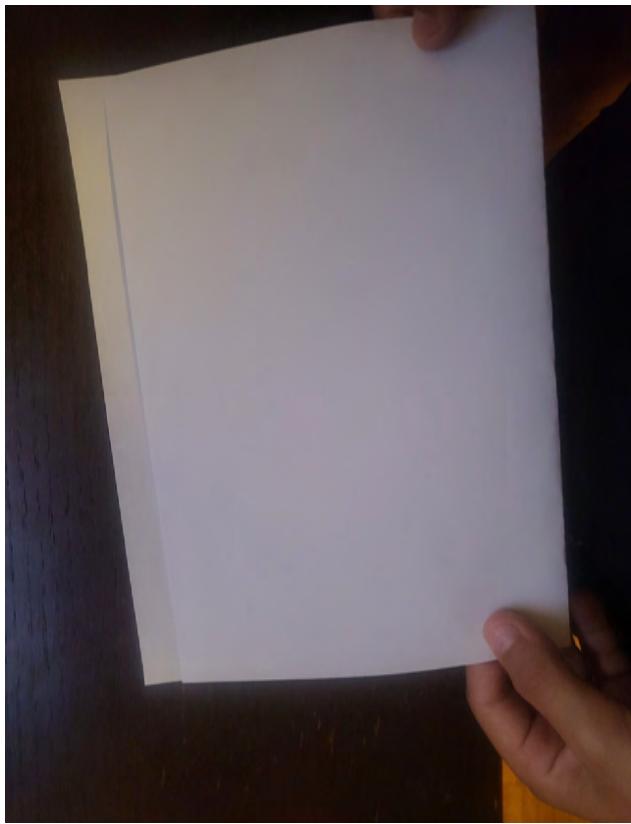
Steps to create a simple booklet:

1. **Fold the first paper**: Take your first sheet of paper and fold it so that the bottom part is slightly longer than the top. This will create a slight overlap.
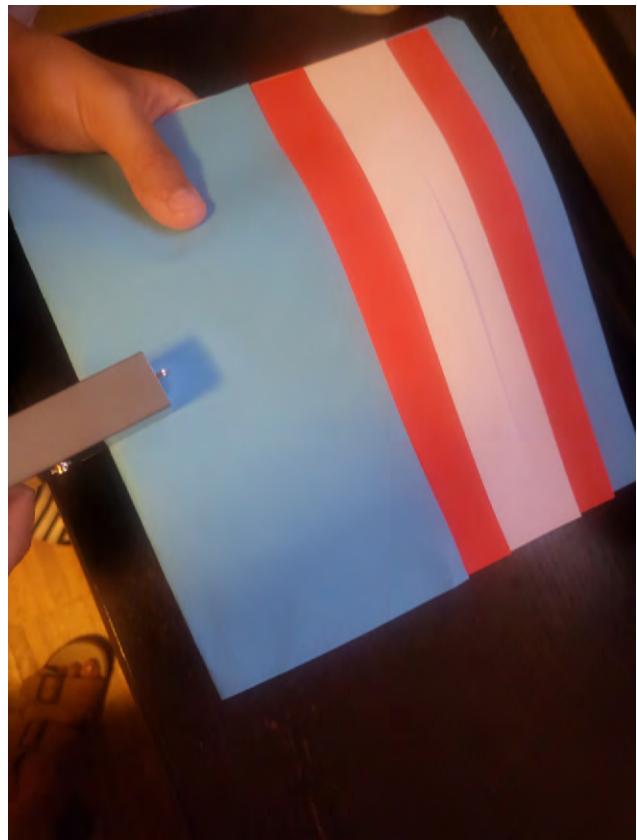
2. **Fold the second paper**: Repeat the process with the second piece of paper, ensuring the bottom part is longer than the top, but this time, make the top slightly shorter than the first paper.

3. **Repeat for the third paper**: Continue this process for each subsequent sheet of paper, creating a stepped effect.
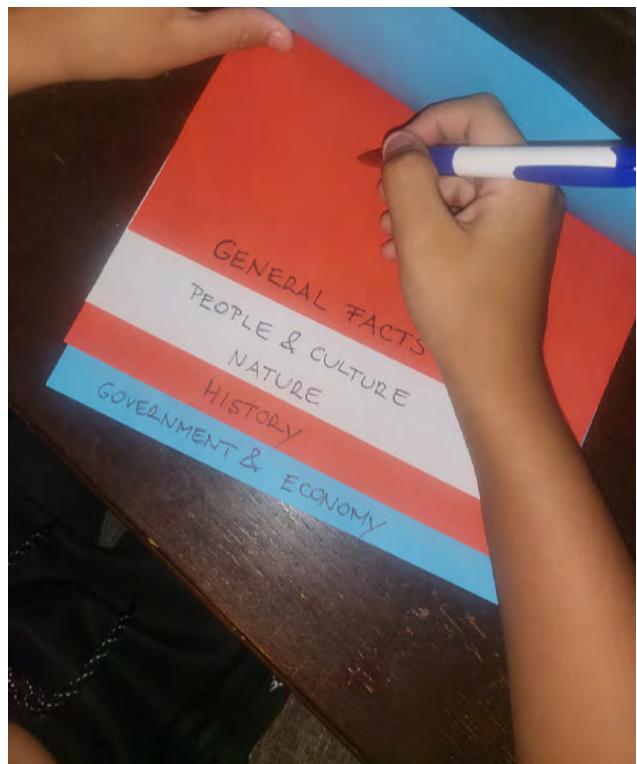
4. Fasten the papers together: Once all your papers are folded, staple them together along the folded edge.

Your booklet is now complete! This simple method allows you to create a custom booklet in minutes, which can then be filled with content relevant to your lesson or subject area.
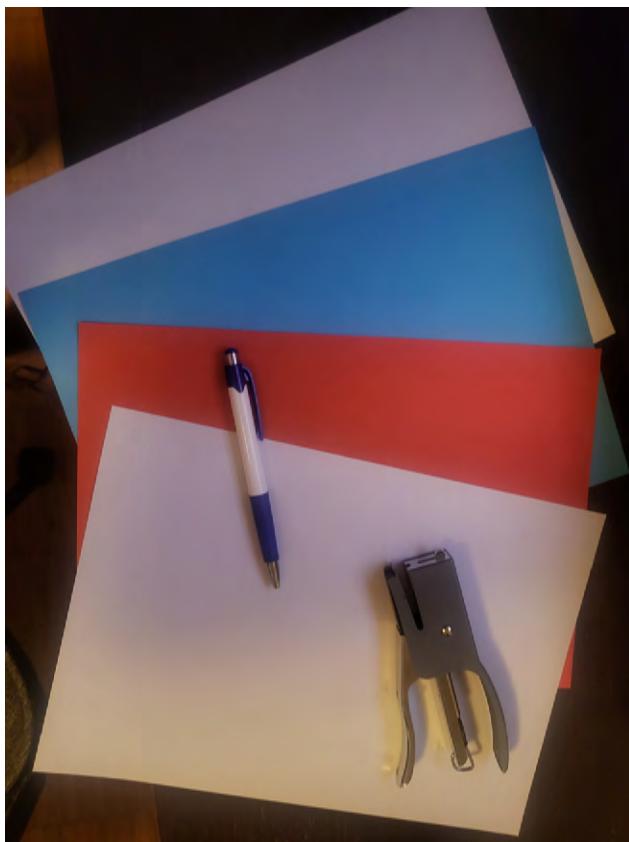
How to use a booklet in the classroom? (an example)

Here is an example of using a booklet to teach about the UK in English class. Here's how it might look.

a) Introduce the booklet sections

- Together with your students make a booklet about the UK divided into sections: *General Facts*, *People and Culture*, *Nature*, *History*, *Government*, and *Economy*.

b) Listen to an audio about the UK

- Students listen to an audio (a podcast, lecture, or pre-recorded presentation) about the UK (I used Youtube video: https://youtu.be/TFyvZb82Fqg?si=lz-PL3CHgmh_bSNu0) and gather information for their booklet into their booklet

c) Pair discussion and sharing notes

- Students collaborate with a partner to compare their notes and fill in any gaps.

d) Class discussion on the topic

- Lead a whole-class discussion where students can share their insights and reflect on what they learned about the UK.

This activity promotes listening, note-taking, collaboration, and class discussion, helping students engage with the content in multiple ways. . Students could also use the booklet as a reference tool during the lesson or for homework assignments

Conclusion

Self-made booklets are a valuable resource for teachers, offering a simple, cost-effective way to engage students, improve understanding, and enhance learning. By providing a focused, organized, and easy-to-use format, booklets can help maximize lesson time, reduce cognitive load, and serve as essential reference tools. Whether you're creating your own booklets using online tools or crafting them by hand, the benefits for both teachers and students are undeniable. Embrace the power of booklets in your teaching practice to help your students achieve better learning outcomes.

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, LANGUAGE!

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How Stop-Motion Animation and Influencer-Style Video Enhance Speaking and Writing in the Primary EFL Classroom

(PHOTO 1 students filming a stop-motion scene)

Introduction

In contemporary primary English teaching, visual storytelling has become a powerful means of connecting language with creativity. Today's learners grow up surrounded by images, short-form video, memes, reels and digital narratives; yet many classroom activities still rely on static tasks. Stop-motion animation and influencer-style video creation offer an appealing bridge between children's digital worlds and meaningful language production.

These approaches are particularly effective in lower primary (Year 4) and upper primary (Years 5–6), where young learners often need strong visual scaffolding and concrete context for both receptive and productive skills. The greatest strength of stop-motion and short video formats is that they allow teachers to **r**ecycle a single product across multiple skills and levels. One short animation — a house scene, an anti-bullying message, a daily routine — can become the basis for vocabulary learning, grammar practice, speaking tasks, writing development, peer feedback and reflection.

Research supports the pedagogical value of video-based learning. Keddie (2016) highlights that video offers rich contextual input which strengthens meaning-making and encourages learners to use language actively. Sablić, Mirosavljević and Škugor (2021) argue that video-based instruction enhances motivation, engagement and comprehension through multimodal input. Sanjaya (2020)

demonstrates that stop-motion specifically supports vocabulary acquisition in younger learners, who benefit from concrete visual cues. Ouyang (2024) shows that video-based instruction can improve learners' spoken production by offering models and meaningful contexts.

This article outlines how stop-motion animation and influencer-style video can be integrated into the primary EFL classroom, with examples drawn from Year 4 and Year 5 practice. "My House" serves as a model project for structured speaking and writing tasks, while a Pink Shirt Day anti-bullying animation illustrates how video can support values-based education in lower primary. Rubrics are provided as examples at the end and can be adapted to suit different year groups and learning goals.

Why stop-motion and short video work so well in primary EFL

1) They create a natural bridge between visual and verbal language

Young learners rely heavily on visual cues. A stop-motion scene, even a simple one, provides immediate support for vocabulary recall, sentence formation and sequencing. When children describe what they see — and what they have created — language use becomes authentic rather than forced.

2) They reduce anxiety in speaking

Speaking can be intimidating for learners at this age. Having a visual prompt lowers the affective filter and gives students something concrete to talk about. They are not "performing English"; they are presenting their work.

3) They allow for meaningful recycling of content

One animation can be reused for:

- naming vocabulary
- using prepositions
- describing actions
- applying *there is/are*
- speaking presentations
- writing short texts
- peer teaching
- reflection

This maximises learning while minimising preparation.

4) They promote collaboration and negotiation

Group projects naturally lead to turn-taking, negotiating ideas, explaining choices and solving problems — all rich communicative situations.

5) They require minimal technology

One device per group is enough. Free apps like Stop Motion Studio make the process intuitive and accessible.

Stop-motion in lower primary (Year 4) — Pink Shirt Day

One particularly successful example comes from a Year 4 class that created a stop-motion video to mark Pink Shirt Day, an international anti-bullying initiative. Pupils used simple paper figures and speech bubbles to animate short dialogues about kindness, friendship and standing up for others.

The teacher provided sentence starters such as:

- *Be kind to…*
- *I can help by…*
- *Please stop… That is not kind.*

After completing the animation, learners reused it for:

- vocabulary work (feelings, actions, school objects)
- short dialogue practice
- simple writing ("We can be kind at school by…")
- ICT skills (uploading and sharing video)
- citizenship and values education

Because the video was short and created by the children themselves, they engaged deeply with the language and message.

Stop-motion in upper primary (Year 5) — "My House" project

Although stop-motion can be used with any theme, "My House" is particularly effective because it connects naturally with vocabulary taught in Years 4–5 and supports a gradual progression from naming to describing, and from speaking to writing.

The project was developed through four phases:

Phase 1 — Vocabulary: rooms, furniture, and household items

Learners created a set using clay, paper, cardboard or toys. The focus was on naming:

- *living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom*
- *bed, sofa, cupboard, fridge, lamp*

Producing a physical model improved retention and supported learners who struggle with abstract vocabulary lists.

Phase 2 — Grammar: prepositions, plurals, and *there is/are*

Because learners positioned the objects themselves, prepositions became intuitive:

- *The sofa is next to the window.*
- *The lamp is on the table.*

They also practised:

- singular/plural forms (*a chair / two chairs*)
- *there is/there are* structures

This phase directly supported fluency because students were describing real spatial relationships, not imagined ones.

Phase 3 — Speaking: describing a house

Learners created short oral presentations based on the animation, using a clear structure:

Introduction
 I live in a small flat… There are five rooms…

Main description
This is my bedroom… There is a bed and a wardrobe…

Detail and expansion
The desk is next to the window… The lamp is on the desk…

Personal response
My favourite room is the living room because…

Speaking became more fluent because learners were not searching for ideas — their animation acted as a visual organiser.

Phase 4 — Writing (40–60 words): transferring spoken to written language

Speaking became the "draft" for writing, making the writing stage much less daunting. Learners produced a short paragraph using the same structures and vocabulary.

This phase strongly supports A.5.7 (writing short simple texts on familiar topics).

Influencer-style videos as peer teaching

Alongside stop-motion, short influencer-style videos allow learners to embody the role of a "mini teacher". One group of pupils created short clips explaining prepositions to their peers; others made 15-second videos recommending books, describing their morning routines, or giving simple grammar tips.

These videos promote:

- spoken fluency
- creativity
- peer scaffolding
- digital citizenship
- functional pronunciation practice

For example:

"Hi everyone! Today I'm showing you how to use 'next to'. Look — the lamp is next to the sofa!"

This style is motivating because it mirrors media students already consume, but repurposes it for learning.

The methodological core: recycling content

The greatest methodological strength of both stop-motion and influencer-style video is that **one product supports many language skills**.

Recycling a single piece of content:

- allows weaker learners to succeed through repetition
- challenges stronger learners to extend the task
- makes lessons coherent and connected
- reduces planning time
- builds ownership and confidence

For teachers working in busy primary settings, this approach offers high impact with manageable preparation.

Assessment: rubrics and checklists as guidance tools

Rubrics provide clarity and fairness. In this project, rubrics were used as **examples**, not fixed prescriptions — teachers can adapt them to their context. They appear after the article and do not count toward the word count.

Rubrics help learners understand:

- what is expected
- what good work looks like
- how speaking differs from writing
- how to monitor their own progress

Checklists support self-assessment and peer feedback.

Conclusion

Stop-motion animation and influencer-style videos are not merely digital extras; they are powerful methods for bringing language to life in the primary EFL classroom. They give learners a voice, a sense of agency, and a joyful reason to use English.

When lessons incorporate children's creativity — their models, their videos, their stories — engagement increases, outcomes strengthen, and communication becomes meaningful. The true pedagogical value lies in recycling these products across tasks: one animation can teach vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing, digital skills and citizenship.

Whether creating a clay living room, animating an anti-bullying scene, or filming a short grammar tip for peers, children discover that English is a tool for expression, connection and creativity.

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Using Drama in ELT – Engaging students through performance, creativity and communication

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˝All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;˝

W. Shakespeare, As You Like It

We have all heard this quote many times before, but how often have we asked ourselves how it applies to the teaching profession? Every time we step into the classroom, we take on our roles as teachers and perform our part. Our audience isn't very attentive most of the time, which makes the job even more demanding. In language teaching, we use many techniques that come from the world of theatre. However, these techniques may be underutilised. I was motivated to write this article after attending a teacher training course in Barnstaple, Devon, which I won at last year's HUPE conference raffle. It was the 'Teaching is Entertaining' course, organised by SOL (Sharing One Language) and run by David Fisher (Bear Educational Theatre in Prague).

David Fisher is both an English teacher and a professional theatre and film actor. He specialises in applying ideas from the entertainment industry to language teaching. He believes that there is an overlap between education and theatre/entertainment. As teachers, we can learn a lot from actors and theatre to enhance our lessons and motivate our students. The course consisted of practical workshops and excursions to some of Devon's most picturesque locations, such as Woolacombe, Ilfracombe, Clovelly, Plymouth, Lynton and Bude. Staying with host families contributed to complete cultural immersion, making it an unforgettable eight-day experience.

BENEFITS OF USING DRAMA

Benefits of using different drama techniques in language teaching are numerous. Drama encourages students to use English actively rather than passively. It helps them gain confidence by speaking in front of others in a supportive environment. Learners communicate authentically because drama requires them to respond in real time. It also improves listening skills and empathy, as students must understand others' perspectives to stay in role. Most importantly, drama creates intrinsic motivation—students forget they're "studying" and start using language.

Drama provides integrated skills practice, which is often lacking in traditional lessons. We can connect all skills to drama techniques. As far as speaking is concerned, students gain fluency and confidence through natural interaction. Students must understand their partners' lines and react appropriately (listening skill). Performing scripts improves students' sense of phrasing and rhythm. Scriptwriting reinforces grammar and the creative use of language. Words are learnt in context and emotionally connected, improving vocabulary retention.

DRAMA TECHNIQUES OVERVIEW

This is a list of some of the most frequently used techniques in language teaching:

- Role-play
- Mime and movement
- Simulations
- Improvisation
- Hot seating
- Readers' theatre
- Short plays or sketches

Role-play is one of the most common techniques. Students act out real-life situations, such as ordering food, asking for directions, or a job interview. This provides contextualized language use—students must choose appropriate vocabulary and grammar to achieve a goal. We should start with structured role-plays using prompts or scripts for beginners, then move towards freer ones where students invent the dialogue.

Mime and movement activities lower language anxiety and develop kinesthetic learning. Students express meaning physically, which helps them internalize verbs, adverbs, and emotions. It is especially effective with beginners or mixed-ability classes. We can combine mime with language reconstruction: after performing, peers describe the actions in English, reinforcing verb forms and descriptive language. There are many activities that can be used in English Language Teaching (ELT), ranging from charades with action verbs or idioms and expressing emotions through movement, to playing Simon Says. Contrary to popular belief, these activities are not only effective with younger students; they can also be used with older students as a great warm-up or vocabulary revision tool. **Improvisation** helps students think on their feet, it promotes risk-taking in English, which is crucial for progress. Students create language spontaneously, which improves their fluency and creativity. You could give a prompt like, "You've lost your passport

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at the airport," or "You're on a reality show and must convince the audience to vote for you." It's important to lower anxiety by giving cue cards or sentence starters. In **hot seating**, one student becomes a character — either fictional or historical. The rest of the class then interviews them. This activity is great for discussing stories or films, so students can "talk" to characters such as Harry Potter or Romeo. This technique improves comprehension, helps students to form questions, and encourages empathy. You can rotate roles so that several students have a turn in the hot seat.

Readers' Theatre is perfect for developing reading fluency and pronunciation. Students perform a script by reading it aloud, focusing on expression, intonation, and rhythm—not memorization. As there is no need to remember lines, it is less intimidating. You can use graded readers, poems or even dialogues from textbooks. Recording performances enables students to hear their progress over time.

Short plays incorporate speaking, listening, reading and writing. They provide students with a meaningful project that culminates in a performance. For lower levels, we can adapt dialogues or stories from textbooks; for higher levels, we can encourage the creation of original scripts. To include all students, we should assign rotating roles. Our focus should be on communication and teamwork rather than acting quality. Filming performances provides useful material for self-assessment.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR USING DRAMA

Drama can be used with students of all proficiency levels; you just have to adapt the complexity. For beginners, it is best to focus on gestures, short dialogues, mime, or pre-taught scripts. At an intermediate level you can try guided improvisations or role-plays with more freedom. With advanced students we should encourage scriptwriting, full scenes, debates, or process drama. The key to using all these techniques is scaffolding, we should proceed from structured to open-ended tasks as confidence grows.

There are some challenges, such as shyness, time and space limitations and mixed-ability classes. However, these could be overcome with careful planning. It is a good idea to start small, for example with pair work or small groups to reduce fear. Drama can be short, for example you could use five-minute role-plays or warm-ups keeping students at their desks while focusing on voice and expression. Assign differentiated roles so stronger students take lead roles, others manage props, write, or narrate. Drama is flexible and any class can make it work. The use of technology can extend drama learning and you could record performances so students can self-assess their pronunciation and fluency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, drama brings language to life, making it personal and meaningful. It helps students experience language rather than just memorizing it. It also improves confidence, empathy and collaboration, skills that go beyond just grammar and vocabulary.

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." Benjamin Franklin

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"Laughter as a Learning Tool: How to Incorporate Humor into Your Classroom for Better Learning"

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Abstract

This article explores the advantages of humor in learning, various types of humor that can be incorporated into lessons, and strategies for using humor effectively in classroom management and language learning.

Keywords: humor, engagement, classroom management, memory retention, learning strategies

Introduction

Humor in educational settings acts as a powerful learning tool which achieves more than simply producing student laughter. Laughter builds a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere while also building better relationships between teachers and students and improving memory retention. Educational professionals have extensively examined humor usage and studies confirm its positive cognitive, social and psychological benefits (WeAreTeachers, 2022).

Benefits of Humor in Learning

Research shows that humor enhances student engagement while simultaneously decreasing anxiety and building collaboration in educational settings according to Free Spirit Publishing (2022). Some of the key benefits include:

Increased Attention – Students are more likely to focus on the lesson and not get distracted when humor is involved.

Better Retention – Information presented in a humorous way is more likely to be remembered.

Reduced Stress – Laughter helps lower stress levels, creating a comfortable learning space.

Enhanced Creativity – Playful activities encourage students to think outside the box.

Types of Classroom Humor

Teachers can incorporate numerous types of humor into their lessons which can include telling verbal jokes and initiating interactive activities. Some effective methods include:

Anecdotes and Personal Stories

Incorporating amusing experiences that students find relatable enhances both engagement and memory retention during lessons.

Cartoons and Memes

Classroom-related memes serve as visual humor which simplifies the understanding of complex concepts or serves as a toll to get students talking about their experience and feelings involving language. For example:

Image 1: LanguageMugs.com(2023).

Playful Activities and Games

"Would You Rather?" - This playful activity stimulates discussions in a fun approach. You can display a slide with two different 'Would You Rather' options for students. For answers, you can select specified students daily, facilitate a classroom discussion, or even partner share. Some humorous examples are: Would you rather have to sing everything you say or dance every time you walk? Would you rather have to wear a sign that says "Kick Me" for a day or "Hug Me" for a week?

Unusual Facts – Encouraging students to share unusual but interesting facts they know about.

Funny Poems – Enhancing creativity through humorous poetry by giving funny examples and encouraging students to write their own poems. Example:
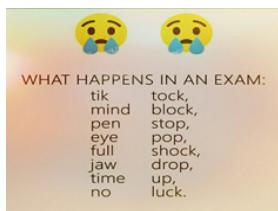

Image 2: Pinterest.com (2024.)

Guidelines for Using Humor Effectively

Humor provides numerous advantages, yet it requires careful application. Here are some best practices:

Keep it appropriate and inclusive – Avoid jokes that could be offensive.

Align humor with learning objectives – Use humor as a tool, not a distraction.

Avoid sarcasm or put-downs – Ensure that jokes do not belittle students.

Consider timing – The right moment can make humor more effective.

Humor in Classroom Management

Using humor is an effective strategy for controlling student behavior in the classroom. Some effective techniques include:

Funny Classroom Rules

"No sleeping in class... unless you're dreaming about today's lesson!"

"Raise your hand if you know the answer—raise both if you're completely lost!"

Attention-Getters

These are actions completed by the teacher that are met with a reaction by the students. They are used to gain attention of the class. An example for younger students: Teacher: "Bubblegum lollipop!"

Students:"We've been talking, now let's stop!"

Language and Humor

Teaching grammar and pronunciation becomes easier using humor. Activities can include:

Spot the Mistake - Students identify humorous errors in sentences. For example: "Please pay your parking fee before existing." "I like cooking my family and my pets."

Funny Sentence Endings - Students spot the errors and make sentences with funny endings (in a given tense), for example: "They are playing football with a pillow." "He broke his phone with a pancake."

Replacing every vowel in a word with "o". Students can practice vocabulary as well as spelling this way.

The Role of Visual Humor

Using funny images can enhance student engagement. Teachers can ask students to create captions for humorous pictures or rename everyday objects in a playful way.

For example, ask students what the animals in the pictures or everyday objects would say if they could talk, for example:
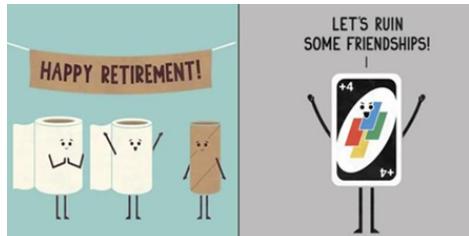
Image 3: https://thelanguagenerds.com/ (2024.)

You can also give students everyday objects or animals to rename them. Some examples are: Prison pony for a zebra, Mountain fountain for a volcano, Human shelf for a couch etc.

Conclusion

A laughing classroom is a learning classroom.

Using funny images can enhance student engagement. Educators can assign students to write captions for funny images or to invent playful names for common objects. When teachers integrate humor into lessons, they create enjoyable experiences while simultaneously building deeper comprehension and better relationships between students and teachers. A classroom that fills with laughter becomes a classroom where learning happens!

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From Words to the World: Empowering Language Learning through PBL, CLIL, and Digital Innovation

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In an ever-changing educational landscape, language learning stands at the crossroads of communication, culture, and creativity. The Erasmus+ project From Words to the World, coordinated by OŠ braće Radića Kloštar Ivanić, builds upon the school's growing European engagement and aims to deepen the connection between language learning, digital innovation, and intercultural awareness.

This is the school's second Erasmus+ KA122 project, following the success of the first short-term mobility initiative, which focused on professional development and inclusion. With From Words to the World, the team takes a bold step forward, expanding the scope to include student mobilities, integration of AI and digital tools, and cross-curricular learning experiences inspired by the CLIL and PBL methodologies.

Project Vision and Objectives

The project's overarching goal is to enhance the quality of foreign language teaching and learning by combining Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). These approaches enable students to use language as a medium for authentic inquiry, communication, and collaboration, while teachers act as facilitators who design learning experiences that mirror real-world contexts.

Specifically, From Words to the World seeks to:
- Strengthen teachers' competences in innovative and experiential language teaching through PBL and CLIL.

- Integrate digital tools and artificial intelligence responsibly into the language classroom to support differentiation, creativity, and autonomy.

- Foster intercultural understanding and European identity through collaboration with partner schools.

- Connect formal and informal learning environments, including museums, historical sites, and cultural institutions.

- Create a collection of ready-to-use teaching materials to share with the wider community of language educators.

These objectives stem from a clear pedagogical vision: to move language learning beyond textbooks and exams, turning it into a living experience that connects words with the world around us.

Teacher Mobilities: Learning to Teach Differently

Teacher mobility lies at the heart of the project. Educators from OŠ braće Radića Kloštar Ivanić will participate in structured training courses across Europe, focusing on practical applications of PBL and CLIL in multilingual classrooms. The selected courses explore how to merge language and content learning through project work, collaboration, and creative use of technology.

Participants will also gain hands-on experience with AI-based and digital learning tools, exploring how these technologies can enhance engagement, provide personalized feedback, and support inclusive education. Training modules on digital literacy, gamification, and online collaboration will further empower teachers to design flexible and motivating learning environments.

Another essential component of teacher mobilities is learning in authentic contexts — discovering how museums, galleries, and historical sites can become meaningful extensions of the classroom. By combining culture, language, and content, teachers will learn to create immersive lessons that spark curiosity and connect linguistic skills with real-world discovery.

Upon their return, teachers will share their experiences through internal workshops, professional learning communities, and presentations at national and regional conferences. The ultimate product of this process will be a digital collection of teaching resources — lesson plans, project ideas, and classroom materials — freely available

to other educators. This open-access collection will ensure the sustainability of the project and amplify its impact beyond the local context.

Student Mobilities: Learning through Authentic Interaction

One of the most exciting innovations in From Words to the World is the inclusion of student mobilities, offering learners the opportunity to experience language learning in authentic settings.

During their stays in partner schools, students will attend regular classes alongside their peers, observing different learning environments and actively participating in lessons. This first-hand experience will allow them to see how students in other European countries learn, communicate, and collaborate, while using English and other target languages as tools for real interaction.

In mixed international teams, students will engage in PBL and CLIL activities, exploring topics linked to culture, heritage, and sustainable development. Supported by digital tools and AI-assisted applications, they will co-create digital stories, videos, and presentations that showcase their findings.

Learning will also take place beyond the classroom. Visits to museums, cultural landmarks, and historical sites will give students the chance to explore local culture and history while applying language skills in meaningful contexts.

The result will be not only improved language proficiency but also enhanced intercultural awareness, teamwork, and self-confidence — skills that are central to lifelong learning and global citizenship.

Integration with eTwinning Projects

The Erasmus+ mobilities are closely intertwined with two ongoing eTwinning projects coordinated by OŠ braće Radića Kloštar Ivanić:

- "Discoveries: European Culture Boxes", which encourages students to exchange cultural "boxes" containing artefacts, stories, and digital materials that represent their local heritage. This project helps learners see the richness of Europe's cultural diversity while practicing descriptive and narrative language skills.
- "Exploring Roman Europe", which connects schools interested in ancient history and cultural heritage through virtual explorations of Roman sites across the continent. Students research, document, and present how Roman influence shaped their local environment, using English

as a common language for communication and presentation.

These eTwinning projects serve as both preparatory and complementary activities to Erasmus+ mobilities. They allow students and teachers to build relationships, develop digital collaboration skills, and engage in intercultural dialogue even before meeting in person. This continuity between virtual and physical mobility exemplifies the Erasmus+ principle of blended learning and multiplies the project's impact.

Alignment with EU Priorities

The project From Words to the World aligns closely with the strategic priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Education Area:

1. Digital Transformation and Innovation
By integrating digital tools and artificial intelligence into language teaching, the project directly supports the EU's Digital Education Action Plan. Teachers will learn how to apply AI responsibly and creatively, while students develop digital literacy, problem-solving, and communication skills essential for the 21st century.

2. Inclusion and Diversity
PBL and CLIL naturally foster inclusive classrooms where students of different abilities and backgrounds can contribute meaningfully. Collaboration, peer learning, and flexible project work encourage participation and engagement from all learners.

3. Sustainability and Green Competences
Learning in museums, local communities, and historical sites helps students connect language with environmental and cultural sustainability. The project also encourages digital collaboration to reduce environmental impact while promoting awareness of Europe's cultural and natural heritage.

4. Participation in Democratic Life and European Citizenship
Through both physical and virtual exchanges, students and teachers experience the values of cooperation, respect, and solidarity that form the foundation of European identity. The project nurtures active, informed, and empathetic citizens who appreciate diversity as a strength.

Dissemination and Sustainability

Dissemination is central to the philosophy of From Words to the World. The team at OŠ braće Radića Kloštar Ivanić is committed to sharing results widely and ensuring that the project's benefits extend beyond the immediate participants.

Planned dissemination activities include:

- A dedicated project website and social media campaign featuring updates, photos, and digital teaching materials.

- Presentations at national and regional professional development events, including HUPE conferences, where teachers will share insights and outcomes.

- Workshops for local teachers focusing on digital tools, AI applications, and PBL/CLIL integration.

- Articles and reports for educational publications to spread good practice among language professionals.

- eTwinning dissemination, enabling collaboration with European peers and ensuring the project's visibility in the broader Erasmus+ community.

Sustainability will be achieved through the integration of new skills and resources into the school's European Development Plan, ensuring that international cooperation remains a continuous process rather than a one-time event. The open-access digital collection of materials will remain available to the wider educational community even after the project's completion.

Impact and Legacy

The expected impact of From Words to the World is multi-faceted. For teachers, it brings enhanced competences in innovative pedagogies, digital literacy, and intercultural education. For students, it offers transformative experiences of learning and living in multilingual environments.

The school itself will benefit from strengthened international partnerships and an enriched professional culture rooted in collaboration, reflection, and openness to new ideas. By combining Erasmus+ and eTwinning activities, OŠ braće Radića Kloštar Ivanić positions itself as a model of how small schools can have a large European impact through creativity, commitment, and strategic planning.

Conclusion

As From Words to the World unfolds, its title becomes a guiding metaphor: language learning as a bridge between classrooms and cultures, between knowledge and experience. Through innovative teaching, digital exploration, and intercultural dialogue, the project empowers both teachers and students to turn words into action — and the classroom into a window on the world.

Classroom Strategies for AI-Resilient Language Tasks

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Our students already encounter artificial intelligence (AI) on a daily basis. Many students use ChatGPT to write essays, check grammar, do their homework, summarise reading tasks, create presentations, and so much more. As English teachers, we can either try to fight against these tools or learn how to use them in a smart and meaningful way. Reports from UNESCO (2023), the World Economic Forum (2024), and the European Commission (2022) all point to the same conclusion: using AI tools is a matter of media literacy, and instead of banning AI, teachers should help students develop the right skills, knowledge, and values to use it responsibly.

Common misunderstandings about AI

When discussing the use of AI, teachers have mixed feelings: some are curious and excited, others are afraid or even frustrated. There are perhaps the most common misunderstandings (or even myths) that often appear in our teacher lounges:

- "Using AI equals cheating."

Of course, using AI to write a full essay and presenting it as your own is clearly cheating. However, using AI to check grammar, ask for ideas, practice speaking and writing can actually help learning. The key difference is in **context and intention,** so we need to think about the purpose of a specific task and if the tool helps the student learn or completely replaces their thinking.

- "We can always detect AI text."

Unfortunately, we can't. There are advanced AI detection tools, but even they can make mistakes and give mixed results.

- "AI destroys creativity."

Yes, AI can destroy creativity, but it doesn't have to. If students use it wisely, AI can become a source of inspiration. For example, students can ask AI for ideas and then expand them in their own words, adding personal experience. That way, AI becomes a helper, not a replacement.

It isn't unrealistic to think that shifting the focus from fear to guidance can turn AI from a threat to a learning partner, the real challenge being teaching students how to use AI tools and still think critically and create with their own voice. Our students need to learn how to recognise that fine line between technology being a support to learning and replacing it.

AI as assistant, not author

We can make a useful and practical distinction between AI as an assistant in the learning process and an author through the following three types of use:

1) AI is an assistant when the AI tool supports learning process by suggesting ideas, checking grammar, or providing feedback

2) AI is a partner when the AI tool contributes to content creation, with the student maintaining responsibility for reviewing, editing, and explaining the outcome (depends on transparency)

3) AI is an author when the AI tool generates an entire piece of work, replacing the learner's original thinking and effort, violating integrity.

Teachers and students could both gain from knowledge and understanding these three levels, and easier identify the boundary between responsible use and cheating. It can also inspire reflection on how technology can improve real-world learning.

Source: https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/01/ai-guidance-school-responsible-use-in-education/
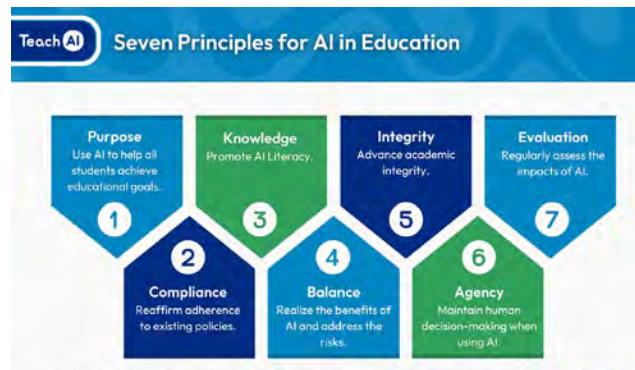
Designing AI-resilient tasks

A big problem is that many teachers still haven't adapted their tasks, so we continue to give writing assignments that are too easy for AI. Prompts like "Write about the advantages and disadvantages of social media," "Describe your favourite holiday" or "Create a presentation about London" can be answered in seconds by ChatGPT or similar tools. If we want to protect authenticity and make our students do the task by themselves, we need to rethink our assignments and adapt our evaluation.

Here are five simple strategies that work well for language teachers:

1) Make it local and personal.

Create tasks connected to your students' lives or environment, like:

"Describe a place in your town that tourists don't know about and explain why you like it."

"Prepare a brochure about our school garden for Erasmus visitors."

2) Include the process, not just the product.

Ask for an outline, draft, and reflection. For example:

"How did you plan your essay? Did you use any tools to help you?"

"Submit the brainstorming results, the first draft and the self-reflection paragraph."

"Include a 1-2 sentence note on how you used AI."

3) Add oral or video components.

Let students record a oral reflection, short podcast, or video summary. For example:

"Record a short podcast explaining your opinion on ____."

"Make a short voice message to a friend abroad describing your favourite Croatian dessert."

4) Use peer work and interviews.

Tasks like *"Interview your grandmother about school life when she was your age"* bring authentic, unique content. Also, consider peer evaluation tasks, like "Exchange feedback on drafts/presentations and submit your peer's comment form."

5 Mix skills and media.

Combine writing and visuals. For example:

"Create a short poster or infographic about healthy local food."

"Design a poster about sustainable tourism in your region."

"Create an infographic showing five ways to save water in our school."

Building fair classroom policies

In addition to denying using AI, students often say they are unsure of what uses of AI are appropriate. To clarify these boundaries and prevent AI misuse, teachers can introduce a simple classroom chart that clasifies examples of student behaviour as 1) responsible use, 2) misuse, or 3) grey areas. Talking about these helps students reconsider their choices and realise that using AI is not always wrong, but that it depends on context, purpose, and transparency.

Teachers can involve students in the process by asking them to create their own class template or "AI Use Charter," as an alternative to simply banning such tools.

This collaborative strategy should promote responsibility and transparency.

A good way to start is defining clear AI charter elements that everyone understands and agrees on:

- what's allowed/permitted: grammar and spelling checks, vocabulary explanations, brainstorming, and creating examples that students evaluate or rewrite, etc.

- what's prohibited: submitting final versions written by AI, using AI to produce fake sources or data, etc.

- how to reference AI use: students can write a simple note like "I used ChatGPT to check grammar."

A very practical and visual method is the **Traffic Light System**, which can be adapted for every school, education level, task outcome… – for every context. It could also be a nice addition to your other classroom posters. This can be done in groups, after which students democratically vote for the common rules. Those can later be revised and adjusted, with students being part of that process as well. This is just an example of such charter:

AI use in our classroom

Not allowed
- Using AI to write your essays or translate full texts
- Using fake references or invented data
- Sharing personal data with AI tools

Use with care and teacher permission
- Using AI to check grammar or spelling
- Asking AI for ideas or explanations
- Using AI for brainstorming

Encouraged with transparency
- Using AI for reflection and feedback
- Comparing AI answers with real sources
- Communicating with AI to enhance speaking skills

Using English lessons to teach AI literacy

Teaching *with* AI helps students understand the concept and how AI works. The English classroom appears to be the perfect setting for this since language learning already develops many of the same skills: communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Teachers can design assignments that combine raising awareness and learning a language:

- reading: use short texts about AI, students read and discuss: *"What are the benefits and risks of AI?" or "How sustainable is AI technology?"*

- speaking: host a debate: *"Will AI replace teachers?",* promote vocabulary for expressing thoughts, agreement, and disagreement

- writing: students write a short paragraph on a topic of their choice, ask AI to write on the same subject, and in pairs compare the two versions

- critical thinking: students "fact-check" an AI answer.

From detectives to mentors

Many teachers feel stressed about AI because they think they must constantly "catch" students cheating. But our role should change from AI police to mentors or coaches.

According to the *DigCompEdu* framework (2022), teachers should model ethical use of technology, guide responsible practice, and help students understand digital tools.
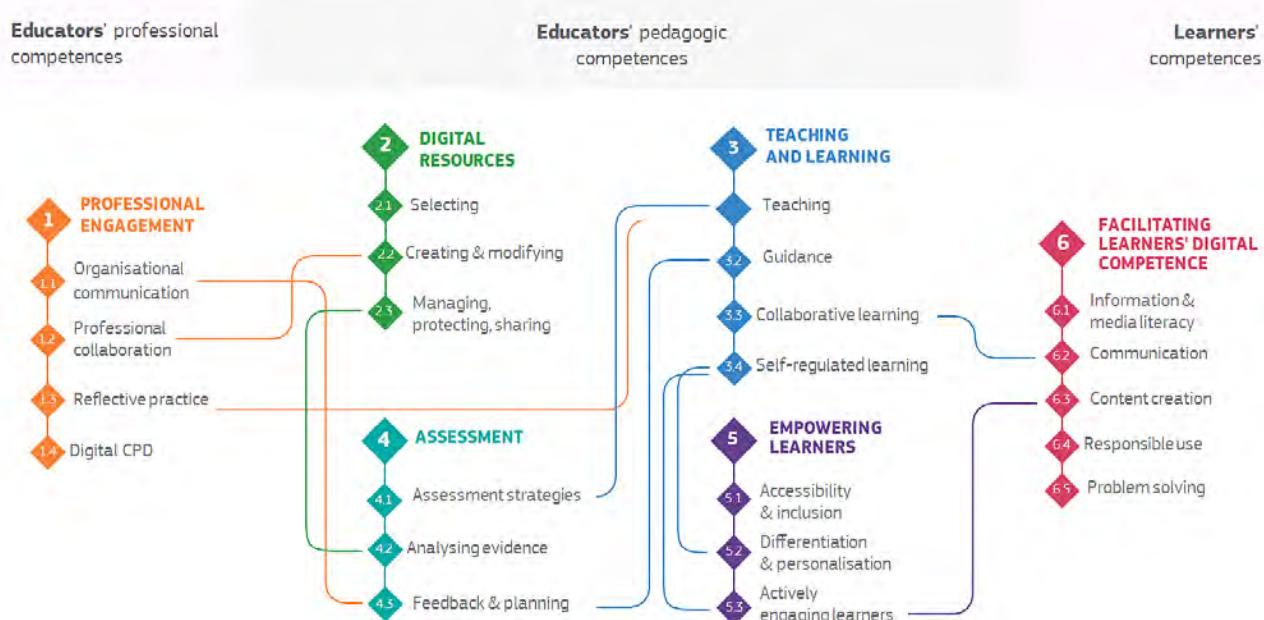
Source: https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcompedu/digcompedu-framework_en

This means we also need support. Schools should provide training on basic AI, what it can and cannot do, and how to use it safely. One of external training possibilities is Erasmus+ teacher training where teachers can exchange experience and examples of good practice. A great local and national project is the Croatian BrAIn project (CARNet) which shows that technology, including AI, can improve learning when teachers are properly trained and supported.

Conclusion

AI is here to stay, and it doesn't have to be a threat to us. If we use it carefully, it can make teaching and learning more creative, engaging, and personalised.

The key message is simple: **AI should assist learning, not replace it.**

When students learn to use AI critically and responsibly, they become more independent and motivated. And when teachers feel confident about using AI, they stop fearing it and start exploring new possibilities: vocabulary development, guided writing, and feedback practice.

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MINDFULNESS ERASMUS+ COURSE

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Primary school Vladimira Nazora received Erasmus+ accreditation in 2023, which allows both students and teachers to participate in new experiences such as student group mobilities, professional development for teaching staff, exchange of ideas with European partners, and classroom observations in other European schools. The Erasmus+ accreditation is valid until 2027 and provides participants with easier access to funding and a permanent source of financing based on the institution's multi-annual plan.

The objectives of our Erasmus+ accreditation are:

- Development of digital skills for students and teachers to increase autonomy in learning and teaching.

- Improvement of mental health support for teachers and students, aiming to identify and address the stress and challenges faced by both.

- Strengthening socio-emotional skills in students, particularly communication and self-regulation of behavior, through active learning and active citizenship.

As part of the objective focused on mental health, the topic of our professional development was Mindfulness, and the structured course was held from October 21 to 25, 2024, in Tenerife, organized by iDevelop.

ABOUT MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a state of active and open focus on the present moment, teaching us how to be fully present and aware of where we are and what we are doing. Our complete attention is directed toward what is happening in our body, our thoughts, and our surroundings, without analysing or changing what is happening. As a form of cognitive psychotherapy, it is scientifically grounded in meditation, but it can be applied in everyday life and daily activities as a method for maintaining psychological well-being.

We are aware that in the world we live in, we are overwhelmed with responsibilities and daily stressors, which

is why it is crucially important to try to reduce anxiety, stress, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Practicing mindfulness can help us cope with negative emotions and distance ourselves from overthinking about the past or the future.

Mindfulness offers numerous benefits for both our mental and physical health. It helps reduce stress and anxiety, stabilizes our emotions, and increases emotional awareness. By practicing mindfulness, we become more conscious of our emotions, which allows us to manage them more effectively, rather than suppressing or reacting impulsively. If we practice it during everyday activities such as walking, drinking a cup of coffee, or even ironing, mindfulness helps us become aware of our emotions in the present moment. These simple activities can improve the quality of our lives, helping us live more calmly and better cope with life's challenges.

During the course, we were introduced to the theoretical foundations of mindfulness, as well as numerous practical examples and activities that help focus attention on the present moment, thereby increasing concentration and maintaining focus on what we are currently doing. Concentration and focus are precisely what our students need.

ABOUT THE COURSE

The Mindfulness course was designed as a combination of theoretical and practical activities through which we practiced how to deal with specific worries, fears, and negative emotions. The first day of the course was dedicated to meeting the other participants from Germany, Latvia, and Sicily through method of active listening. After that, we tried the technique of mindful walking, during which we focused our attention on the sounds from our surroundings.

Mindfulness is a state of active and open attention to the present moment, teaching us how to be fully present and aware of where we are and what we are doing. Our full attention is directed toward what is happening in our body, our thoughts, and our surroundings, without analysing or changing what is happening. As a type of cognitive psychotherapy, it is scientifically based on meditation, but it can also be applied in everyday life and activities as a method for maintaining psychological well-being.

We are aware that in the world we live in, we are overwhelmed with responsibilities and daily stressors. Therefore, it is extremely important to try to reduce anxiety, stress, and feelings of overload. Practicing mindfulness can help us cope with negative emotions and distance ourselves from overthinking about the past or the future.

Mindfulness has numerous benefits for both our mental and physical health. It helps reduce stress and anxiety, stabilizes our emotions, and increases emotional awareness. By practicing mindfulness, we become more aware of our emotions, and we can manage them more effectively, rather than suppressing or reacting impulsively. If we practice it during everyday activities like walking, drinking a cup of coffee, or even ironing, mindfulness helps us become aware of our emotions in the present moment. These simple activities can improve the quality of our lives, help us live more calmly, and make it easier to cope with life's challenges.

During the course, we were introduced to the theoretical foundations of mindfulness, as well as numerous practi-

cal examples and activities that help direct attention to the present moment, thereby increasing concentration and maintaining focus on what we are currently doing. Concentration and focus are key elements that help students, especially through the method of active listening. After that, we practiced the technique of mindful walking, during which we directed our attention to the sounds of our surroundings and what was happening around us.

Each morning began with yoga and meditation exercises designed to relax both body and mind, while focusing concentration for the upcoming activities. We became aware of the reasons we create stress for ourselves and how this behaviour is often caused by our subconsciousness. By creating a daily activity calendar, we realized how much of our time is spent on obligations and how little

we dedicate to ourselves and our own needs. This kind of behaviour is the primary cause of "burnout," chronic physical and emotional exhaustion that can lead to depression or physical illness. To reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, we practiced the EFT tapping method, which helps decrease emotional intensity and increase positive emotions.

We also explored various breathing techniques that have proven effective in alleviating anxiety, such as nostril breathing, the 4-7-8 technique, and deep, abdominal breathing. Through Frog Exercises, we practiced how to help children reduce stress in a fun way through focused breathing. During the course, we also used visualization techniques as a relaxation method. With this technique, we learned how to form mental, inner images that we had not seen or experienced before, to alleviate tension or practice focus and concentration. In addition to this technique, we used meditation as a mental exercise to direct attention to our senses and increase awareness.

One of the methods we studied in more detail was journaling, an intuitive writing technique aimed at releasing negative emotions and thoughts onto paper (steam-out).

One of the most interesting workshops was the one focused on positive thinking, where we wrote positive messages and letters to ourselves. The course ended with sound therapy, which was conducted using Tibetan singing bowls, originating from Tibet and other parts of the Himalayas. These bowls produce sounds that have a calming effect on the body and mind. The purpose of this therapy is to relax, reduce stress, and improve concentration. This activity was an ideal and relaxing conclusion to the Mindfulness course.

CULTURAL TOURISM OF TENERIFE

During the professional development course, the mornings were dedicated to education, while the sunny afternoons were spent enjoying the cultural and tourist attractions of Tenerife. We visited Teide National Park, home to the volcano and the highest peak in Spain, standing at 3,718 meters, which is also the third-largest

volcano in the world. We successfully reached an altitude of 3,555 meters and enjoyed the unique landscape and breathtaking views. One afternoon was spent at the Loro Parque zoo, which covers an area of 135,000 m² and is home to the largest number of parrot species in the world, around 4,000. We enjoyed a dolphin show and saw a variety of exotic animals. The goal of Loro Parque is to protect both marine and terrestrial animals, with the funds raised from ticket sales being invested in scientific research. One day was dedicated to visiting the volcanic cliffs of Los Gigantes, after which the town located there is named. During the boat tour, we had the opportunity to see whales and dolphins in their natural habitat and bravely swam near the cliffs of Los Gigantes, which rise to 800 meters.

CONCLUSION

This professional development represents a unique educational and cultural experience. The theoretical and practical knowledge gained helps us in our professional development, in designing lessons, communicating with students, and conducting workshops for teachers. However, there is also a meaningful change on a personal level, as by practicing the mindfulness method, we bring a calmer pace into our lives, making us calmer and more content individuals.

Discovering Sofia: A Conference Experience to Remember

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My first international conference abroad took me to the beautiful city of Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. BETA Bulgaria—HUPE's partner association—held its 32nd Annual International Conference on 27 and 28 September at the University of National and World Economy. Under the title "ELT Horizons: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities," the event brought together 38 speakers from across Europe, as well as renowned plenary speakers Aleksandra Popovski, Keneward Hill, Sylvia Velikova, Rob Howard, and Aleksandra Jevtović.

Although the conference hosted only about fifty participants, what initially seemed unusual soon proved to be an advantage. The intimate atmosphere created a friendly, relaxed environment where we connected easily, exchanged ideas, and shared plenty of laughter. Over the two days, I met dedicated professionals and gained valuable insights into contemporary ESL methodologies, the role of AI inside and beyond the classroom, teaching English for specific purposes, and many other emerging topics in language education.

On Saturday, I delivered my workshop "Emotions and Art – Recognise and Visualise," which explored emotional intelligence and ways to integrate art and emotions into

English lessons. Despite a small audience, the response was warm and enthusiastic. The methodology sparked engaging discussion, and I was delighted to be encouraged to apply for the 2027 IATEFL International Conference in Birmingham—an invitation I fully intend to accept.

Beyond the official programme, the organisers prepared a lovely social evening featuring traditional Bulgarian folk music and dancing, offering a glimpse into the country's rich cultural heritage. On Sunday, a group sightseeing tour was planned, but I had to miss it due to my flight

back to Zagreb. Still, I managed to explore Sofia on my own and was struck by how vibrant, modern, and undeniably European the city feels.

Located at the foot of Mount Vitosha, Sofia offers everything a curious traveller could hope for. Its landmarks reflect more than two millennia of history—Greek, Roman, Ottoman, and Soviet influences—all proudly displayed as part of the city's identity. Sofia is traditional yet modern, unmistakably Balkan yet fully European. Its churches, cathedrals, museums, boulevards, and even metro stations deserve far more than a quick visit.

One of the highlights was the Ancient Serdica Archaeological Complex, an extraordinary site that transports visitors back to the Roman Empire. Before my trip, I hadn't had much time to learn about Bulgaria's culture, but thanks to my hosts and the people I met, I left with a deepened appreciation for the country. Among the many fascinating things I discovered was Bulgarian rose oil—known as rose otto—a world-famous essential oil extracted from the petals of Rosa damascena grown in the Kazanlak Rose Valley. It is widely used in perfumes, skincare, and aromatherapy, and represents one of Bulgaria's most treasured natural products.

This was my first visit to Bulgaria, but it certainly will not be my last. Sofia's blend of history, culture, and genuine hospitality left a lasting impression—one I look forward to experiencing again.