



ELT IN A MULTIMODAL WORLD

38TH ANNUAL APPI CONFERENCE

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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ELT in a Multimodal World:

Voices and Practices in contemporary English Language Teaching

It is with renewed enthusiasm and a deep sense of commitment to the ELT community that we present the 38th Annual APPI Conference Book of Proceedings. Now in its third consecutive edition, this volume continues a tradition that has quickly come to feel essential to our community: a place where the conversations sparked at our annual gathering find a more enduring form, and where the work of our colleagues in Portugal and beyond can travel further than the walls of any auditorium.

This year's theme was chosen as a deliberately expansive phrase, inviting contributors to reflect on the many channels, registers, and resources through which English is now taught, learned, and lived. Meaning today is rarely made through words alone. Our students communicate across image and text, gesture and sound, screen and street, and the classrooms in which we work are themselves becoming richer semiotic spaces, populated by digital tools, hybrid formats, picture books, video calls, and voices from around the globe. From 25 to 27 April 2025, in the welcoming setting of ISCTE-IUL in Lisbon, leaders, researchers, and practitioners convened to ask what it means to teach English well in such a world and how we, as educators, can meet our learners with the same multimodal richness they bring to the rest of their lives.

This Book of Proceedings is an extension of those conversations, compiling some of the contributions of esteemed speakers and researchers whose work continues to enrich ELT practice. Each chapter highlights the depth and breadth of expertise within the APPI community and reaffirms the importance of adaptability, creativity, and human connection at the heart of language teaching.

Gabriel Díaz Maggioli opens the volume with *Fulfilling Students' Needs: A Multimodal, Framework-Based Approach to Language Teaching*, arguing for a decisive shift away from prescriptive methods toward flexible, research-informed frameworks. His "Six Es" model weaves cognitive science, second language acquisition research, and an English as an International Language perspective into a comprehensive vision of student-centred, multimodal teaching.

Agnieszka Dziecioł-Pędich and **Agnieszka Dudzik** turn our attention to one of the most demanding skills in the EFL classroom in *Multimodal Tools for Developing Speaking Skills in Foreign Language Education*. Their thoughtful survey of digital resources shows how multimodal tools can lower speaking anxiety, support independent practice, and respond to the diverse needs of contemporary learners.

Ivana Krsmanović brings the multimodal lens to bear on online and hybrid environments in *Hybrid Harmonies: CoI Meets Multimodal Pedagogies in ELT*. By aligning multimodal practice with the Community of Inquiry framework, she offers practical guidance for cultivating Teaching and Social Presence in digital classrooms, ensuring that interaction, belonging, and engagement do not vanish when students leave the physical room.

Rita Zurraba invites us into the lived reality of a Portuguese classroom in *Enhance Language Learning with Real-World Virtual Interactions!* Through the Mystery Skype activity, she shows how a simple videoconference can dissolve geographic barriers, transform English into a tool of investigation and cooperation, and open windows of intercultural understanding for learners who might otherwise see little of the wider world.

Annie Altamirano demonstrates the enduring power of story in *Last but Not Lost: Developing Environmental Awareness through Storytelling*. Drawing on Nicola Davies' picture book *Last* as her anchor text, she models how authentic literature, CLIL principles, and visual literacy can simultaneously develop language and environmental awareness, helping young learners feel (not merely know) the weight of conservation.

George Kokolas offers a timely introduction to a growing area of practice in *Positive Education for Beginners*. Drawing on the science of positive psychology, character strengths, and mindfulness, he makes the case that well-being and academic achievement are not in tension but mutually reinforcing and that the language classroom, with its long arc of effort and growth, is uniquely placed to nurture both.

Diana England then takes us into the realm of international collaboration with *Leaders in the Making: A Joint Erasmus+ Project – Unlocking the Future*, sharing the story of a five-country partnership between language schools in Portugal, Romania, Italy, Croatia, and Serbia. Her account demonstrates how international partnerships can integrate leadership development with teacher professional growth, generating resources and relationships that endure overtime.

Ana Demitroff closes the volume, turning the multimodal lens inward to ask not only how teachers present content but how they can see that learners are taking it in. Drawing on decades of practice, she shares richly illustrated strategies that anchor learning in something hands-on and tangible at a moment when literacy is under pressure.

Looking back, the 38th APPI Conference once again proved itself a vibrant meeting place for the ELT community, with three days that overflowed the formal programme. The discussions on multimodality, digital pedagogies, intercultural competence, inclusive practice, and well-being underscored both the breadth of our field and the shared commitments that hold it together.

As editors of this volume, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to every contributor who took the time to translate the energy of their session into a written chapter. We also thank the APPI Board, the conference organising team, and the wider community of speakers, attendees, and partners whose dedication ensures that the ELT community in Portugal continues to have a space for meaningful discourse and professional growth.

We invite you to explore the chapters of this Book of Proceedings as a source of inspiration and practical insight. May they serve as a catalyst for further inquiry, innovation, and collaboration in shaping the future of English language teaching in a multimodal world.

The Editors

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Fulfilling Students' Needs: A Multimodal Framework-Based Approach to Language Teaching

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Abstract

Contemporary language education requires innovative approaches that address students' evolving communicative needs in a globalized, multilingual context. Traditional methods often fail to accommodate the diversity of today's learners. This paper explores an integrated pedagogical framework that draws from cognitive science, second language acquisition (SLA) theories, multimodal strategies, and English as an International Language (EIL) perspective. Emphasizing the transition from rigid methodologies to flexible frameworks, it presents a comprehensive, research-based model for enhancing learner engagement, communication, and autonomy. Practical classroom applications aligned with the "Six Es" framework — Explore, Engage, Express, Encounter, Experiment, and Extend — are discussed to demonstrate how multimodality and interdisciplinary integration can transform second language classrooms into vibrant, inclusive learning spaces. Implications for teacher development and future research directions are also examined.

Keywords: second language acquisition, multimodal pedagogy, English as an International Language, student-centered learning, cognitive science

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1. Introduction

In the first decades of the 21st century, English has transcended national borders even more than in the twentieth century, becoming a global medium of communication. Consequently, the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) must evolve to address the complex and diverse communicative needs of learners worldwide. Traditional, method-centered approaches often fall short, constrained by rigid prescriptions that ignore the rich heterogeneity of learner experiences, learning needs, and cultural contexts. Instead, there is a growing consensus that teaching practices must be flexible, inclusive, and responsive.

This paper argues for a shift towards a flexible, framework-based pedagogy grounded in multimodal practices, cognitive science insights, and SLA research. Specifically, it proposes a model organized around fulfilling students' needs "one 'E' at a time" — Explore, Engage, Express, Encounter, Experiment, and Extend — offering both theoretical foundations and practical classroom strategies. By doing so, teachers can foster deeper engagement, support authentic communication, and empower learners to become autonomous, reflective users of English.

2. The Case for Frameworks over Methods

Historically, language education has been dominated by prescriptive methods — grammar translation, audiolingualism, the direct method, and communicative language teaching, among others. Each method prescribed a specific sequence of activities and a rigid teacher-student dynamic (Kumaravadivelu, 2009). While these methods offered clarity, they often lacked the flexibility to respond to contextual nuances and diverse learner needs.

Frameworks, by contrast, provide a more adaptable approach to language education. Flexibility is a core characteristic of frameworks. They do not bind educators to a single path but allow them to adjust their practices according to the changing needs of their students and the dynamic realities of their classrooms. A comprehensive approach is another key element, as frameworks consider the "what," "why," and "how" of learning, ensuring that instructional strategies are purposeful and meaningful.

More importantly, frameworks also bridge the gap between theory and practice. Instead of being purely theoretical constructs or mere practical recipes, they integrate insights from educational research with classroom realities. Furthermore, frameworks promote reflective practice among teachers, encouraging them to continually evaluate

and refine their instructional strategies based on learner feedback and emerging research. This orientation toward flexibility, integration, and reflection positions frameworks as more suitable for today's complex educational contexts.

3. Multimodality and Interdisciplinarity in the Classroom

3.1 Interdisciplinarity: Enriching understanding

Interdisciplinary approaches in education involve drawing on knowledge, methods, and perspectives from multiple disciplines to enrich learners' understanding and problem-solving abilities. Interdisciplinarity is not about superficially adding elements from other fields but about weaving connections that deepen learners' cognitive engagement. For instance, a project investigating the cultural significance of Portugal's *Revolução do Cravos* might integrate historical analysis, literary interpretation, and artistic expression. Such an approach fosters critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to see issues from multiple perspectives.

Moreover, interdisciplinary projects help learners develop transferable skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation. These skills are essential not only for academic success but also for navigating the complexities of the modern world. In language education, interdisciplinarity can contextualize language use, making it more authentic and meaningful for learners.

3.2 Multimodality: Catering to diverse learners

Multimodality refers to the use of multiple modes or channels of communication and representation in teaching and learning. In a multimodal classroom, information is conveyed through various forms such as text, images, audio, gestures, and physical manipulation of objects. Multimodal instruction aligns with cognitive science principles, which suggest that engaging multiple sensory modalities enhances encoding, retrieval, and retention of information (Goodwin, 2025).

For example, a lesson on environmental issues might involve reading articles (textual mode), watching documentaries (visual and auditory modes), participating in debates (oral mode), and creating posters (visual and spatial modes). By engaging multiple senses, teachers can reach learners with different cognitive styles and preferences, making learning more accessible and effective. Additionally, multimodal instruction can support students with learning difficulties by providing alternative pathways to understanding.

4. Cognitive Science and Language Learning

Cognitive science provides valuable insights into how learning occurs, which can inform language teaching practices. One key principle is the role of curiosity in learning. Curiosity acts as a motivational engine that drives learners to explore, question, and seek understanding. When students are curious, they are more likely to engage deeply with the material and persist in the face of challenges.

Another important principle is dual coding theory, which posits that information presented through both verbal and visual channels is more easily encoded and retrieved. For instance, pairing a new vocabulary word with an image can strengthen memory associations and improve recall.

Depth of processing theory further suggests that information processed at a deeper, semantic level is retained better than information processed superficially. Therefore, tasks that require learners to analyze, interpret, or apply new language promote better long-term retention than rote memorization.

Additionally, cognitive science emphasizes the importance of spacing and retrieval practice. Learning is more durable when practice is distributed over time (spacing effect) and when learners actively retrieve information from memory (retrieval practice). These insights imply that language instruction should incorporate repeated exposure to new language in varied contexts and encourage learners to recall and use language actively.

4.1 Cognitive interest cues

Cognitive interest cues are stimuli designed to spark learners' curiosity and cognitive engagement. These can include surprising facts, intriguing questions, emotional stories, or visually striking images. For example, starting a lesson on travel with the question, "What would you pack if you were traveling to Mars?" can immediately capture students' attention and prime them for learning new vocabulary related to travel and exploration.

Effective use of cognitive interest cues requires sensitivity to learners' backgrounds and interests. Cues should be novel enough to provoke curiosity but also relatable enough to connect with learners' existing knowledge and experiences.

5. English as an International Language and Decentering ELT

In traditional English Language Teaching (ELT), the target was often framed as an idealized native-speaker competence, typically modeled after British or American

English norms. However, the global spread of English challenges this model, necessitating a shift toward an English as an International Language (EIL) perspective. EIL recognizes that English belongs to all its users worldwide, who adapt it for their communicative needs in diverse local contexts. As Díaz Maggioli (2024) notes, decentering ELT means moving away from prioritizing native-speaker standards and acknowledging the legitimacy of localized varieties of English.

Decentering ELT entails rethinking curriculum design, material selection, and instructional and assessment practices. It involves integrating examples of English used in global contexts, showcasing accents and cultural expressions from different parts of the world, and valuing intelligibility and communicative effectiveness over adherence to a particular native standard. This inclusive approach empowers learners, especially those from non-Anglophone backgrounds, as they see their linguistic identities reflected and validated. Moreover, it prepares students for real-world communication, where interlocutors come from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

By embracing EIL principles, language educators can foster a more equitable classroom environment, counteracting linguistic imperialism and promoting a more pluralistic view of language competence. This decentering of ELT not only aligns with contemporary realities but also supports broader educational goals of diversity, inclusion, and global citizenship.

6. Second Language Acquisition: Insights for Teaching

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research provides critical insights into how learners acquire additional languages. A foundational distinction in SLA is between acquisition and learning. According to Henshaw and Hawkins (2022), acquisition refers to the largely unconscious process of developing linguistic competence through meaningful exposure and interaction, while learning involves conscious knowledge of language rules.

Effective language pedagogy should prioritize conditions that foster acquisition. This includes providing abundant comprehensible input — language that is understandable but slightly above the learner's current level — and opportunities for meaningful interaction. The role of form-focused instruction, corrective feedback, and scaffolding should also be considered as supportive, not dominant, elements.

Kumaravadivelu's (2009) post-method pedagogy adds further depth to SLA-informed teaching. He outlines three key parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility. Particularity emphasizes the importance of contextualizing teaching to

specific cultural and social settings. Practicality bridges the gap between theory and everyday classroom practices, encouraging teachers to become researchers of their own classrooms. Possibility challenges educators to address broader issues of power, identity, and equity in language education, fostering transformative educational experiences.

Together, SLA theories, insights from cognitive science, EIL, and post-method pedagogy provide a foundation for a flexible, learner-centered framework that honors the complexity of language acquisition processes.

7. Cognitive Science and Language Learning

Building on cognitive science, SLA research, and EIL perspectives, Díaz Maggioli (2024) proposes the "Six Es" framework — Explore, Engage, Express, Encounter, Experiment, and Extend — to systematically address students' communicative and cognitive needs.

7.1 Explore

The first step, Explore, involves orienting learners by clearly communicating what they are going to learn, why it matters, and how they will achieve it. Teacher clarity, which has an effect size of 0.75 according to Hattie (2015), plays a crucial role here. Clear learning outcomes, shared at the beginning of lessons, set expectations and guide students' attention.

Exploration also entails connecting new learning to students' goals and prior experiences, enhancing relevance and motivation. Teachers can involve learners in co-constructing objectives and success criteria, fostering metacognitive awareness. By explicitly stating the purpose and benefits of each learning activity, teachers help students develop agency over their learning processes.

7.2 Engage

Engagement activates learners' existing knowledge and stimulates curiosity. According to Hattie (2015), activating prior knowledge has a very high impact on learning outcomes, with an effect size of 1.28. Engaging activities can include provocative questions, surprising facts, puzzles, or emotionally resonant stories.

Engagement strategies should tap into learners' personal interests and cultural backgrounds. For example, a lesson about festivals around the world could invite students to share celebrations from their own cultures, creating emotional investment and cognitive hooks for new vocabulary and structures.

Additionally, engagement can be fostered through multimodal stimuli, such as intriguing images, short videos, or interactive polls. By appealing to different senses and cognitive pathways, teachers can create rich, memorable learning experiences that spark sustained attention and curiosity.

7.3 Express

Expression moves learners from passive reception to active use of language. Authentic communication requires that learners have a genuine purpose to convey information, solve problems, or share opinions. Tasks that involve information gaps, reasoning gaps, or opinion gaps are particularly effective in promoting communicative interaction (Díaz Maggioli, 2020).

For instance, a "Find Someone Who" activity, where students ask peers questions to complete a survey, creates a real need to communicate. Similarly, role-plays, debates, and collaborative projects provide platforms for meaningful language use.

Crucially, opportunities for expression should be scaffolded with appropriate linguistic support, such as sentence starters, vocabulary banks, and model texts. Teachers must ensure that students have access to comprehensible input and are encouraged to personalize language rather than merely reproduce memorized phrases.

7.4 Encounter

Encountering new knowledge involves the organized, scaffolded presentation of content and/or language. Effective scaffolding, which has an effect size of 0.82 (Hattie, 2015), supports learners in moving from what they know to what they need to know.

Teachers should chunk information into manageable segments, sequence content logically, and use multimodal resources to reinforce understanding. For example, a grammar lesson on the present perfect tense might involve visual timelines, contextualized dialogues, guided practice exercises, and peer explanations.

Noticing is a key aspect of encountering. Learners must be guided to notice linguistic forms and patterns within meaningful contexts. Strategies such as consciousness-raising tasks, highlighting key features, and contrastive analysis can support this process.

Reciprocal teaching, where students take turns leading discussions or summarizing content, further deepens encounters with new knowledge by promoting active processing and collaborative construction of meaning.

7.5 Experiment

Experimentation focuses on deliberate practice aimed at moving learners from controlled accuracy to fluent, flexible language use. Neuroscience emphasizes that practice must be purposeful and feedback-informed to lead to durable learning changes.

Díaz Maggioli (2024) outlines a "3X Practice" approach developed by Underhill and Scrivener (Scrivener, 2014): initial practice under guidance (Usual), memory-challenged recall practice (Recall), and creative, personalized reapplication (Recreate). For instance, after practicing set sentences, students might reconstruct them from prompts, then adapt them to new communicative contexts.

Díaz Maggioli (2024) also suggests a progression of practice activities that seeks to bridge the gap between accuracy and fluency. He recommends that practice activities be designed following a scaffolded continuum that starts with imitation activities, followed by substitution activities, manipulation activities, personalization activities, reconstruction activities and finally, open communication activities.

7.6 Extend

Extension involves consolidating learning through formative feedback and forward planning. Constructive, formative feedback has an effect size of 0.70 (Hattie, 2015) and is crucial for helping learners understand their current performance, identify gaps, and set future goals.

One effective method is the Learner-Initiated Feedback Technique (LIFT), where students proactively request specific feedback on aspects of their work (Brookhart, 2017). This approach promotes learner autonomy and metacognitive development.

Self-assessment and peer assessment activities also support extension, as they encourage reflection and active engagement with learning criteria. Teachers should create a classroom culture where feedback is seen as an opportunity for growth, not merely as evaluation.

Finally, extending learning means providing opportunities for real-world application of language skills beyond the classroom. This could include community projects, digital storytelling, pen-pal exchanges, or participation in online forums.

8. Practical Applications: Tasks and Strategies

The practical applications of the Six Es framework illustrate how theoretical principles can be translated into effective classroom practices. Carefully designed tasks can

address each phase of the framework, ensuring that students' cognitive, emotional, and communicative needs are systematically met.

For the **Explore** phase, teachers can create learning outcome posters or slides that clearly articulate the objectives of the lesson and explain why each objective matters. This orientation exercise sets the tone for the learning experience, promoting goal-setting behaviors. For instance, asking students to brainstorm ways they can assess their understanding of a topic fosters metacognitive awareness and ownership of the learning process.

In the **Engage** phase, activities that tap into students' prior knowledge and curiosity are paramount. "My Country, Your Country" is an effective pair work task where students exchange factual and cultural information about different countries. By activating background knowledge and presenting intriguing gaps in information, the task stimulates cognitive engagement and social interaction.

Express tasks should create authentic communication opportunities. "The Best Place to Live" task requires students to negotiate preferences and make group decisions based on discussion and persuasion. Such tasks not only practice language skills but also develop critical thinking, collaboration, and interpersonal communication.

During the **Encounter** phase, teachers can present new language structures through multimodal approaches, combining textual explanations with visual aids, video clips, and kinesthetic activities. Grammar exercises can be scaffolded using the "3X Practice" model: initial practice with teacher feedback, memory-challenged recall, and creative reapplication in new contexts, as seen in exercises transforming standard sentences into spontaneous conversation.

Experiment tasks encourage deliberate practice through meaningful application. Role-plays, simulations, and mini-projects allow students to try new language forms in realistic, communicative contexts. Peer feedback, reflection journals, and self-assessment checklists can accompany these tasks to deepen learning and promote self-regulation.

Finally, the **Extend** phase ensures that learning is not ephemeral. Techniques like the Learner-Initiated Feedback Technique (LIFT) give students agency in the feedback process, helping them identify areas for improvement and strategies for growth. Reflective activities, such as "START-STOP-CONTINUE" evaluations, promote critical reflection and future planning.

9. Directions for Future Research

While the Six Es framework offers a promising model for language teaching, ongoing research is necessary to refine its application and expand its impact. Several avenues for future investigation can be identified.

First, empirical studies examining the long-term effects of multimodal, framework-based instruction on language proficiency and learner autonomy are needed. Quantitative and qualitative research could measure gains in communicative competence, cognitive engagement, and motivation across different learner populations and contexts.

Second, research should explore how best to scaffold learner transitions from structured support to independent language use. Understanding the most effective strategies for gradually releasing responsibility to learners could enhance the efficiency and sustainability of the framework.

Third, cross-cultural studies could investigate how the Six Es framework functions in diverse educational contexts. Insights from such studies would help tailor the framework to different cultural, linguistic, and institutional environments, ensuring its global relevance and applicability.

Finally, investigations into the professional development of teachers implementing the Six Es framework could provide valuable insights into best practices for teacher training, mentorship, and leadership development in multimodal, student-centered pedagogy.

10. Conclusion

At a time in the history of teaching and learning when global communication and cultural pluralism shape the fabric of everyday life, language education must evolve to meet new realities. The rigid, one-size-fits-all methods of the past no longer suffice. Instead, a flexible, research-informed, and multimodal framework like the Six Es provides a pathway to more inclusive, dynamic, and effective language learning.

Grounded in cognitive science, SLA theory, and an EIL perspective, the Six Es framework fosters learners' curiosity, engagement, critical thinking, and communicative competence. It empowers students to become active, autonomous participants in their learning journeys and equips teachers with a structure that is both theoretically sound and practically adaptable.

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Multimodal Tools for Develop Speaking Skill in Foreign Language Education

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Abstract

This article examines pedagogical strategies for developing multimodal speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. It seeks to demonstrate how integrating digital tools can enhance speaking skills and support varied learning styles. The article presents a range of multimodal speaking tools that combine spoken language with visual, auditory, and interactive input to support oral communication and language learning. Emphasis is placed on instructional practices that foster learner confidence, promote interaction, and improve oral fluency. The article argues that multimodal tools are helpful in promoting more inclusive and effective speaking instruction by addressing the needs of diverse learners. Additionally, the resources described in this paper help to integrate classroom practices with contemporary communicative demands.

Keywords: speaking skills, multimodal tools, digital resources, EFL

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1. Introduction

Speaking is frequently considered to be one of the most challenging skills to master in EFL learning. Unlike receptive skills, it requires students to address linguistic, cognitive, social, and affective demands all at once. They need to select appropriate vocabulary and grammar, manage pronunciation, respond to others and maintain the flow of the interaction in real time. Research in applied linguistics and discourse studies has consistently shown that spoken communication is inherently multimodal, relying on the integration of speech with prosodic, gestural, facial, postural, and spatial resources (Kress, 2010). The importance of multimodal speaking has become even more pronounced in contemporary communicative contexts shaped by digital technologies. Video conferencing, online presentations, social media content creation, or hybrid learning environments require speakers to manage speech alongside images, text, screen-based actions, and camera awareness. Learners are increasingly expected to perform spoken tasks in digitally mediated spaces, where multimodal competence is essential. This article argues that multimodal speaking skills should be explicitly taught and practised. It seeks to illustrate how multimodal tools can help in the development of speaking skills.

2. Multimodal Speaking and Digital Tools

Multimodality refers to the use of several different methods, or "modes" to create meaning. In speaking, these modes include linguistic resources (vocabulary and grammar), prosodic features (stress, rhythm, intonation), kinesic resources (gesture, facial expression, body movement), and spatial or material elements (objects, physical environment, visual media) (Kress, 2010). Hence, multimodal tools for developing speaking skills can be understood as technologies that combine multiple modes of communication to support the development and practice of oral communication. Such tools integrate at least two distinct modalities (e.g., audio + visuals + speech interaction) to provide learners with more meaningful and engaging learning opportunities aimed at producing and improving spoken language. The integration of multimodal tools in EFL teaching can be helpful in making speaking practice accessible and effective for diverse learners by:

Enabling learners to practise speaking independently

Developing speaking skills with the help of such tools allows language learners to work at their own pace outside the classroom. This helps to increase both their exposure to

foreign language and the time they devote to practising speaking, the latter being frequently limited in the classroom. Moreover, independent speaking practice contributes to the development of learner autonomy, i.e. the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981).

Reducing speaking anxiety

The use of multimodal speaking tools can help to decrease the nervousness, fear, or worry that learners frequently experience when speaking a foreign language. They offer a low-stakes environment and allow students to rehearse speaking skills in a non-judgmental setting, thus lowering their foreign language speaking anxiety (Gosiewska-Turek, 2018).

Addressing learners' diverse needs, preferences, and proficiency levels

Multimodal tools, which integrate audio, video, text, and visual cues, enable more personalised and immersive practice for various proficiency levels and interests. They enable more tailored practice than is normally available in foreign language classrooms and offer a selection of speaking tasks that address specific challenges, e.g. pronunciation or vocabulary retention.

3. Selected Multimodal Tools for Improving Pronunciation

It needs to be emphasised that contemporary students, although frequently considered to be digital natives, are not always proficient in using digital resources for language learning purposes. In order to help them utilise such tools more strategically, language teachers must specifically address these issues during language courses. Strategic use of digital tools means that learners are aware of the features that the tools offer and thus use them with a clear purpose in mind, i.e. they choose the appropriate tool or feature to address a specific learning challenge. This allows them to use the tools actively rather than passively and implies that language learners understand when to use such resources and when not to.

One of the most often used tools available to students for verifying the pronunciation of unfamiliar words is **Google Translate**. It enables learners to hear the correct pronunciation in addition to translating words into the target language. However, it seems that language students scarcely notice this feature, which is accessed by clicking the speaker icon (Figure1).

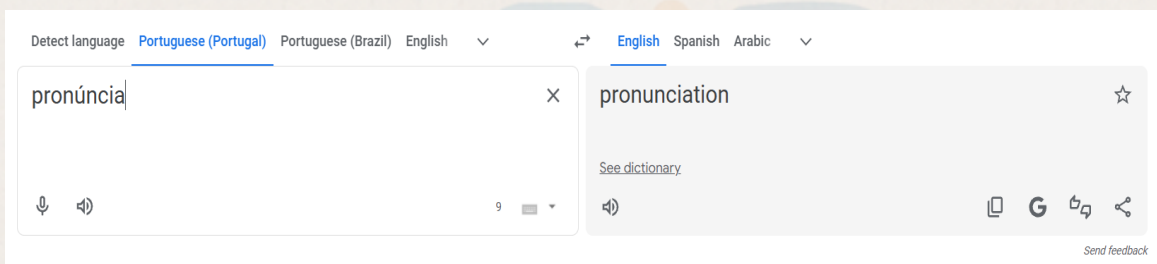


Figure 1: Google Translate interface showing the pronunciation feature for the word *pronúncia*.

Another important feature of Google Translate is allowing users to slow audio playback (Figure 2). This is of particular use for learners who want to hear slower, and therefore clearer, pronunciations of more difficult words or phrases.

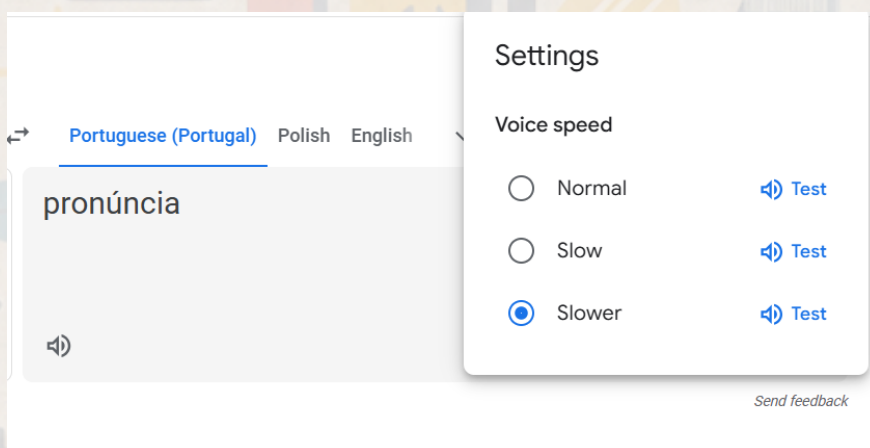


Figure 2: Google Translate “Voice Speed” settings for pronunciation practice.

Significantly, Google Translate cannot be considered a fully multimodal language-learning tool. It is, however, worth mentioning because it provides learners with a pronunciation model to imitate, thus helping to increase their interest in and motivation to learn pronunciation. While working on their own, students can hear the same word, phrase or sentence as many times as they need to without the pressure of boring their peers. Frequent repetition plays an important role in developing pronunciation skills, as it helps learners produce words and phrases more automatically, which leads to improved fluency (Celce-Murcia, et al., 2010).

Even though the use of fully multimodal tools for speaking practice has major advantages, not every learner has equal access to such tools. Students are unlikely to admit having inadequate digital skills or struggling with financial or technological constraints, which can create the false impression that everybody has equal access to digital tools. Therefore, it is important to introduce learners to a variety of tools with

different degrees of modality, ensuring that all of them can practise speaking effectively, regardless of their digital literacy skills or level of access to fully multimodal resources.

Similarly to Google Translate, **ChatGPT** enables learners to familiarise themselves with the pronunciation of unknown words. Language teachers, however, should make students aware that they can listen to the pronunciation of full sentences as well as isolated words with the aid of suitable prompts and initially hidden aspects (Figure 3). Accessing this functionality is straightforward and merely requires clicking the three dots beneath the translation.

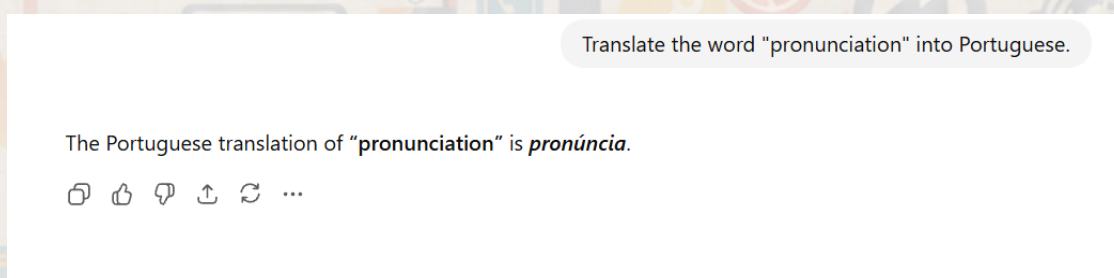


Figure 3: Screenshot of ChatGPT showing the Portuguese translation of the English word "pronunciation" as *pronúncia*.

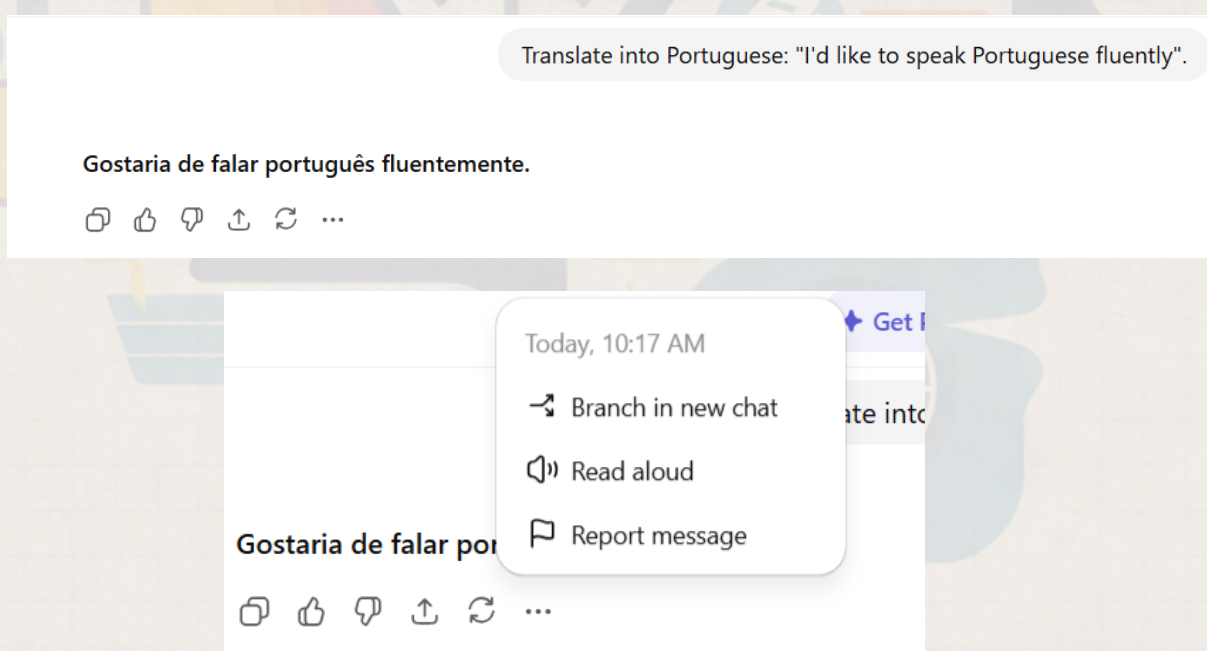


Figure 4: ChatGPT message options menu.

ChatGPT is an alternative to online dictionaries, such as *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* or *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online* (henceforth LDOCE). The latter, being monolingual, can seem slightly more challenging to use and

less accessible for learners at lower language proficiency levels, whose knowledge of the target language may still be inadequate to understand definitions. However, reading definitions in the target language can help to activate and consolidate the knowledge of the vocabulary that students already possess. Inevitably, it also encourages the learning of new words, which serve as the foundation for speaking a foreign language effectively. Similarly to ChatGPT, online dictionaries offer pronunciation models, providing both British and American audio without the need for additional prompts. Moreover, the LDOCE offers audio for full example sentences, thus allowing learners to hear words in connected speech (Figure 5).

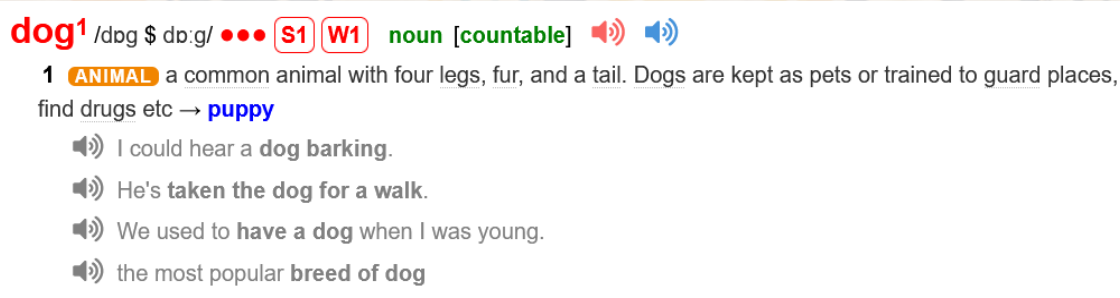


Figure 5: Screenshot from the LDOCE showing that a given word can be heard in different sentences.

Additionally, both dictionaries include phonetic transcriptions in British and American English. Despite the common perception that phonetic transcription is an outdated tool, particularly in light of technological advancements, it helps learners to become independent of electronic tools and practise pronunciation in offline contexts. Nevertheless, phonetic transcription becomes an effective tool only when it is explicitly taught and regularly practised by learners.

An important point to emphasise is that all the tools discussed above share the limitation of not providing feedback on how accurately students pronounce the words they hear. Therefore, interactive practice is better served by tools like **ELSA Speak**, an AI-powered English speaking and pronunciation coach (Figure 6).

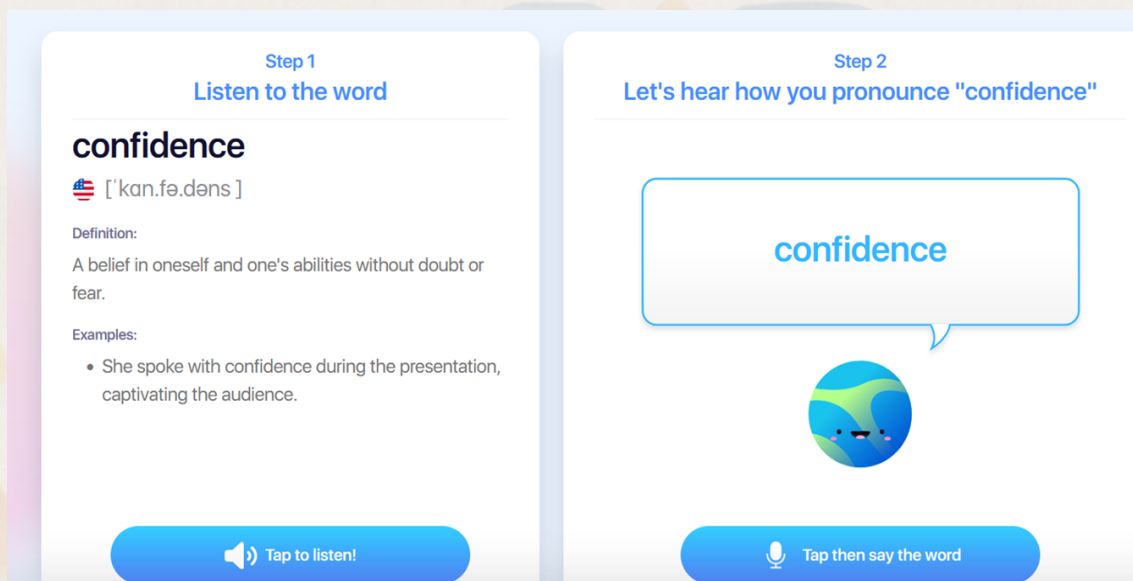


Figure 6: Screenshot from ELSA Speak showing the pronunciation of a word, its phonetic transcription, definition, and use in context.

Apart from providing the pronunciation of a word, its phonetic transcription, definition, and an example of its use in a sentence, the tool also allows learners to hear how speakers use the word in real-life conversations (Figure 7).

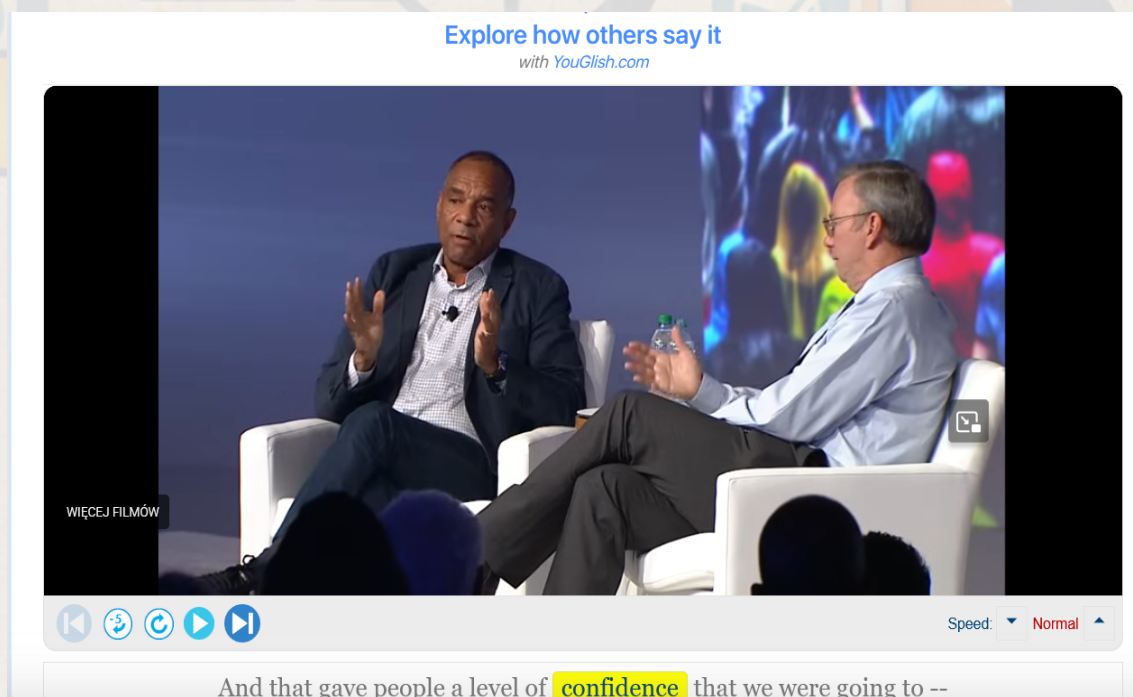


Figure 7: Screenshot from ELSA showing that a given word can be heard in a real-life context.

Being an interactive tool, ELSA also allows language learners to record their own voices and receive immediate and detailed feedback on the accuracy of their pronunciation (Figure 8).

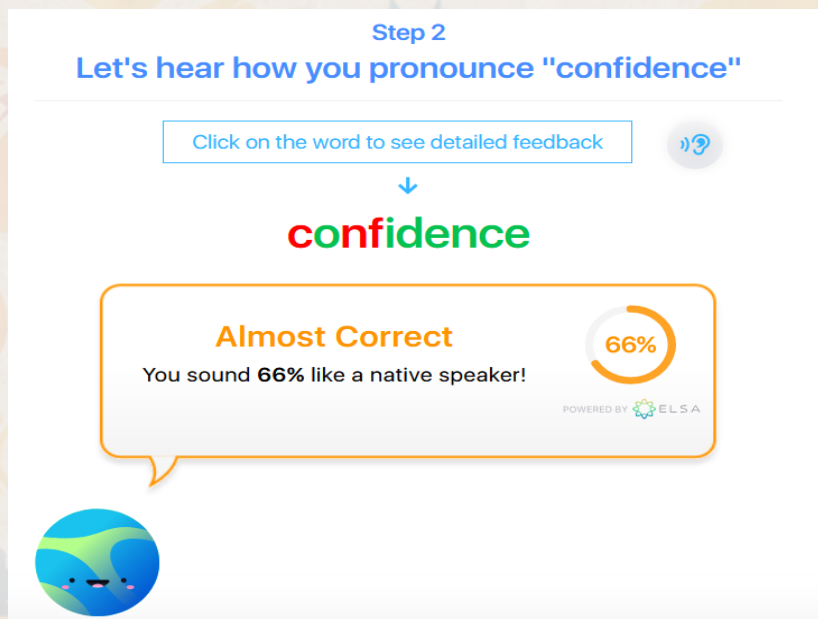


Figure 8: Screenshot from ELSA showing the feedback users receive upon recording their own pronunciation.

Additionally, it also provides learners with detailed tips on the proper positioning of the tongue and mouth for accurate sound production (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Screenshot from ELSA showing tips on how to position speech organs to pronounce individual sounds.

In order to use ELSA Speak effectively, learners need to demonstrate at least CEFR A2 proficiency level, as this is necessary to understand all the feedback and tips the tool offers. Furthermore, they require access to a relatively quiet environment and high-quality microphone, as inadequate equipment and background noise may disrupt the quality of recording and result in inadequate feedback, i.e. the tool may indicate that a user's pronunciation is more or less accurate than it actually is.

The native model of pronunciation is yet another challenge to be indicated in the context of utilising ELSA. The tool's assessment of how closely a learner's speech resembles an idealised model may push students to strive for perfection rather than intelligibility and effective communication.

4. Selected Multimodal Tools for Developing Pronunciation Skills and Vocabulary

Apart from pronunciation, language learners require a wide range of vocabulary to effectively communicate their messages. **English Central** is a multimodal tool that can assist them in developing both areas. With subtitles and vocabulary support, it provides a vast library of over 20,000 authentic English videos arranged by topic and level (Figure 10).

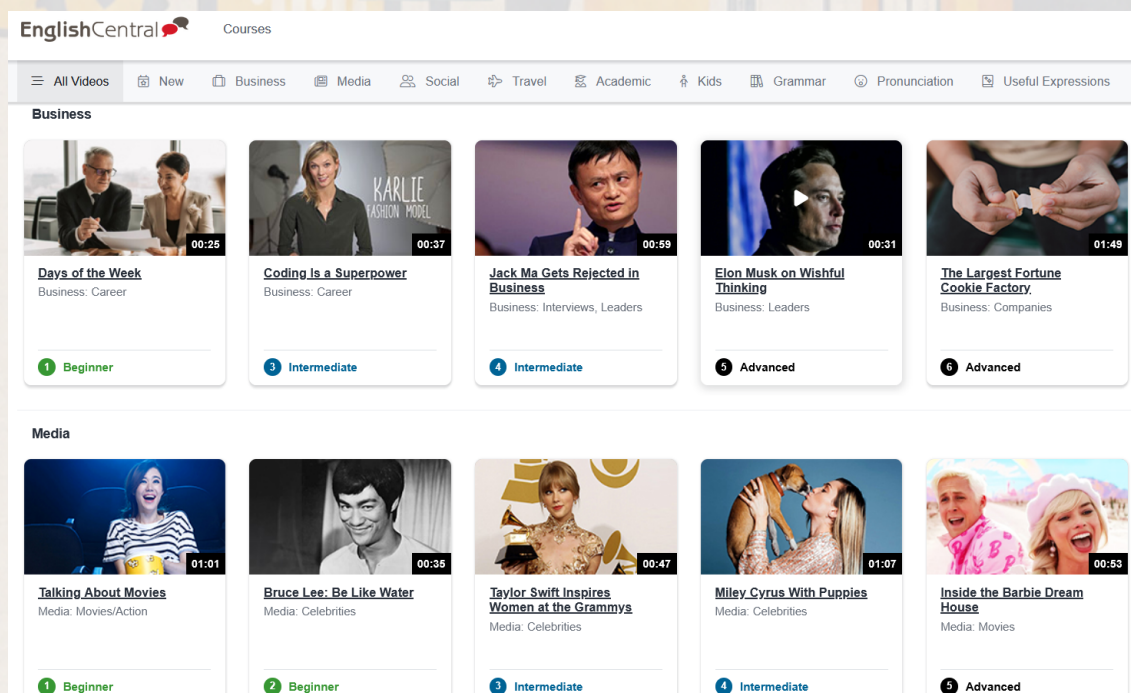


Figure 10: Screenshot from English Central showing broad thematic categories of videos.

Depending on their needs, learners first choose a video from 5 broad thematic categories. Working with video material is divided into five stages. During the first stage, called *Watch the Video*, learners hear and read the language needed to convey an intended message while watching the selected video with subtitles (Figure 11).

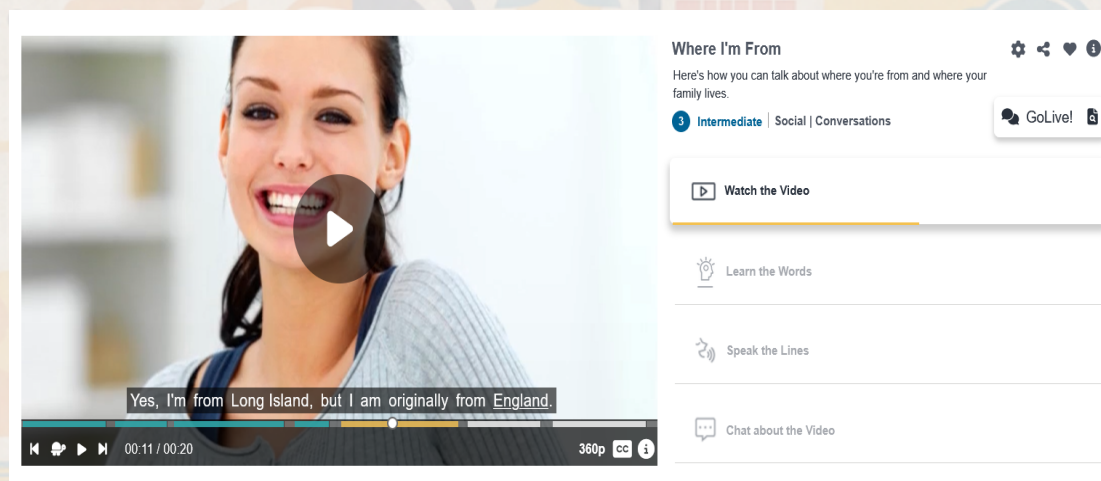


Figure 11: Screenshot from English Central showing one of the videos presenting the language that will be practised in subsequent sections.

By clicking on selected words while the video is playing, learners can see definitions, hear the correct pronunciation, and observe how they are used in sentences (Figure 12).

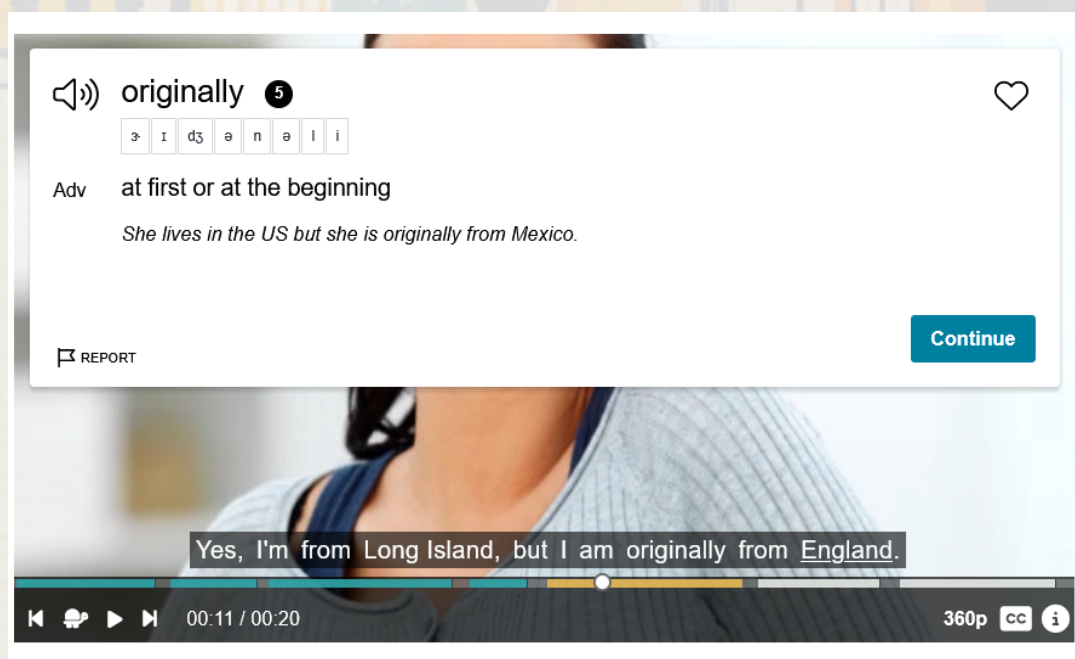


Figure 12: Screenshot from English Central—what happens when learners click on a word they would like to learn.


The words learners clicked on appear in the second stage - *Learn the Words* - where they see their definitions again and practise the correct spelling (Figures 13 and 14).

Learn these words from the video:

✓ **ORIGINALLY**
 at first or at the beginning 5

You can select words from "[All words](#)" tab

Learn 1 word



Yes, I'm from Long Island, but I am from
 England.

00:11 / 00:20 360p ⓘ

Figures 13 and 14: Screenshots the Learn the Words section of English Central.

During the *Speak the Lines* stage, learners see a sentence or phrase from the video on the screen. The sentence contains one or more gaps corresponding to the words they studied in the *Learn the Words* section (Figure 15).

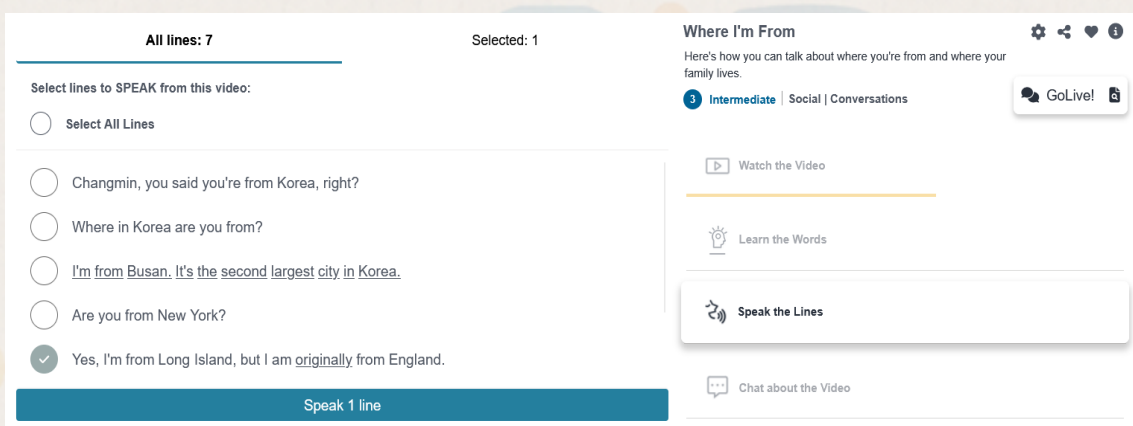


Figure 15: Screenshot from Speak the Lines section of English Central.

Next, they record their voices to practise both pronunciation and intonation and submit the recordings to receive online pronunciation feedback. The tool analyses the learner's speech, checking pronunciation, intonation, and fluency and provides immediate feedback, often with a score or visual cues (Figure 16).

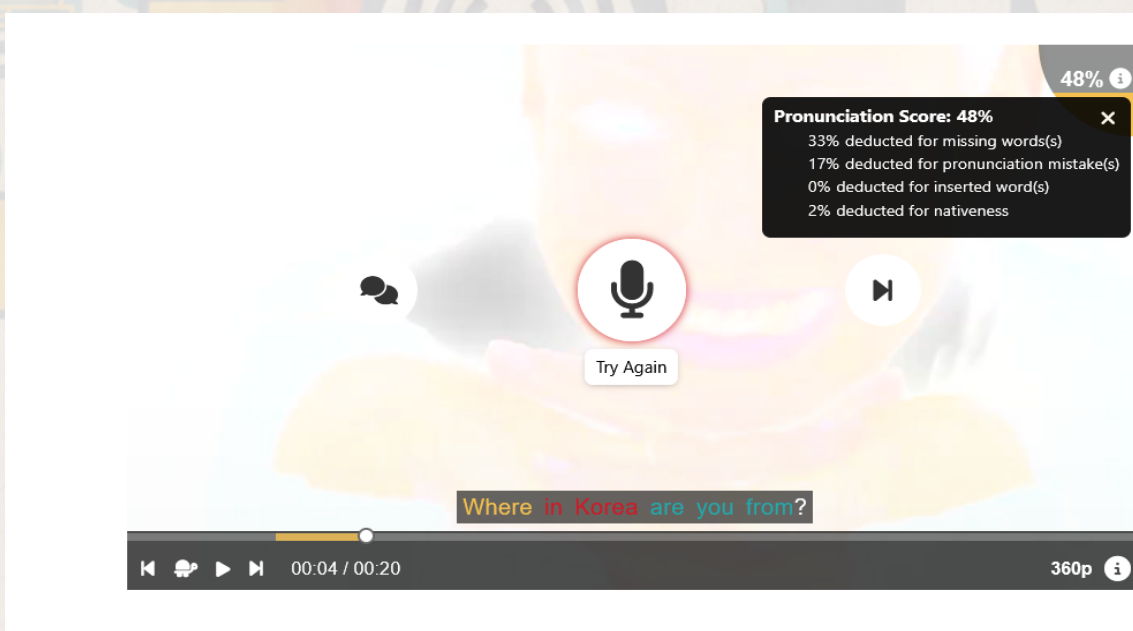


Figure 16: Screenshot from the Speak the Lines section of English Central with feedback.

Learners can repeat each exercise as many times as they need, which improves both their accuracy and confidence.

In the final stage, called *Chat about the Video*, learners can chat with a bot about selected issues from the video (Figure 17).

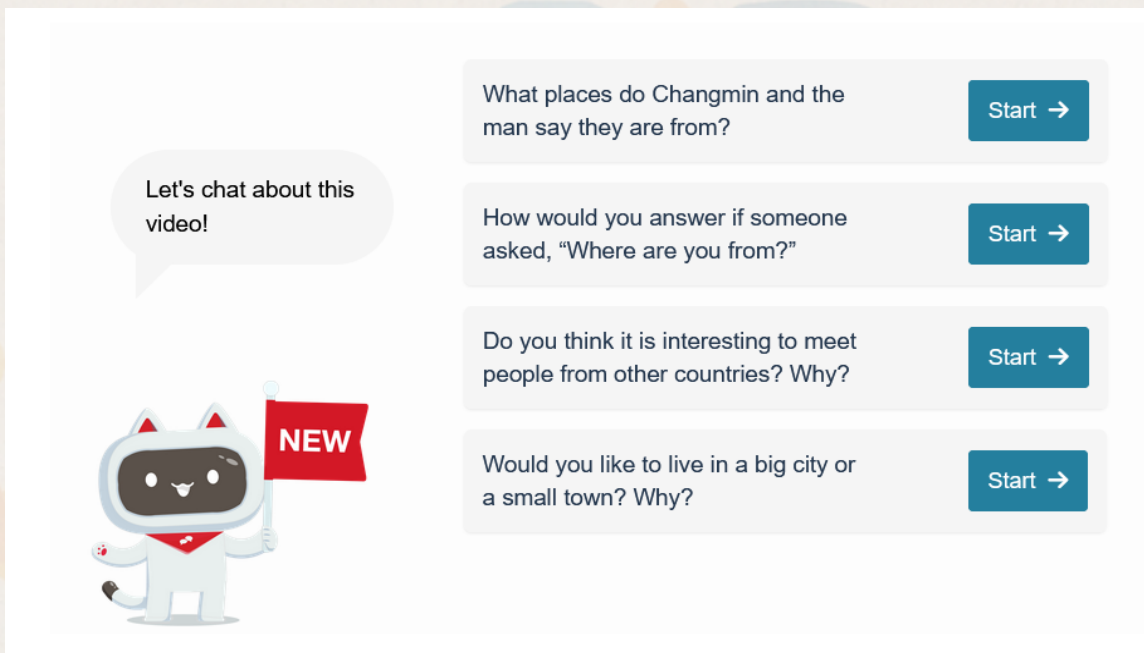


Figure 17: Screenshot from Chat about the Video section of English Central.

English Central is best suited for learners who already have basic knowledge of English and want to further develop fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Its target audience includes mainly teenage and adult users, although there is a section developed specifically to meet the learning needs of young children (Figure 18).

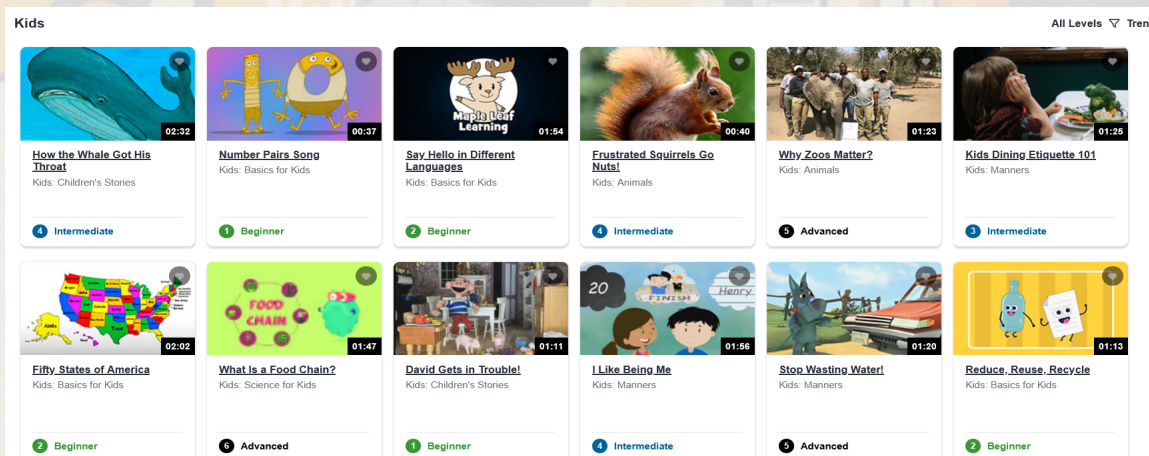


Figure 18: Kids section from English Central.

English Central can be considered the most multimodal tool among the ones discussed in this article. However, it needs to be emphasised that language learners should be introduced to a variety of resources so as not to become dependent on a single one. No single tool can fully meet the diverse learning needs of an individual learner. Teachers should also bear in mind that due to incredibly varied sensory needs

and preferences of language learners, some of them, especially more hypersensitive ones, might find the multimodality of certain tools overwhelming. Hence, such basic resources as **Vocaroo** (Figure 19), a voice recording tool that allows users to record, play back, and share audio recordings easily, might actually prove more effective.

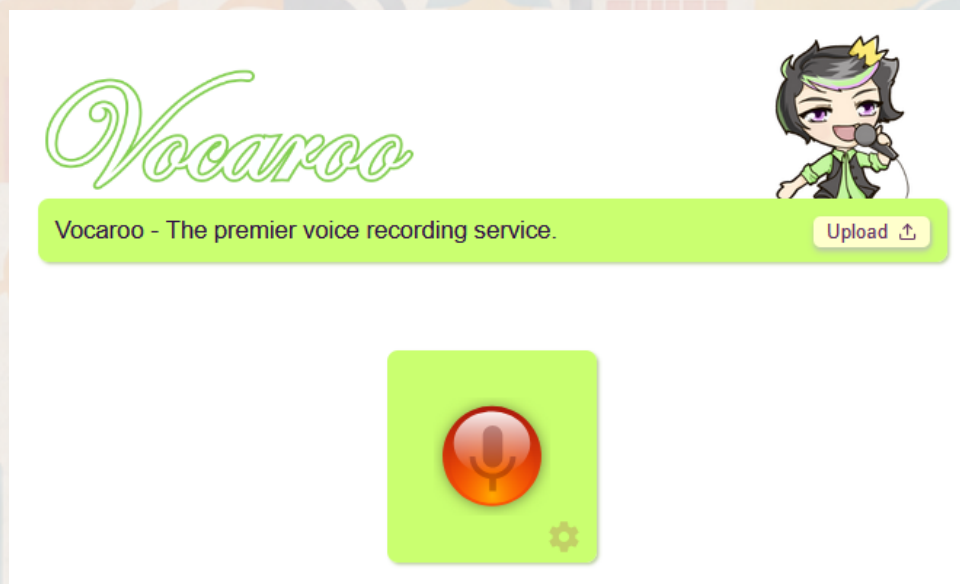


Figure 19: Vocaroo interface.

The major advantage of Vocaroo is the fact that learners, regardless of age, can re-record their messages privately before sharing them. This greatly reduces speaking anxiety and encourages repeated practice for improved pronunciation and fluency. Significantly, Vocaroo works well even for users with less powerful devices or slower Internet connections.

5. How to Use the Tools in Foreign Language Education

In order to use multimodal tools for educational purposes, teachers must be familiar with them. Attempting to demonstrate the latest technology without understanding it fully first can lead to ineffective lessons, demotivate learners, and undermine the teacher's authority. Awareness of the functionality of various tools enables educators to demonstrate them explicitly to learners, i.e. show and explain how to use each resource in a clear, direct, step-by-step manner, leaving little to no room for assumption or ambiguity. Explicit demonstration of technology for learning purposes in language classrooms is vital, as teachers should never assume that learners will intuitively know how to use educational resources effectively and strategically.

Significantly, the choice of a specific resource must reflect learners' language proficiency levels, technological competence, and learning goals. As user friendliness and attractiveness seem to be of equal importance, it might be useful to select a tool with the help of someone representing a similar age group to the learners. They can provide authentic insights into whether a tool under consideration feels intuitive, engaging, and socially relevant to a given age group.

The tools discussed in this article seem more suitable for independent use rather than classroom work. Therefore, language educators ought to prepare students for independent work by showing them how to plan, monitor, and evaluate their language learning with the support of technology. It should be emphasised that learner autonomy, similarly to purposeful use of learning, does not develop automatically: both require training and time. However, not every learner feels the need to become autonomous or feels able to achieve autonomy. Hence, the attempt to encourage learners to use multimodal speaking tools should be supported by explicit instruction, scaffolding, and ongoing teacher guidance.

Even when learners are autonomous enough to develop their speaking skills with the help of multimodal tools, they still need achievable and flexible learning goals which prevent unfocused or random technology use. Unrealistically fast or rigid goals may discourage even the most autonomous learners, especially since progress in speaking skills is non-linear and requires time.

Apart from attainable goals, learners require a reward system and feedback to sustain motivation. Rewards and feedback from the teacher are often more effective than those provided by a digital tool, even the most interactive one, because they involve a human element that cannot be fully replicated by technology. Feedback provided by the teacher can easily be tailored to the learner's specific failures and success, whereas a tool may provide only generic responses. Ideally, teacher feedback should consider the broader context of the learner's progress, which is unavailable even in the most advanced resources. Unlike teachers, advanced tools cannot provide additional examples or rephrase feedback that learners fail to understand, and learners may not even realize that the comments are unhelpful. This can make subsequent language practice less meaningful and more frustrating. Importantly, learners also often feel more accountable and motivated when their progress is monitored by a real person rather than when they have to rely solely on automated scores or badges.

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Hybrid Harmonies: Col Meets Multimodal Pedagogies in ELT

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Abstract

In the digital age, multimodality has become vital for effective English Language Teaching (ELT). Aligning with the Community of Inquiry (Col) framework, multimodality, namely combining visual, aural, spatial and other modes of communication, create inclusive and engaging learning environments in online and hybrid learning environments. Grounded in the Col model, this paper highlights Teaching and Social Presence as key to fostering engagement, motivation, and retention. Whereas Teaching Presence ensures that multimodal content is intentionally designed and sequenced, Social Presence promotes collaboration and authentic interaction, replicating the dynamics of traditional face-to-face teaching. Research confirms that these elements, when integrated effectively, significantly improve learner outcomes and satisfaction. The paper concludes by proposing a set of practical, Col-informed strategies for designing hybrid ELT classrooms that enhance inclusion and sustain learner engagement.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Community of Inquiry, multimodality

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1. Introduction

The digital age has significantly reshaped English Language Teaching (ELT), expanding instruction into online and hybrid environments supported by digital platforms and multimodal resources. While these developments have increased flexibility and access, they have also raised persistent challenges related to learner engagement, interaction, and the quality of learning experiences traditionally fostered in face-to-face classrooms.

Given the inherently social nature of language learning, the absence of physical co-presence in online ELT contexts can weaken communication, reduce motivation, and affect students' participation. Addressing these challenges requires pedagogically grounded approaches that move beyond the mere digitization of classroom practices. Within this context, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, complemented by multimodal pedagogical practices, provides a useful lens for designing inclusive and engaging online and hybrid ELT learning environments.

2. Community of Inquiry and Multimodality

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, introduced by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), is a social constructivist model that conceptualizes meaningful learning in online and blended environments through the dynamic interaction of three interdependent and overlapping dimensions: Teaching Presence, Social Presence, and Cognitive Presence (Figure 1). Developed in response to the well-documented limitations of online learning, particularly the absence of sustained face-to-face interaction, the CoI framework provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding how deep and purposeful learning can be fostered in digitally mediated contexts.

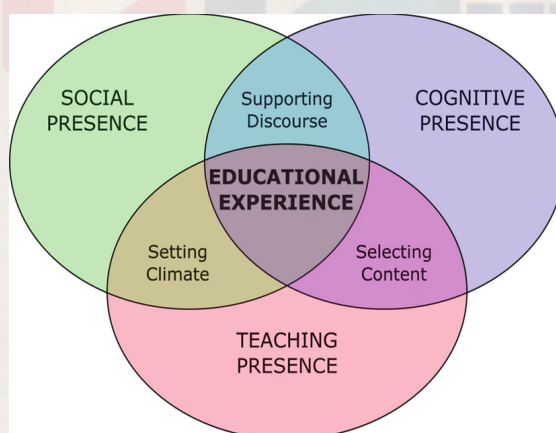


Figure 1: Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000, p.88)

In online and hybrid settings, the reduced immediacy of interpersonal communication can undermine learner engagement, sense of belonging, and learning outcomes (Krsmanović, 2022). The Col framework, operating synergistically through three presences, addresses these challenges by foregrounding the social and pedagogical conditions necessary for knowledge construction, positioning learning as a collaborative and dialogic process rather than an individual and isolated activity.

Teaching Presence encompasses the intentional design, facilitation, and instruction of the course; Social Presence refers to learners' ability to project themselves as "real" participants in the learning community, fostering trust, open communication, affective expression, and group cohesion. Cognitive Presence, in turn, represents the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse, progressing through the four phases of inquiry.

One of the pedagogical ways through which the Col presences can be supported and operationalized is multimodality. Multimodality examines how meaning is produced through the organization and interplay of diverse semiotic resources such as spatial, visual and beyond. In educational contexts, it advances an enlarged conception of literacy that recognizes the wide spectrum of multimodal communicative practices shaping learners' participation in the contemporary digital landscape (Lim et al., 2022).

In English language teaching, a multimodal approach or multimodal pedagogy both refer to the ways in which language instructors purposefully design learning experiences through the use of diverse multimodal resources, so educators guide learning by bringing together different forms of knowledge and carefully choosing meaning-making resources to create coherent learning experiences. In other words, a multimodal approach to teaching supports bridging the familiar with the new, at the same time creating spaces for learners to investigate, and negotiate ideas and identities through multiple meaning-making resources (Lim et al., 2021). Research confirms a multimodal approach in ELT has numerous benefits, such as enhancement of students' interest and motivation, and better knowledge retention (Hendrawaty et al., 2024).

As this paper argues, multimodality is treated as a pedagogical means through which the mentioned presences may be supported and operationalized. The Col model provides the conceptual structure for understanding learning processes, while multimodal practices function as instructional resources. What is more, Col further strengthens multimodal pedagogies in hybrid contexts by enabling educators to make deliberate design choices in expressing, arranging and sequencing curriculum content.

3. Practical Guidelines

This section presents selected practical guidelines that illustrate how Teaching Practice and Social Presence can be intentionally established and sustained in online and hybrid environments.

One effective strategy for enhancing Social Presence is the use of a welcome message posted on the course platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams), ideally delivered through a multimodal format such as an image, meme or short video (Figure 2). The course introduction should also include a brief presentation of the instructor’s “real” self, for instance sharing personal teaching values, expectations, or a professional motto, or some bio trivia. Such disclosures humanize the instructor and help reduce the social distance often associated with online learning.

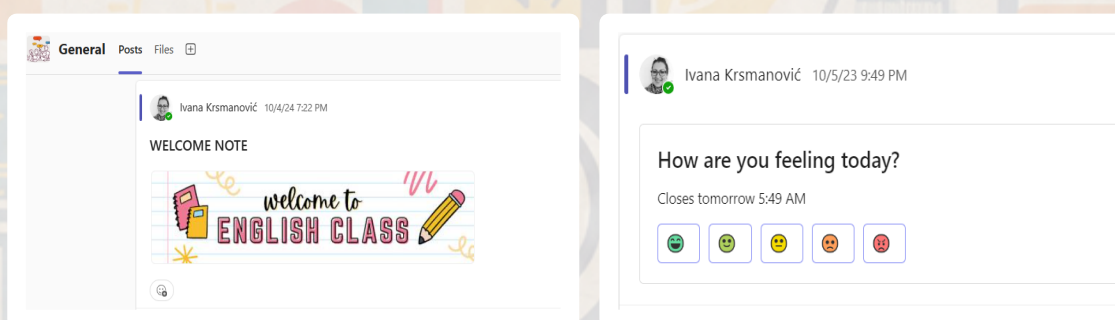


Figure 2: An example of a welcome note, use of GIFs and emojis

Addressing students using inclusive language, (the collective pronoun “we”), contributes to the early development of group cohesion and signals that collaboration is shared and expected during the course (Figure 3). Moreover, communication should be distributed across multiple channels and in different forms, such as chat boxes, visible shared posts, breakout rooms, among others, for pair work, group work, or one-to-one interactions, so that the interactional richness of face-to-face teaching is achieved.

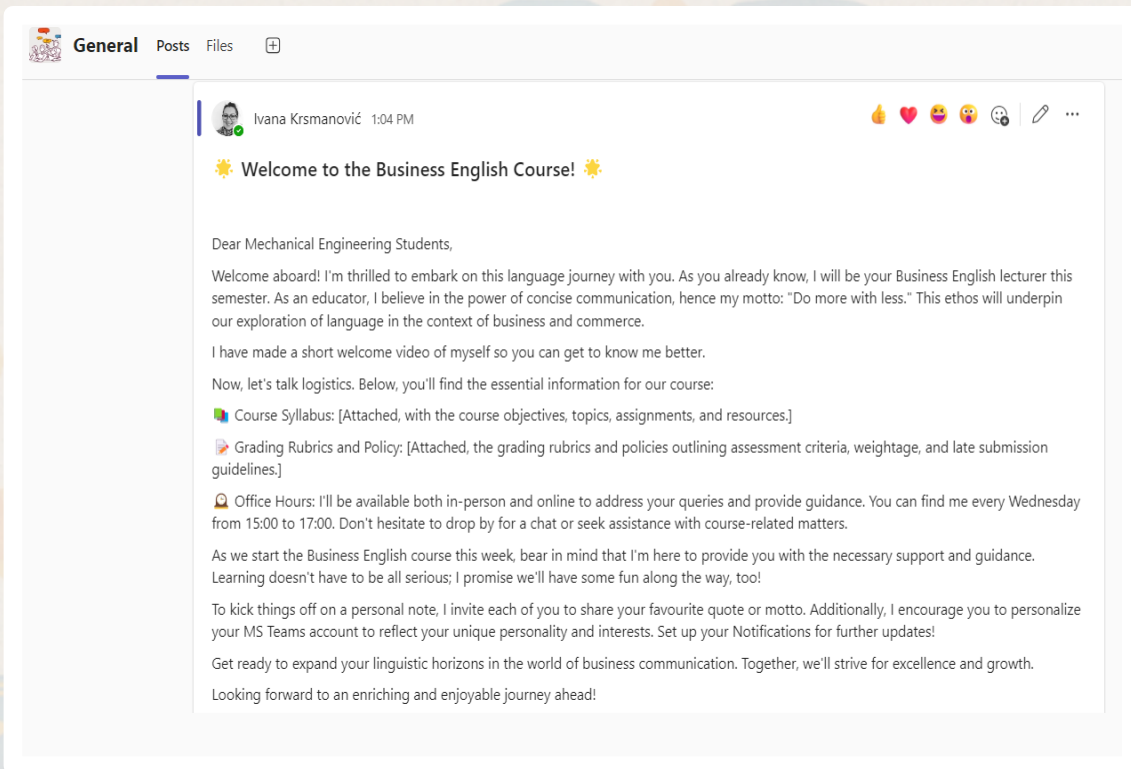


Figure 3: An example of welcome note with course instructions

To further enhance affective engagement, the strategic use of emojis, memes, and Gifs is strongly encouraged, as these modalities enrich meaning-making and help set the positive tone, especially at the beginning of a course/class (Figure 4).

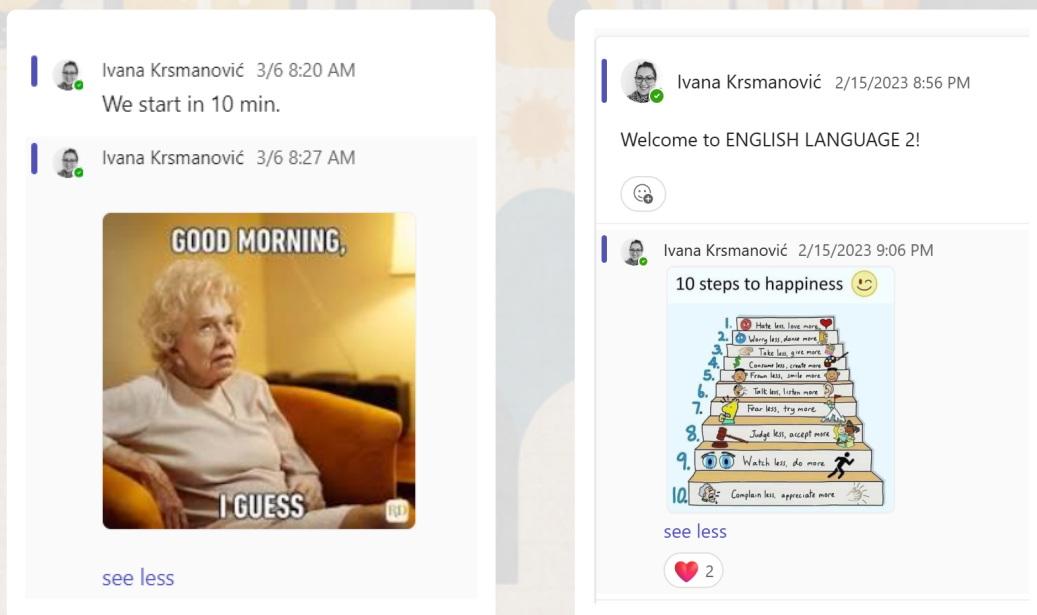


Figure 4: An example of a GIF and infographic use

When providing instruction, it is highly recommended that, in addition to real-time video call, learning materials be made available through multiple channels and modalities, so that the risk of misinterpretation or cognitive overload is reduced. Relying on a single mode of delivery may disadvantage learners who process information differently or who experience technological constraints. For example, Word and PDF handouts can be supplemented with additional video content, infographics, podcasts, annotated slides, among others (Figure 5). Such multimodal distribution of instructional content supports Teaching Presence by making instruction more explicit, accessible, and transparent, while also enabling learners to revisit materials at their own pace. As a result, students are better supported in understanding course requirements and engaging more confidently with learning tasks.

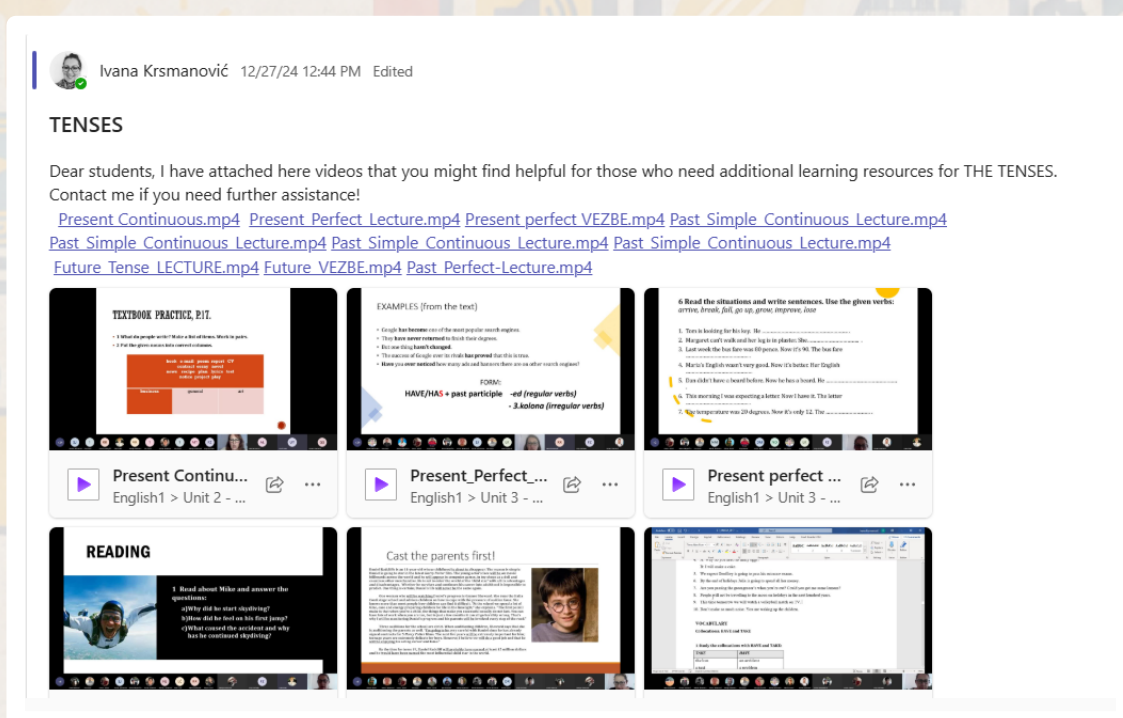


Figure 5: An example of multimodal content

Effective online teaching is not only about being multimodal, but it very much depends on the human and contextual dimensions of instructional practice. Adding “flavor” to your teaching helps humanize the online environment and inspire deeper engagement. Equally important is allowing time for learning habits and behaviors to develop, as students require consistent structures and routines to adapt to online modes of study.

Finally, educators should be aware of institutional policies governing the use of social networks and multimodal platforms in their educational institution. While tools such

as YouTube or social media channels (e.g., Twitter, TikTok, Instagram) can enrich learning and extend its reach, their use must remain pedagogically purposeful and institutionally compliant.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, while online learning environments offer flexibility and scalability, they continue to lack the immediacy, spontaneity, and rich interpersonal cues that characterize face-to-face teaching. In physical classrooms, informal interaction, non-verbal communication, and real-time feedback naturally reinforce learners' sense of belonging, engagement, and accountability, which are elements that are often diminished in online settings. When these relational cues are absent, students may experience reduced motivation and weaker connections with both instructors and peers. As we have shown in this paper, addressing these limitations requires the deliberate and systematic design of pedagogical activities across different stages of the course. Grounded in the Community of Inquiry framework, and supported by purposeful multimodal practices, such activities play a central role in establishing and sustaining Teaching Presence through intentional design and facilitation, as well as Social Presence through meaningful interaction and collaboration. These presences do not emerge automatically in online environments; rather, they must be consciously cultivated in order to approximate the pedagogical and relational dynamics of face-to-face instruction and to support more engaging and meaningful learning experiences.

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Enhance Language Learning with Real-World Virtual Interactions

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Abstract

Intercultural competence is often neglected in language learning classrooms. Although teachers value this competence, many find it difficult to integrate effectively into their lessons. Both teachers and learners can benefit from using technology to connect with classrooms around the world. Participation in authentic online interactions fosters linguistic development⁵ and understanding of cultural diversity. This paper explores how the Mystery Skype activity can transform language teaching into an engaging and meaningful experience. Mystery Skype helps to connect classrooms, break down geographic barriers. During these virtual interactions, students actively use the target language, improving their speaking and listening skills. Moreover, they foster other essential skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, empathy, and global awareness. The discussion highlights the pedagogical potential of the Mystery Skype activity to enhance communicative and intercultural competences, offering practical insights for educators aiming to create dynamic, inclusive, and globally connected learning environments.

Keywords: virtual interaction, language learning, intercultural competence, global citizenship, Mystery Skype

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1. Introduction

Language teachers recognize and value the importance of integrating intercultural competence into their classrooms, along with developing students' communicative competence. However, they also acknowledge that implementing activities that foster intercultural competence can be challenging. In a society characterized by mobility and dominated by digital communication, learning a new language also means learning to understand others. Simultaneously, technology has opened up pedagogical opportunities, as communication platforms easily facilitate authentic virtual interactions that help to connect students from different countries in real time. These experiences go beyond classrooms' limits, creating real-life context moments that promote meaningful learning.

The Mystery Skype activity is an educational game that promotes spontaneous, purposeful, and meaningful communication, sparks students' curiosity about others, lowers their anxiety, and fear of speaking.

2. Language Teachers' Challenges

In language learning classrooms, oral competence often emerges as a major source of anxiety for students. Although many learners use English informally outside of school, they frequently refuse to speak in the classroom environment due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by their peers.

Correia (2021), in a study conducted in Portuguese schools, concluded that speaking activities seldom involve genuine language production, as students tend to memorize texts and most struggle to move beyond scripted performances. In addition to develop students' oral competence, teachers also identify another challenge: how to integrate intercultural competence into their lessons. Although teachers acknowledge the importance of this, many struggle to incorporate it effectively into their practices (Leão, 2017). Some teachers are unsure how to approach this competence or unconsciously believe that “culture and language are inextricably bound together... [and that] they automatically teach culture or even intercultural competence when they teach a language” (Byram & Wagner, 2018, p. 2).

Contemporary language learning needs to reflect the globalized world in which students live. The rapid flow of information, migration, and digital communication place speakers in constant contact with different cultures. Virtual Interactions provide an effective means of developing different competences (Kramersch, 2014; O'Dowd, 2012).

3. Virtual Interaction in Language Teaching

Virtual interactions involve direct contact between learners located in different countries, mediated by digital technology such as videoconferencing, instant messaging, or collaborative platforms. This methodology, widely studied by authors such as O'Dowd (2012) and Helm and Guth (2016), allows students to use the language for real purposes, interacting with native speakers or other learners to complete authentic communicative tasks. These activities enhance students' intercultural awareness, develop critical thinking, stimulate their curiosity for knowledge, develop both their language and digital skill, through the authentic use of English in real-world contexts. Over the years, studies have been conducted, and different terms have been used to describe these practices. However, most research has been mainly on higher education, and there is a lack of studies involving younger learners (Dooly & Vinagre, 2021).

Implementing activities based on virtual interaction demands a shift in the teacher's role. The teacher becomes an intercultural mediator (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Students are prepared to watch, interpret, and compare cultures.

4. The *Mystery Skype* Game

Language teaching in socially and economically disadvantaged schools often involves navigating low learner motivation, anxiety around oral production, and limited exposure to cultural diversity. This is the reality of many learners in Portuguese schools.

As a teacher involved in the eTwinning project since 2006, I long recognised the meaningful impact that international collaboration can have on learners. However, after moving to a new school with limited technological resources, I started seeking for new ways to connect my students with other classes. Many of these hard-to-reach learners expressed low academic expectations, low expectations in life, limited curiosity about the wider world, and refused to acknowledge the importance of learning a foreign language. Teachers are challenged to find engaging methods that make foreign language use meaningful and relevant, especially for lower secondary learners. In this context, integrating intercultural experiences through virtual interaction has become increasingly vital as it "offers newer avenues to opening up the classroom to the world" (Ollivier, 2018).

The *Mystery Skype* game is simple in structure; however, it has great pedagogical impact on learners. It is played online by two classes from different countries

using a videoconference platform. Without revealing their location, each class takes turns asking strategic yes-or-no questions to identify their partner's country.

The activity combines authentic communication, collaborative problem-solving and relies on teamwork. Students must listen attentively, think critically and formulate purposeful questions. In this context, the English language becomes a tool of investigation, negotiation and cooperation.



Figure 1: Students during the sessions

The flexible structure of the game allows classes to organize themselves autonomously. All students assume different roles – such as questioners, answerers, mappers, note takers, think-tankers – ensuring that all contribute to the final outcome. This collaborative environment helps to lower students' language anxiety and transforms the mistake into an opportunity to learn (Freiermuth & Huang, 2021).

This virtual interaction, *Mystery Skype*, is often divided into two stages. In the first stage, students attempt to identify each other's country. Once the “mystery” is solved, the session moves into a second phase of intercultural exchange. This stage is agreed upon beforehand by the teachers and adapted according to the time available for interaction. It may involve open student-led questioning or short presentations highlighting cultural features of each country.



Figure 2: Sharing cultural aspects

To play this game teachers need only a computer equipped with a camera and audio, internet connection, and a partner class. The activity originally developed through Facebook groups⁶, which continue to serve as active communities for educators.

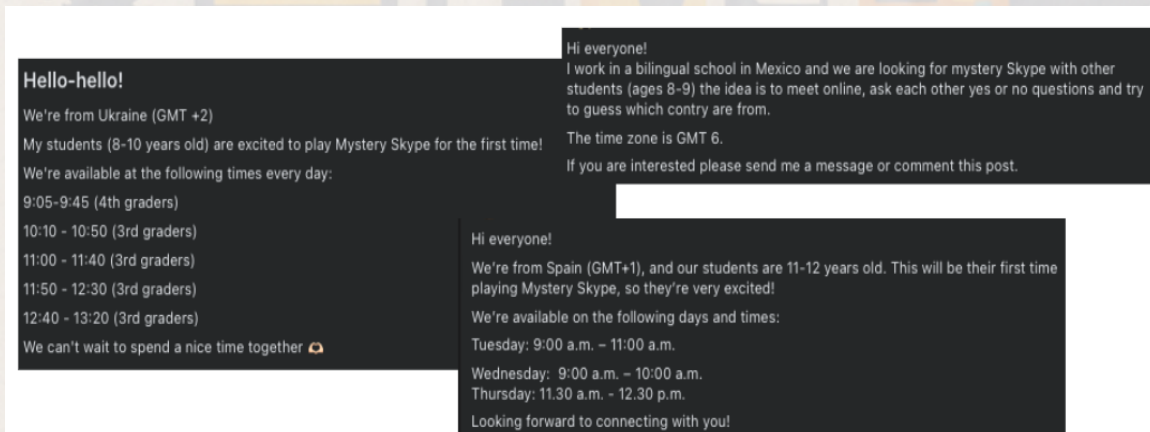


Figure 3: Examples of partner searching

To arrange a session, teachers simply post a message with their availability, the age range of their students, and connect with interested partners who respond.

⁶ The most active group can be accessed on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/333792373465203/>

5. Conclusion

The investigation aimed to address the lack of studies on virtual interactions and mainly on the game Mystery Skype with younger learners, by analysing the teachers' and students' perceptions. The Action Research was held in a TEIP School (Escola Básica Ferreira de Castro, Agrupamento de Escolas Ferreira de Castro, in Mem Martins, Sintra) and it involved 2 research cycles of 3rd-cycle students.

The findings indicate that Mystery Skype primarily promotes the development of intercultural competence. Both teachers and students highlighted the recognition of diverse cultural realities, greater empathy, and raised their curiosity about others. Communicative competence was also enhanced, especially due to the authenticity of the “real-world” context. Students reported a clear need to use English to communicate in a meaningful way, increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and described that the tension experienced during the session worked as a stimulus rather than an intimidation. Teachers confirmed that approximately 90% of their students demonstrated greater motivation to communicate following the participation in the activity.

Overall, Mystery Skype emerges as an accessible, effective and active methodology that fosters meaningful language learning, opens the classroom to the world, and contributes to the more conscious, reflective and interculturally aware citizens.

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Last but Not Lost: Developing Environmental Awareness through Storytelling

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Abstract

This paper explores the integration of environmental education and storytelling in EFL classrooms through Nicola Davies' picture book *Last*. Drawing on theoretical foundations of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), multimodal learning, and visual literacy, it demonstrates how authentic literature can simultaneously develop language skills while fostering environmental awareness. The discussion examines age-appropriate scaffolding techniques for different proficiency levels and developmental stages, highlighting how cross-curricular connections enhance learning outcomes. Practical pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities are presented, showcasing how teachers can utilize picture books to engage students emotionally with environmental issues while developing critical thinking and communication skills. The paper concludes that storytelling offers a powerful vehicle for making abstract environmental concepts accessible and meaningful, while providing authentic contexts for language acquisition.

Keywords: environmental education, storytelling, EFL, multimodal learning, picture books

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1. Introduction

Environmental education has become increasingly vital in preparing young learners to engage with the complex challenges of our world. However, environmental topics can often feel abstract or overwhelming, particularly for young English language learners with limited vocabulary to express complex ideas. Storytelling offers a powerful solution to this challenge, making abstract concepts tangible and personal while simultaneously developing language skills in meaningful contexts.

This paper explores how Nicola Davies' picture book *Last*, which tells the story of a northern white rhino experiencing life as the last of its kind, can be effectively utilized in EFL classrooms to develop both environmental awareness and language competence.

The approach presented integrates theoretical frameworks from language education, multimodal learning, and environmental education to create engaging, meaningful learning experiences.

As Ghosn (2002) argues, children's literature offers an authentic, motivating medium for language acquisition while simultaneously addressing the emotional and psychological needs of young learners. Picture books, in particular, provide rich opportunities for language development through the interplay of text and visuals, making them especially suitable for EFL contexts (Mourão, 2016).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content and Language Integrated Learning offers a dual-focused approach where content learning and language acquisition occur simultaneously (Coyle et al., 2010). This approach is particularly relevant when using environmental themes in language classrooms, as it provides authentic contexts for meaningful communication.

CLIL's 4Cs framework—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—aligns perfectly with using picture books for environmental education. The content (environmental awareness) becomes the vehicle through which communication skills develop, while cognitive engagement with complex themes and cultural understanding of global issues naturally emerge through story exploration (Bentley, 2010).

2.2 Visual literacy and multimodal learning

Picture books like *Last* combine visual and textual elements to enhance understanding, making them particularly valuable for language learners. As Kress (2010) notes, meaning is constructed through multiple modes of communication, including linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial resources.

Paivio's (2007) Dual Coding Theory provides a compelling explanation for why picture books are effective learning tools. This theory posits that the human mind processes information through two distinct but interconnected systems: one handling verbal information and the other processing visual information. When teachers engage both systems simultaneously, students create more complex interconnected memories, leading to improved retention and comprehension.

Picture books leverage this cognitive principle by pairing visuals with text, reducing the cognitive load for language learners while enhancing their ability to decode meaning. For EFL students, the illustrations in *Last* provide crucial contextual support, helping them comprehend the narrative even when their vocabulary may be limited.

2.3 Age-appropriate scaffolding for different developmental stages

Scaffolding—providing temporary supports that help learners accomplish tasks they couldn't complete independently—is essential when teaching students of different ages and proficiency levels (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Effective scaffolding considers both cognitive development and language proficiency.

For younger learners (ages 8–9), scaffolding should focus on tangible concepts and simple cause-effect relationships. Activities should incorporate simple vocabulary, repetitive sentence structures, and abundant visual aids. At this stage, concrete tasks like sorting, matching, and sequencing help students engage with the story while building foundational language skills.

Older learners (ages 12–13) can engage with more abstract thinking and critical discussions about complex themes like animal extinction and human responsibility. Scaffolding for this age group might include sentence starters for debates, graphic organizers for analyzing causes and effects, or structured discussions that guide them to articulate complex ideas.

For beginners at any age, effective scaffolding includes:

- ➔ Visual aids pairing vocabulary with images

- Sentence frames (e.g., "I think _____ because _____")
- Task chunking that breaks learning into manageable steps

For intermediate and advanced learners, appropriate scaffolds include:

- Graphic organizers for analysing cause-effect relationships
- Debate frames that provide structured prompts
- Collaborative writing tasks with assigned roles
- Translanguaging opportunities that allow strategic use of L1 for complex concept discussions

2.4 Age-appropriate scaffolding for different developmental stages

Authentic literature provides powerful tools for teaching both language skills and environmental awareness. Unlike materials specifically designed for language learning, authentic texts like *Last* expose students to natural language in meaningful contexts (Ghosn, 2002). This exposure facilitates vocabulary development, improves reading comprehension, and increases engagement through emotional connection.

Picture books are particularly effective for EFL learners because they remain accessible despite challenging vocabulary or concepts. The illustrations in *Last* support comprehension while the relatively simple text with its repetitive structures ("I am the last...") provides patterns that language learners can internalize and reproduce.

Environmental themes in authentic literature also encourage higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, evaluation, and creativity, while fostering a sense of global citizenship. As Griva and Semoglou (2012) note, when children engage with environmental content through storytelling, they develop both linguistic competence and environmental awareness simultaneously.

3. Cross-curricular connections

3.1 Why include cross-curricular connections?

Cross-curricular learning helps students see the relevance of learning in broader contexts, making classroom experiences more meaningful and applicable to real-world issues. When environmental education is integrated with language learning, students develop a more holistic understanding of both areas.

This approach naturally encourages critical thinking through interdisciplinary connections (Barnes, 2015). Students must compare perspectives, analyze relationships between different concepts, and integrate knowledge from multiple domains—skills that are essential for addressing complex environmental challenges.

Cross-curricular connections also promote holistic skill development. While exploring *Last*, students might simultaneously use:

- Language skills to express ideas and opinions
- Research skills to gather information about endangered species
- Artistic skills to create visual representations
- Collaboration skills for group tasks like debates or digital storytelling

Perhaps most importantly, cross-curricular learning builds a sense of interconnectedness—both within the curriculum and in understanding the world. This perspective is essential for preparing students to be global citizens capable of addressing multifaceted environmental issues.

3.2 Linking environmental education with language learning

Environmental education provides rich, authentic contexts for language learning. Abstract concepts like conservation, sustainability, and biodiversity become tangible through storytelling, particularly when presented through the perspective of characters like the northern white rhino in *Last*.

Stories like *Last* allow learners to see the world through another perspective, creating emotional connections that foster empathy and understanding. This emotional engagement is a powerful motivator for learning, as students become invested in the issues presented and eager to use language to express their thoughts and feelings.

Environmental themes also encourage higher-order thinking skills. When discussing why animals become endangered or brainstorming conservation solutions, students naturally engage in analysis, evaluation, and creative problem-solving—all while practicing language in authentic, purposeful ways.

4. Why *Last* is an ideal resource for EFL classrooms

Nicola Davies' *Last* offers several features that make it particularly suitable for EFL contexts:

Emotional Engagement:

The story elicits empathy and emotional connections, which are powerful motivators for learning. Students become invested in the rhino's journey, creating an authentic purpose for language use.

Accessible language:

The book uses concise, poetic language with repetition (e.g., "I am the last..."), making it easy for EFL learners to grasp sentence structures and key vocabulary. This repetition provides natural opportunities for language acquisition.

Visual literacy support:

The striking, emotive artwork helps students decode meaning without relying solely on text. The illustrations show the contrast between the grey urban environment and the vibrant natural habitat, supporting comprehension and providing rich starting points for discussions.

Global themes:

Topics like endangered animals and conservation are universally relevant, fostering global citizenship and awareness. These themes connect to students' existing knowledge and concerns about the environment, regardless of their cultural background.

Cross-curricular flexibility:

Last naturally integrates with multiple subject areas:

- Science: Ecosystems, biodiversity, human impact on nature
- Social Studies: Ethics of conservation, global citizenship
- Art: Creative projects inspired by the story

Adaptability:

The book works across different age groups and proficiency levels, with activities easily adjusted to meet diverse learning needs.

5. Classroom implementations

5.1 Guiding principles for effective grading practices

Pre-reading activities activate schema and build anticipation while introducing key vocabulary. For *Last*, effective pre-reading activities include:

Cover analysis:

Show students only the cover image, covering the title. Ask predictive questions like: "What do you think might happen in this book?" and "Looking closely at the design,

what unusual things can you see?" This encourages observation skills and hypothesis formation.

Title discussion:

Reveal the title and ask: "Why do you think the story is called *Last* and why a white rhino?" This introduces the theme of extinction while activating prior knowledge.

Frontmatter exploration:

Examine the opening illustrations and discuss the rhino's possible feelings. Create thought bubbles for the character, encouraging emotional engagement and prediction skills.

Colour analysis:

Discuss the use of colour in the illustrations. Ask: "Why does the author use these colours? What might they represent?" This develops visual literacy and analytical thinking.

5.2 While-reading activities

While-reading activities support comprehension and engagement with the text:

Read-aloud with pauses:

Read the story aloud, pausing at strategic points to discuss what is happening and to draw attention to key visual elements. This scaffolds comprehension while modelling fluent reading.

Character tracking:

Have students notice and track the girl with the green and white spotted scarf throughout the story. Ask: "What do you think she's doing? Why is she important?" This develops observation skills and narrative understanding.

Emotional journey:

Help students notice the contrasts between the "old place" (vibrant, colourful) and the zoo (grey, dull), encouraging them to connect visual elements with the emotional journey of the rhino.

Multimodal comprehension:

For lower-level learners, play just the audio while students follow in the book, allowing them to match sound with text and image simultaneously.

5.3 Post-reading activities

Post-reading activities extend learning and encourage deeper engagement with the themes:

Role on the wall:

Create a large outline of the rhino character where students contribute words or drawings representing what the character likes, dislikes, or feels. This visual mapping helps students analyse character motivation and emotions.

Research challenge:

In groups, create mind maps of information about white rhinos, why they are endangered, and conservation efforts. This extends the topic while developing research skills and topic-specific vocabulary.

Digital collaboration:

Create a collaborative digital "working wall" using tools like Padlet where students contribute facts, images, and reflections about endangered species. This builds digital literacy alongside environmental awareness.

Creative challenges:

Create a feelings timeline for Sudan (the rhino), showing his emotional journey throughout the book. For advanced students, this could include composing a soundtrack to echo these emotional shifts.

Environmental debates:

For older or more advanced students, structure debates around questions like "Is it too late to save endangered animals?" or "What is the role of zoos?" Provide sentence frames and key vocabulary to support argumentation skills.

Role Play discussions:

Assign various perspectives (wildlife ranger, local family member, conservationist, poacher, scientist, tourist, etc.) and have students present arguments from these viewpoints, encouraging multiperspective thinking.

6. Conclusion

Using Nicola Davies' *Last* as a teaching resource offers a powerful way to integrate environmental education with language learning. Through storytelling, abstract environmental concepts become tangible and emotionally resonant, creating authentic contexts for meaningful language use.

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Positive Education for Beginners

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Abstract

Positive education represents an innovative approach to schooling that integrates academic learning with character development and well-being. Grounded in the science of positive psychology pioneered by Martin Seligman, positive education emphasises equipping students with life skills such as grit, optimism, resilience, growth mindset, engagement, and mindfulness. This paper provides an overview of positive education for educators new to the field, examining its theoretical foundations, the global need for well-being interventions, and practical implementation strategies. The paper highlights key concepts including the integration of learning and well-being, pre-conditions for positive educators (self-reflection and self-intervention), the role of character strengths, and evidence-based practices. Additionally, it addresses misconceptions about positive education and emphasises that fostering well-being enhances rather than detracts from academic achievement. The paper concludes that educators can make a meaningful difference in students' lives by adopting a whole-school, evidence-based approach to positive education.

Keywords: positive education, well-being, character strengths, resilience, positive psychology

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1. Introduction

The landscape of education has undergone significant transformation in recent decades, with increasing recognition that academic achievement alone does not equip students adequately for life's challenges. Martin Seligman (1999), founder of positive psychology, argued that psychology had developed unevenly, with substantial progress in understanding and treating mental illness, while comparatively neglecting the systematic study of human strengths, capabilities, and what enables individuals to thrive. This observation extends equally to education. For too long, educational institutions have focused narrowly on academic performance while neglecting the development of character, resilience, and well-being.

Positive education emerges as a response to this imbalance. Unlike traditional approaches that treat well-being as secondary to academic concerns, positive education intentionally blends both domains, recognising that they are mutually reinforcing. This paper provides an introduction to positive education for practitioners new to the field, examining its theoretical foundations, research support, and practical implementation strategies grounded in positive psychology and educational best practice.

The urgency of adopting positive education practices has never been greater. Global data reveals alarming trends in young people's mental health. In the United States, one in five children and young people aged 3–17 have a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioural disorder (American College Health Association, 2018). In the United Kingdom, one in six children aged 6–16 experience a mental health issue (NHS Digital, 2021). Across Europe, approximately one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 years are estimated to be living with a mental disorder (UNICEF, 2021). These statistics underscore the critical need for preventative, well-being-centred interventions that build resilience and foster positive functioning in the collective.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Positive Education

2.1 Defining positive education

Positive education blends academic learning with character and well-being development. It prepares students not only with subject-matter knowledge but also with life skills including grit, optimism, resilience, growth mindset, engagement, and mindfulness. Critically, positive education is based on the science of well-being and happiness—positive psychology—and is supported by international networks such as the International Positive Education Network (n.d.).

Seligman's work at Geelong Grammar School in Australia provided the foundational model for positive education practice. His framework demonstrates that when learning and well-being operate together, they create a synergistic effect (Norrish, 2015). Academic learning pursued in isolation can easily become a lonely, impersonal process, with achievements that feel empty of meaning and do little to equip students for life beyond school. Conversely, well-being interventions pursued independently may foster resilience and meaning but may not constitute positive education in the fullest sense. When learning and well-being are intentionally combined, each reinforces the other, and together they help equip students for success in life with well-being (International Positive Education Network & World Government Summit, 2017).

2.2 Positive education and language teaching

The application of positive education principles is particularly relevant to language teaching contexts. Sarah Mercer observes in the Express Publishing English for the 21st Century Skills that language classes are the perfect place to integrate an emphasis on well-being and language learning, given that we typically focus on other educational goals beyond narrowly defined linguistic ones (Mavridi & Xerri, 2020). In addition, Sarah Mercer notes that teachers frequently foster aspects of learner well-being in order to sustain the long-term effort that successful language learning demands (Mavridi & Xerri, 2020). This recognition positions language educators as uniquely situated to implement positive education practices, as the extended nature of language acquisition naturally creates opportunities to develop resilience, persistence, and character strengths.

2.3 The "broad and build" theory

Barbara Fredrickson's "Broaden and Build" theory provides important theoretical support for positive education. This theory suggests that positive emotions broaden our cognitive and behavioural repertoires, enabling us to build lasting psychological, intellectual, and social resources. This theoretical framework justifies the inclusion of well-being and positive emotion cultivation in educational settings, not as tangential to learning, but as fundamental to it (Fredrickson, 2001).

3. The Global Need for Positive Education

Three compelling reasons (the three "whys") justify the urgent adoption of positive education approaches globally.

3.1 Addressing negative feelings and mental health crisis

In a large national sample of U.S. college students, 25.9% reported that anxiety had negatively affected their academic performance in the past 12 months, 16.9% reported this for depression, and 31.9% for stress (American College Health Association, 2018). In Australia, approximately one in seven children and adolescents aged 4–17 years have experienced a mental disorder in the past 12 months, and nearly one in three young people aged 12–25 report high or very high levels of psychological distress (Johnson et al., 2016). These figures demonstrate that mental health challenges are not marginal concerns but represent a widespread crisis demanding comprehensive intervention.

3.2 Cultivating mindfulness and focus on the present

Second, positive education emphasises mindfulness and a focus on the present moment. A key principle emerges from reflecting on time itself: the past is gone, the future has not yet arrived, but the present is a gift. By encouraging students to focus on their studies and engagement now, educators foster resilience for future difficulties. Savouring—the practice of fully appreciating positive experiences—and conscious engagement with the present moment elevate students to "another level of mindfulness." This focus on the present is neither escapism nor denial of future planning, but rather a cultivation of psychological presence that enhances both learning and well-being (Kokolas, 2025).

3.3 Helping students clarify and live according to values

Third, positive education supports students in identifying and living according to their personal values. Henry Kimsey-House and Phillip Sandahl, in their work on co-active coaching, emphasise that values can be understood as an inner compass that helps us act in ways that feel honest and aligned with whom we truly are in the present moment (Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, Whitworth, 2011). Importantly, values are not about what we would like to become or what we think we should be—these represent aspirations or external pressures rather than authentic values. When students clarify their actual values and learn to make decisions consistent with those values, they develop a compass for navigating life's complexities. Additionally, achieving success and values won't make you necessarily happy but you need to have happiness and values so as to achieve success (Kokolas, 2025).

4. Pre-Conditions for Positive Educators

Implementing positive education effectively requires more than knowledge of theory and techniques. Three pre-conditions are essential for educators who wish to foster positive education: self-reflection, self-intervention, and taking action.

4.1 Self-reflection

Self-reflection forms the foundation of positive education practice. Educators must maintain their own course journals, recording observations and insights from their practice. A structured reflective model, such as Gibbs' reflective cycle, offers a clear process for this work: experiences are documented, time and space are deliberately set aside for reflection, and the insights generated are then used to inform and improve future practice (University of Edinburgh, 2024). This systematic approach to self-reflection ensures that positive education practices are not superficial or formulaic but genuinely grounded in lived experience and continual refinement.

4.2 Self-intervention

The second pre-condition is equally critical: if educators do not cultivate positivity and well-being in themselves, they cannot authentically foster these qualities in students. The principle is straightforward: "If you don't feel positive yourself as a teacher, you can't make your students feel positive. First help yourself, then others." This principle aligns with Justin Robinson's (Geelong Grammar School) observation that "Positive Education is not taught, it's caught." (McGee, 2019). Students learn most powerfully through the embodied example of their educators. When teachers model resilience, engagement with values, character strengths, and mindfulness, students absorb these approaches naturally. This is why self-intervention—deliberately cultivating one's own well-being and positive psychology practices—is a pre-condition for effectiveness.

4.3 Taking action

The third essential pre-condition is taking action—moving from reflection and internal work to tangible, embodied practice. Teachers must become the daily embodiment, reminder, and expression of positive education principles. It is not sufficient to understand positive education intellectually; educators must actively demonstrate these principles in their classrooms, relationships with students, and everyday interactions. This means consciously applying character strengths in decision-making, explicitly discussing values with students, practising mindfulness visibly, and responding to challenges with the resilience and perspective they wish to cultivate in young people. When teachers take action and become living examples of positive education, the

approach ceases to be abstract and becomes contagious. Students do not merely learn about resilience, values, and character strengths; they witness and absorb them through direct observation of their teachers' lived practice. Taking action transforms positive education from theory into lived reality, making the educator's embodiment of these principles the most powerful teaching tool available.

5. Evidence-Based Implementation: Character Strengths and Beyond

Research robustly supports the connection between well-being and academic performance. Waters demonstrates that school-based positive psychology interventions produce measurable improvements in student outcomes (Waters 2011, 2017). Suldo et al. (2011) found that subjective well-being predicted longitudinal academic success. Similarly, meta-analyses by Durlak et al. (2011) show that universal interventions enhancing social and emotional learning produce significant positive effects on academic performance.

5.1 Character strengths as a common language

One of the most practical tools for implementing positive education is the Character Strengths framework developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004). This framework identifies 24-character strengths organised under six virtues, providing a common language for educators and students to recognise and develop human strengths. The VIA Character Strengths survey (available free online at www.viacharacter.org) has been completed by over 25 million people globally.

In practice, educators can introduce students to character strengths through structured activities as are recommended by Kokolas (2025): students complete the VIA survey, reflect on whether the results resonate with them, and identify which strengths they would like to develop. Students then share their findings with classmates, fostering peer learning. Subsequently, educators can create "inter-strengths groups"—temporary groups organised around shared strengths or shared desires to develop particular strengths. These groups meet periodically to discuss and develop their target strengths collaboratively. This approach transforms abstract well-being concepts into concrete, observable, and developable competencies that feel relevant to students' lives.

5.2 Mental contrasting and perspective

Beyond character strengths, positive education employs other evidence-based techniques. Mental contrasting, developed by Gabriele Oettingen (2014) and detailed in her book *Rethinking Positive Thinking*, involves articulating a wish, imagining the positive outcome, identifying obstacles, and developing a plan—a structured approach to goal-setting that acknowledges both possibility and challenge. This technique moves beyond simplistic positive thinking by requiring individuals to realistically consider barriers to success, thereby increasing motivation and follow-through. Perspective-taking similarly represents a crucial skill. Always considering that other viewpoints exist, students develop cognitive flexibility and empathy. Practical activities include analysing characters' emotions in stories, playing perspective-dependent games such as chess, and engaging in dinner-table conversations exploring diverse viewpoints on issues.

6. Misconceptions about Positive Education

To clarify the scope and nature of positive education, it is important to address common misconceptions.

Positive education is not about constant happiness or avoiding negative emotions. A comprehensive positive education approach acknowledges the full range of human emotion—joy, sadness, anger, Positive education does not shield children from failure and adversity. To the contrary, resilience—the and fear- all serve important functions. Rather than suppressing difficult emotions, positive education teaches students to recognise, understand, and work constructively with them.

Positive education does not shield children from failure and adversity. To the contrary, resilience—the capacity to face challenges and recover—is a core focus. Educators deliberately create manageable challenges and support students in developing mental and emotional resources to navigate setbacks.

Positive education is not a "one-size-fits-all" program that can be imported unchanged into diverse contexts. Different schools, communities, and students have different needs and values. Positive education is better understood as an orientation—a commitment to evidence-based, strength-based, whole-school practices that integrate well-being with academic learning.

Finally, positive education is not another isolated program to add to an already crowded curriculum. Rather, it represents an approach that permeates all aspects of schooling, integrating well-being into existing academic and pastoral structures.

7. The Power of Choice and Perspective

A central insight of positive education is the power of human agency and perspective. Martin Seligman (2018) emphasises that we have one past but multiple futures. This recognition of multiple possible futures contrasts sharply with deterministic thinking. We possess far more choice than we typically acknowledge.

Victor Frankl's (1959) observation captures this insight powerfully by stressing that there is a brief gap between what happens to us and how we react, and in that gap, we have the ability to choose a response that shapes our development and preserves our freedom. This principle represents the heart of positive education: regardless of circumstances, individuals retain the capacity to choose how they interpret situations and respond to them. Educators who help students recognise this power—and who model it themselves—fundamentally transform students' sense of agency and possibility.

Lyubomirsky's (2008) research suggests that well-being is determined by genetics (50%), circumstances (10%), and intentional activity (40%). This distribution is particularly empowering: whilst we cannot change genetics substantially and circumstances are partly beyond our control, the 40 per cent influenced by intentional activity—what we do and how we think—remains within our agency. Positive education specifically targets this 40 per cent, teaching students to recognise and exercise their power to choose thoughts, actions, and responses.

8. Conclusion

Positive education represents not a radical departure from educational best practice but rather a deliberate, evidence-based approach to integrating what educators have always known implicitly: that people thrive when their strengths are recognised, their values are honoured, and their well-being is nurtured alongside their intellectual development.

The global mental health crisis affecting young people demands that educators move beyond passive hope that students will develop resilience spontaneously. Instead, positive education provides concrete, research-supported frameworks and practices for actively cultivating well-being, character strengths, and psychological flourishing.

As Mercer observes, language classes are particularly well-positioned to integrate positive education, as language learning itself requires the very qualities—persistence, engagement, optimism, and resilience—that positive education explicitly develops. For all educators, but especially for those working in language teaching contexts, positive education offers a path forward: one that enhances rather than detracts

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Leaders in the Making: A Joint Erasmus+ Project – Unlocking the Future

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Abstract

This paper presents Leaders in the Making: Unlocking the Future, a collaborative Erasmus+ project involving five language education institutions across Portugal, Romania, Italy, Croatia and Serbia. The project aims to develop students' leadership, life and entrepreneurial competencies through a structured, transferable course while simultaneously supporting teachers' professional growth through collaborative material design. Drawing on principles of coaching, mentoring and training, the project integrates analytical thinking, creativity, resilience and social influence into age-appropriate learning pathways. The paper outlines the project rationale, partnership structure, development phases and expected outcomes for students, teachers and institutions. It also highlights the value of international collaboration, shared expertise and sustainable resource creation within the Erasmus+ framework. Finally, the paper offers practical guidance for institutions considering participation in collaborative Erasmus+ projects, emphasising strategic planning, stakeholder involvement and long-term impact.

Keywords: Erasmus+ projects, leadership education, teacher development, international collaboration

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1. Introduction

In recent years, language education institutions have increasingly recognised the need to go beyond linguistic outcomes and support learners in developing broader competencies that enable them to thrive in complex social, academic and professional contexts. Leadership, critical thinking, creativity and resilience are now widely acknowledged as essential life skills, particularly for young people navigating an uncertain future (OECD, 2018). Within this context, the Erasmus+ programme provides a powerful framework for international collaboration, innovation and sustainable educational development (European Commission, 2023).

Leaders in the Making is a joint Erasmus+ project developed by International House Torres Vedras (Portugal), International House Bucharest (Romania), IH Giga Catania (Italy), IH Jantar Split (Croatia) and Oxford School Leskovac (Serbia). The project brings together diverse institutional perspectives to design a structured leadership course for students, while simultaneously fostering professional growth among teachers through collaborative design processes. This paper reports on the rationale, structure and implementation of the project and reflects on its broader educational value.

2. Rationale for a Collaborative Erasmus+ Project

2.1 Character strengths as a common language

Collaborative Erasmus+ projects offer institutions the opportunity to engage with diverse educational cultures, pedagogical traditions and professional practices. By working across national contexts, partner schools gain access to a wide range of perspectives that can challenge assumptions and stimulate innovation. For Leaders in the Making, collaboration was seen as essential to ensuring that leadership was conceptualised not as a culturally narrow construct, but as a flexible set of competencies adaptable to different contexts.

From an institutional perspective, participation in Erasmus+ projects enhances professional credibility and positions schools as forward-thinking organisations committed to educational quality and innovation. In addition, Erasmus+ funding enables the development of materials and initiatives that might otherwise be financially or logistically unattainable.

2.2 Benefits for teachers and students

Teachers involved in international projects benefit from structured professional development, exposure to alternative methodologies and sustained dialogue with peers from other countries. These experiences contribute to reflective practice and professional confidence. For students, Erasmus+ projects provide opportunities to develop intercultural awareness, autonomy and a global mindset, even when physical mobility is limited. The Leaders in the Making project was designed to maximise these benefits by embedding international perspectives directly into the course content and learning activities.

3. Key Concepts Underpinning the Project

3.1 Coaching, mentoring and training

The project draws on three complementary approaches to teacher and learner development: coaching, mentoring and training. Coaching is understood as a non-directive process that empowers individuals through reflection, goal-setting and problem-solving, with the facilitator adopting an enabling role. Training, by contrast, focuses on the structured delivery of specific knowledge and skills, with clear objectives and measurable outcomes. Mentoring occupies a developmental middle ground, relying on experience-sharing, guidance and supportive relationships between more and less experienced practitioners.

These distinctions informed both the design of the student-facing course and the collaborative processes among teachers. Material development combined structured training elements with mentoring relationships across institutions, while encouraging a coaching mindset that valued reflection and autonomy.

3.2 Life and entrepreneurial competencies

The leadership framework adopted in Leaders in the Making aligns with widely recognised life and entrepreneurial competencies. These include analytical thinking and innovation, critical thinking and analysis, creativity and initiative, resilience and flexibility, problem-solving, reasoning and ideation, leadership and social influence, and active learning strategies. Rather than treating leadership as a single trait, the project conceptualises it as a dynamic combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours that can be developed over time.

4. Project Structure and Implementation

4.1 Partnership and management

The project is coordinated across five partner institutions over a thirty-month period. Management combines scheduled transnational meetings with regular online progress meetings, supported by continuous email communication and shared digital workspaces. Google Drive and collaborative documents facilitate co-authoring, while project management platforms such as Jira and Key Action Plus enable task tracking, reporting and compliance with Erasmus+ requirements.

4.2 Development phases

The project follows a clearly defined sequence of development stages. Initial work focused on creating a shared course outline and syllabus. This was followed by the development of presentations, student handouts and interactive materials such as printable cards. Subsequent phases include lesson plan design, piloting in partner institutions and a revision stage informed by classroom feedback. This staged approach ensures both pedagogical coherence and adaptability to local teaching contexts.

5. Expected Outcomes and Impact

The primary output of Leaders in the Making is a transferable leadership course that can be adapted for different age groups and educational settings. For students, the course aims to enhance self-awareness, collaboration, decision-making and social responsibility. For teachers, the project provides sustained professional development through international collaboration, material design and reflective dialogue.

At an institutional level, the project contributes to long-term capacity building by generating reusable resources and strengthening international networks. The emphasis on sustainability ensures that project outcomes extend beyond the funding period, benefiting future cohorts of learners and educators.

6. Implications for Institutions Considering Erasmus+ Projects

Institutions interested in embarking on collaborative Erasmus+ projects should begin by identifying a clear educational goal aligned with programme priorities such as inclusion, digital transformation or sustainability. Building partnerships through established

networks and Erasmus+ platforms is essential, as is the development of a realistic implementation plan with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Equally important is stakeholder involvement. Engaging teachers, students and other community members from the outset increases ownership and the likelihood of meaningful impact. Once a project is underway, regular communication, careful time management and a focus on quality outcomes are key to success.

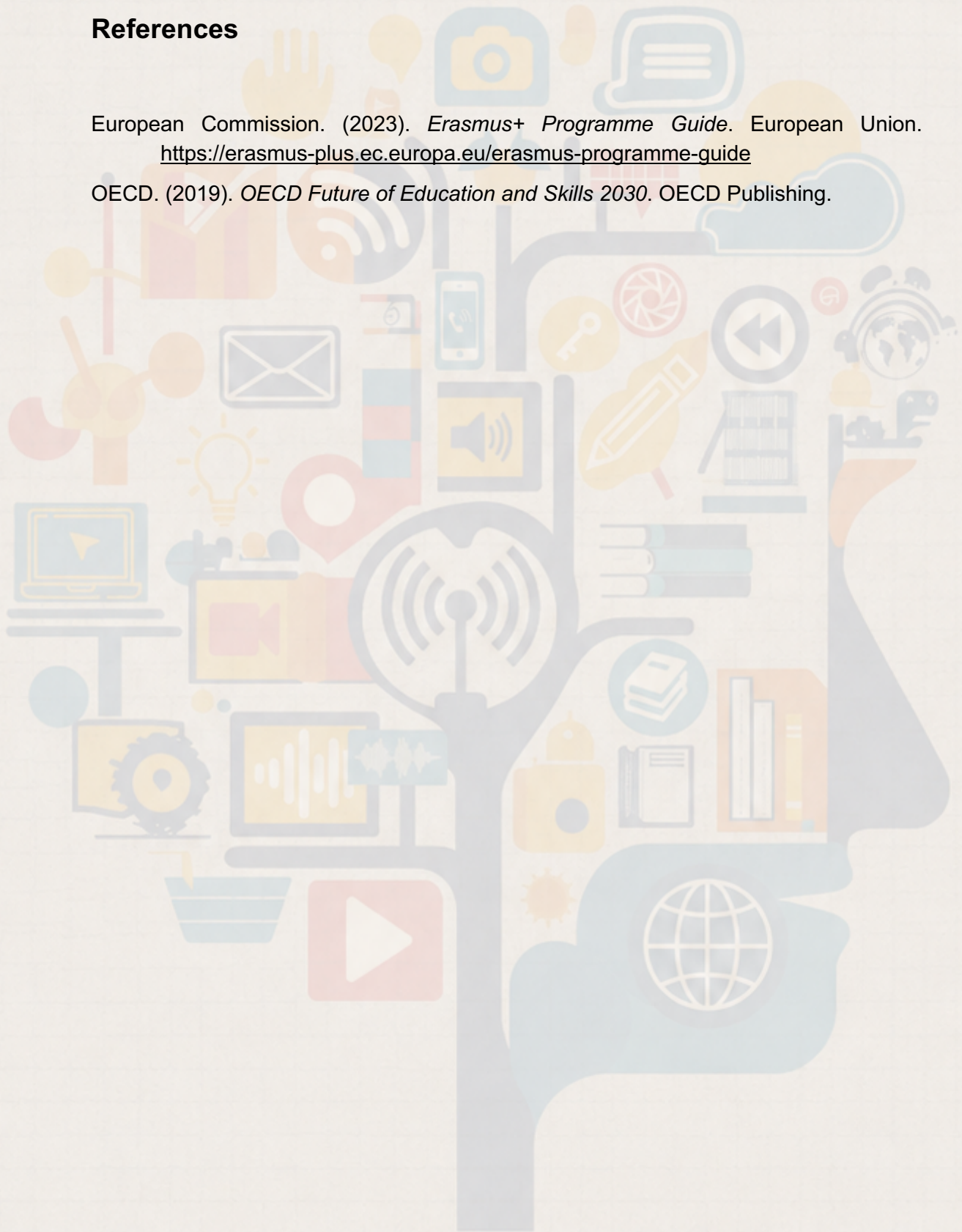
8. Conclusion

Leaders in the Making illustrates the potential of collaborative Erasmus+ projects to enrich language education by integrating leadership development with teacher professional growth. Through shared expertise, structured processes and a commitment to sustainability, international partnerships can create educational initiatives that are both innovative and enduring. The project demonstrates that leadership can be taught, learned and lived within language education, preparing learners and educators alike for the challenges of an interconnected world.

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I Get It!: Ensuring our Learners understand in a Multimodal Classroom

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Abstract

Before learners create a final product in a multimodal classroom, teachers need to see if they are successfully passing from one stepping stone to the next in the learning process. Smaller multimodal tasks can be used to check the understanding of a video or a spoken narrative, for instance, or to scaffold the oracy that pre-empts text production. This is formative assessment, which helps the teacher gauge if a class is ready to proceed to the next step. Presented here are a range of ideas for English Language and Bilingual Education classes in Primary, Middle School and Secondary. To go beyond the “give this a try” list of activities, the presenter has attempted to draw out theoretical considerations. It is hoped that these examples inspire colleagues to contemplate how communication and learning to learn skills like these might be developed for different ages and stages.

Keywords: multimodality, formative assessment, visual learning, oracy

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1. Introduction

APPI conferences encourage participants to think deeply about trending concepts, like agency and collaborative learning, so that practitioners can actually apply these ideas to their teaching. The 38th APPI Conference was no different. As multimodality can refer to how information is captured in video, audio, gesture, images and text, its impact on classrooms is enormous. What was also made evident in this conference was that multimodality can run in two directions: it can be a way for content to be presented as well as for learners to show they have assimilated that content.

An experienced teacher may readily share her work with colleagues; what may be more challenging for her is to trace the theoretical origins of her praxis. As was the case with the term “agency”, it was precisely an APPI conference that made multimodality enter the nomenclature of many practitioners like her in the first place. Multimodality has lived on as a theme since then: a case in point is how visual learning within ELT has been re-addressed at APPI and other events (e.g. Reis, 2025).

Nevertheless, the theoretical underpinning of I get it! can be traced to sources beyond ELT. For instance, General Education literature provides input on topics like formative assessment, in whose name multimodal activities may be used to gauge learner understanding. This in turn evolves into Assessment for Learning (AfL), an approach that has greatly influenced the presenter’s praxis. The AfL toolkit provides ideas to help teachers help their learners see what is expected of them. For instance, it includes WAGOLLS, or model products to show the class “what a good one looks like”. This technique is especially important when multimodality leads to more creative products, like the ones presented in the workshop.

Another relevant concept is the one of oracy (e.g., Mercer & Howe, 2012). This concept goes beyond the ELT definition related to one of the four skills and the more general idea of oracy through presentations and drama. It refers to the thinking aloud aspect of making content one’s own and to understanding more abstract concepts through structured dialogue before learners move on to written texts.

Specialist subject content is also mentioned here because many ELT teachers like the speaker work in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), both hard and soft. Marsh (2021) recommended broader reading to his audience in a plenary at Working CLIL. That is, CLIL teachers need to go beyond ELT and venture into specialist subject literature. Many of the examples for this workshop came from hard and soft CLIL Science. This work is informed by guides from the United Kingdom, like the one on using realia for representing ideas (Asoko & de Boó, 2002). More recent literature on

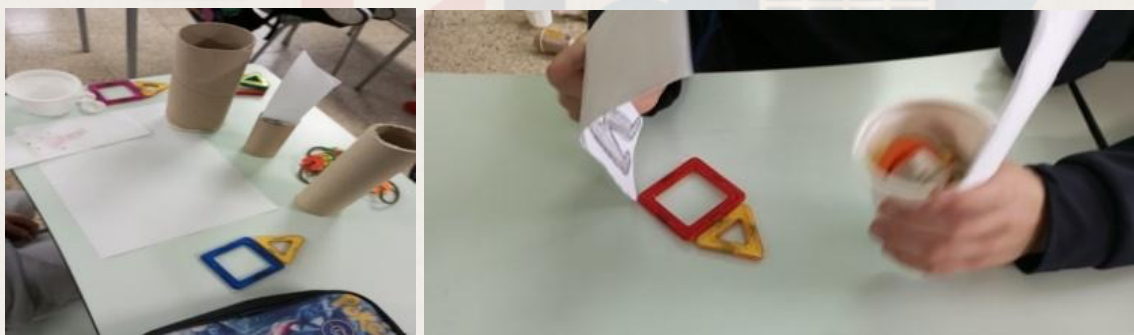
multimodality (Davis & Trowdale, 2024) and structured oracy in the Science classroom (Earle et al., 2025) has only reinforced the speaker's belief in the importance of these concepts.

Of course, reflective practice through decades in the classroom and the human capital cascaded from colleague to colleague also play a role in developing a teacher's praxis. What may be a gradual paradigm shift away from technology and screens has driven many practitioners like her back to more hands-on activities. The other factor teachers perceive and academics are starting to evidence is a decline in literacy. Our learners may need more scaffolded oracy before encountering the content in a text in any language (Mercer & Howe, 2012; Wexler, 2019).

2. Showing Understanding

2.1 Total Physical Response with realia for older students

Normally the technique of "listen and do" through Total Physical Response is associated with Very Young Learner programmes. However, a failed attempt at a paper-based dictogloss led to a change of tack for a 6th-year ELT class. The teacher's objective was to scaffold the students' understanding of a narrative presented orally: a version of Little Red Riding Hood. The physical setting of the story, with the two houses at each end of the forest, were represented with objects at hand; magnetic shapes, a plastic cup, bottle caps, toy flowers and kitchen towels and toilet roll tubes. Students made paper puppets of the wolf and the girl (Figures 1 and 2). The teacher then told the story as small groups manipulated their own sets of these objects. As a final project, the groups were asked to reproduce the story in different ecosystems.



Figures 1 and 2: Using realia for a TPR activity (Arenales Santa Juana, Ferrol, Spain).

A similar technique was used with another orally presented story, with chopsticks! The students made gestures and sound effects as a story about the American Wild West

was being told. Card game sets, taken from a very old children’s magazine, served as a dictogloss so that the class could re-tell the story.

Not only were these activities engaging for the students; they also provided an immediate indication of understanding because the teacher could see if the elements were correctly manipulated. More introverted learners could “hide” behind the realia and busy hands meant that it was less likely for minds to wander during an oral activity.

2.2 Systematically building those skills: making mind-maps, flow charts and analogies

Those English specialists who have been privileged enough to work alongside Early Years staff in schools often receive gems of wisdom like “if a child can’t feel something, he or she cannot learn it” (Demitroff and Seftel, 2025). This input can inspire activities that go from 3-D with realia to a paper product as a visual aid. A case in point is a physical timeline, like the one below related to the Big Bang (Figure 3). The challenge is in finding realia from what surrounds teachers and students at school and home.



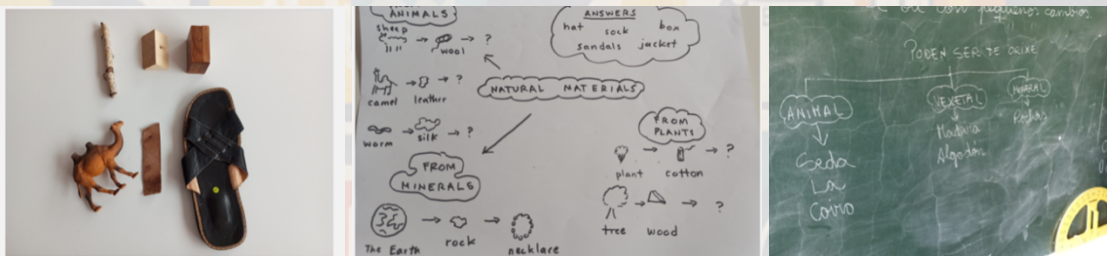
Figure 3: A timeline for the Big Bang with realia (Tui summer camp, Portuguese and Galician schools).

Manipulating objects gives welcome relief from screen- and paper-tethered content. Adapted from an idea seen on a decades-old Teachers’ TV video, large plastic rings and real objects were used as a physical Venn diagram (Figure 4). The topic was conductors and non-conductors in electricity; this activity spilled into the English class because there was not enough time in the Science class. Students who normally would not participate in English were engaged and those who were more analytical than linguistic could shine.



Figure 4: Venn diagram with realia (Arenales Santa Juana, Ferrol, Spain).

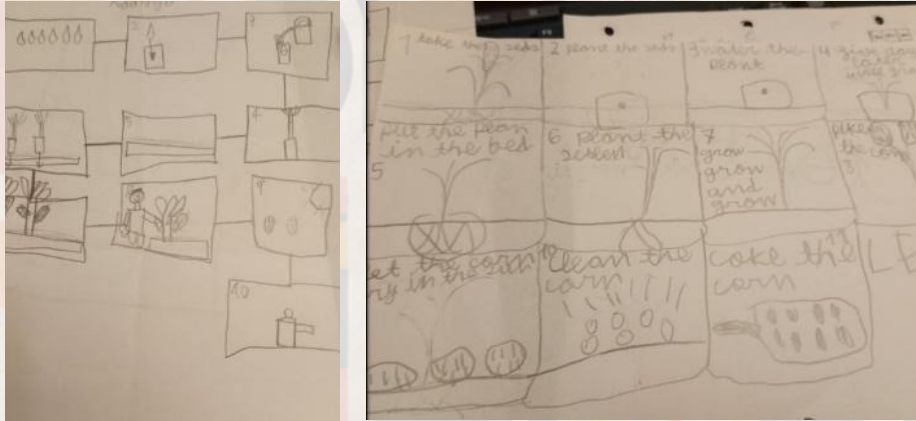
A hands-on ethos inspired another activity. 3rd-year pupils in English had been asked to group objects placed in a seemingly random manner on the classroom floor. Again, it was the case of a Science topic sneaking into the English class: the natural material chain. There were a toy sheep, a ball of wool and a woolly hat; a camel, a piece of leather and a sandal and so on (Figure 5). The next step involved adding elements to a teacher-scaffolded mind map (Figures 6 and 7). Imagine the teacher and her colleagues' surprise when her pupils were unable to see the link between this activity in English and a unit they had done on the same topic, natural materials, in the L1s the week before in Science class.



Figures 5, 6 and 7: From the objects to the scaffolded mind map. Starting point: a previous Science class (Arenales, Santa Juana, Ferrol, Spain).

This experience raised questions: how can teachers as a community within a school or neighbouring institutions walk their learners through the steps towards multimodal expression, whatever the subject they are teaching? Moreover, what are the milestones of learner competence across the stages? These questions led to the next experiment: revisiting an activity with the same class from one year to the next. This time the input came from a video on how corn was grown. The same children who produced a chain of images in a primitive flow chart in the 2nd year of Primary were presented with those drawings in the third year and asked if they could remember anything from their

work. They then saw the same video and re-did the flow charts (Figures 8 and 9). It was easy to see how the sophistication of the visual scheme and the amount of detail they produced had greatly increased. This exercise opened the discussion about what makes a good flow chart, a learning process that would be ongoing.



Figures 8 and 9: Flow charts from one year to the next (Jesús Maestro, Ferrol, Spain).

Realia make a reappearance in these CLIL Science classes in the form of representing abstract ideas. For example, second-year Primary pupils might learn that chewed food goes down a tube called the oesophagus. At this age, pupils represent it with a kitchen towel roll. In later years, as the same learners realise what involuntary muscles are and that our food is pushed gradually down to the stomach, they are ready to compare this body part with a tube of toothpaste (Allison, 1977).

It is not just a question of the teacher giving learners ready-made packs of realia. Her creativity inspires them to find their own systems of representation. More importantly, learners will get more adept at justifying their choices, in both linguistic and cognitive terms. Below is an example of what 5th-year students did for their own projects on other body systems (Figures 10, 11 and 12).



Figures 10, 11 and 12: Using realia to model circulatory systems (Jesús Maestro, Ferrol, Spain).

English teachers who have no contact with CLIL can still find inspiration from this strategy. When a concept is abstract or difficult, it can be illustrated with realia or a visual reference. When a vocabulary item is not part of a working repertoire, an English student can explain how something else is similar. Students have the tools to break down abstract concepts in texts. Sequences are more memorable with realia and these objects provide a sensory dimension to our screen and paper-dominated classrooms.

A Secondary Biology CLIL class on the immune system was made more engaging and accessible through realia based on a unit from the magnificent Exploratorium bank of resources (Figure 13). That model has since inspired students to do the same with new topics and outside the Science class, among others. Plenaries, or whole class discussions on the learning process, make good habits explicit.



Figure 13: Realia used to represent the immune system (idea from Exploratorium).

3. From Oracy to Written Texts through Papercraft

ELT teachers doing cross-curricular projects in Primary and Middle School often analyse the text they need and then pre-teach the grammar and text organisation before getting their pupils to produce their own versions. A classic example is the process text on the water cycle. The English teacher may want to introduce the Passive tenses (even if it is only for functional use) and then have learners order the stages.

Those who work from Pre-primary to Primary and Middle School and therefore have a strong instinct of child development stages may express concern here. Even in their 5th year (Middle School in Portugal, still Primary in Spain), learners may be able to model that process text with intensive scaffolding, but they may not be assimilating the thinking behind the task. For instance, they might be just starting to get the idea of what the introduction and conclusion of any text is or what a process description really involves. Indeed, some 5th year students have difficulty recognising what a process is.

Teachers have to be sure that the class has a feel for the overall shape of the process and that they can order its sequence. Just as a story necklace paper craft might help structure a narrative, other types of physical scaffolding could come in handy for different text types. Hence the creation of this papercraft for a unit on body systems in CLIL Natural Science. 4th-year students of Primary simply ordered the stages and drew pictures with key words. The following year, in the 5th, they can think about the introduction, in this case, the general function of a body system.

Realia stay in view. The photo below (Figure 14) shows how the general function of the digestive system, mentioned in the introduction, is represented. An energy stick and jar of sweets are for the energy and nutrients the system gives us; the brown sock represents the waste it eliminates. Process texts often start with the general function of the system and learners often have difficulty expressing this. Next to this image is the papercraft (Figure 15): the introduction is on the folded flap along the top, the paper legs represent each stage and the inverted umbrella serves as the conclusion to catch main ideas and add an extra piece of food for thought in its tip.



Figures 14 and 15: Realia and papercraft to scaffold a process text (Jesús Maestro, Ferrol).

The 9th-year Biology Secondary students mentioned earlier used a similar technique to plan an oral presentation, again on the digestive system, but in much greater detail. However, not everyone in the class liked this approach to note-taking; some preferred more traditional, linear note-taking techniques. A dialogue had opened: students became aware of their learning preferences. They could then experiment with different multimodal products until they find what works best for them. For instance, they could try being more playful with their note-taking (Figure 16).

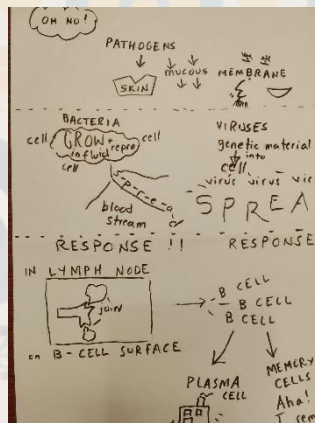


Figure 16: Playful immune system notes.

Whatever the age group, while learners are mastering complex topics in classroom discussions or are gathering information from multimodal sources, they need something to hold on to. Paper crafts provide an anchor in a classroom where oracy predominates as learners work through their ideas and think aloud. However, if teachers in Spain and Portugal are helping schools move from a transmission-based system of talk and chalk to a more competence-based model, they need to work together to train the learners progressing through the system. The communication skills for oracy and multimodality need to be systematically developed across the stages.

4. “It’s only cool if it’s with the whole school” Speaker’s Mantra

This APPI workshop focused on one area the teachers in a school can establish a coherent policy on: posters, which later evolve into Canva or PowerPoint presentations. An ELT teacher in one school in Spain helps her pupils with poster design for other subjects in the CLIL Art class. Her 3rd-year classes concentrate on distribution. In the following year, they work on pop-up and fold-up attachments. By fifth, they concentrate on lettering and spacing. Throughout this training, they re-visit drawing and colouring techniques they have seen in other Art sessions (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Learning how to make pop-ups on posters (Arenales Santa Juana, Ferrol, Spain).

Learners forget that poster-making is more than just the imagery and lettering. Posters are often used to show a learner's mastery of content and self-expression. A constant worry is that cutting and pasting is taking place. Thus, there should be a whole-school policy of only using key words and not sentences or paragraphs. Another concern is that more time is spent on pretty graphics and the basic information is neglected. Help with timing and project planning is crucial. An illustration that is copied, but not understood or acknowledged, must be addressed. Craft foam and glitter should give way to more environmentally-friendly materials on these creations.

5. Conclusion

A workshop can be a showcase of activities that colleagues can apply to their classrooms. This session presented ideas for encouraging learners to use realia and visuals to show that they “get it” and to provide anchors in multimodal classroom with a strong emphasis on oracy. However, the presenter also hopes that these real examples will encourage her colleagues to consider how these activities and techniques might look across the ages. In this way, a whole-school and community-wide approach to communication and learning to learn skills development can be promoted.

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