



الكلية الأسترالية في الكويت  
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**Teaching and Learning English  
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# INTRODUCTION


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The present collection includes selected papers from the third and fourth conferences organized by the English Language Department at the Australian College of Kuwait. The third conference was held on March 25th, 2017 and focused on 'Learning Strategies', while the fourth conference was held on March 24th, 2018 and its main theme was "Creativity, Fun and Interactive Strategies in the ESL classroom".

While the first article by Carol Griffiths is on the theme of learning strategies, the rest of the contributions are around the theme of creativity, fun and interactive strategies in the classroom. In her comprehensive article, Griffiths defines learning strategies, reviews studies on their use in teaching, and provides practical recommendations for teachers to ensure their effectiveness as well as recommendations for future research.

In their paper entitled 'Helping Students Develop Communicative Efficiency in Speaking', Sarah Al Shihab and Camille Bondi provide a summary of a number of interactive fun classroom activities to teach speaking that they presented in their workshop.

The third paper 'Engaging English in Class and on Stage through Fairy Tales' by Alison Larkin Koushki proposes a project-based approach in which literature, namely folk tales, are integrated. The approach the author argues is an effective way to enhance not only the four language skills, but it also improves emotional intelligence and cultural awareness.



In their workshop on 'Inferencing in an Academic Setting', Khaleda Al Khoraiabet and Konul Gabulzada present a number of fun interactive strategies to teach inferencing in listening and reading using both paper-and-pencil and online activities.

Creativity in Language Teaching through Task-Based Learning was the focus of the workshop by Fajer Al Rashid and Fajer Al Shammari. The presenters discussed two main creative ways of teaching reading, writing and grammar: reverse reading and erasure. The last paper is a summary of the keynote speech and a workshop given by the plenary speaker Nik Peachey. Peachey shared a wealth of online activities and resources that could be used by either the instructor or the student to produce language in a very creative way.

Overall, this collection includes very practical activities for teachers and students that they can apply and enjoy during their learning and teaching experience inside or outside the classroom. We thank the authors for their contributions and all the people who were involved in the organization of the two events and the production of these proceedings.

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# The Language Learning Strategy Puzzle: What is their Role in Successful Language Learning?

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## Abstract

This article will begin by discussing a definition of language learning strategies and identifying a number of constructs which are commonly confused with language learning strategies, but which are, in fact, different (e.g. skills, styles and other types of strategies). We will then go on to discuss the relationship between strategies and successful language learning.

Strategies, however, do not exist in isolation. In fact, the contributing factors all interact like an extremely complex jigsaw puzzle. Other variables will therefore be considered, including orchestration (the way strategies interact with each other), context (e.g. foreign/target language), goal orientation (e.g. general English exam) and individual learner characteristics (e.g. motivation, beliefs, investment, affect, proficiency, aptitude, autonomy, age, gender, nationality, culture, personality, style, etc.).

When it comes to strategy instruction, we have to say that by no means all strategy instruction programmes have been successful. The article will look at some unsuccessful programmes as well as looking at others which have produced more positive results. Five principles for successful programmes will be suggested: awareness raising,

explicit instruction, practice, implicit instruction and evaluation, as well as principles for teacher education. The article will conclude by discussing the Tornado Hypothesis, according to which, language learning and strategy development are not linear, but spiral.

## **Introduction**

It was anticipated by pioneering researchers such as Rubin (1975) that discoveries regarding how successful students learn could be used by other students to learn more successfully, and in the years since, research has continued in order to explore ways of conducting effective strategy instruction. However, in order to conduct valid and reliable research, a sound definition is essential (e.g. Gu, 2012). Although strategy definition has given rise to much controversy (e.g. Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Griffiths, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2018; Macaro, 2006; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper & Russo, 1985), a review of the literature suggests a compact definition of language learning strategies as activities chosen by learners for the purpose of learning language. This definition contains four essential elements:

- Strategies are active (e.g. Oxford, 1990, 2011, 2017; Rubin, 1975): strategic learners are not passive. The active dimension (typically expressed in verbs, e.g. asking for help or I try to relax) helps to distinguish strategies from styles, a concept with which they are often confused (styles are more general preferences, typically expressed adjectivally, e.g. visual, holistic, kinaesthetic, etc).
- Strategies are chosen by learners (e.g. Bialystock, 1981; Cohen, 2011): it is not possible for someone else to force learners to use strategies. Furthermore,

this choice operates somewhere along a continuum between deliberate and automatic (e.g. Wenden, 1991). It is suggested that the deliberate/automatic dichotomy is more useful than the conscious/unconscious distinction, since the latter has “acquired too much surplus meaning” (McLaughlin, 1990, p.617).

- Strategies are purposeful and goal oriented (e.g. Macaro, 2006): random actions for no particular purpose are not strategic. The goal helps to distinguish LLS from other concepts with which they are often confused, e.g. skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), which are for using what has been taught (e.g. Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Skills development might include learning to skim read for key information, writing more cohesively, understanding more when listening, or speaking more fluently. Skills can, however, in turn be used as a learning strategy. If, for instance, a learner decides to read in order to learn new vocabulary or idioms, to observe models of grammar in use etc., the reading is being used as an activity chosen for the purpose of learning, and it therefore becomes, by definition, a strategy.

- Language learning strategies are for either directly developing or regulating the learning of language. This helps to distinguish LLS from other kinds of strategies (e.g. communication strategies, whose basic function is to achieve some communicative purpose, e.g. Tarone, 1981). Although communication strategies can set up a situation where learning can take place, it is not until the learner actually applies a learning strategy (e.g. remembering the new vocabulary, relating the new information to something already known, etc.) that learning actually takes place. Up until this point, it is quite possible for an individual to live in an environment where a language is spoken, and to communicate quite effectively by means of gestures or other survival strategies,



but to learn more or less nothing of the actual language.

### **Relationship of Strategies to Successful Learning**

Also controversial has been the question of whether strategies are related to successful learning, and by no means all research in the area has produced positive results (e.g. Porte, 1988; Vann and Abraham, 1990). Green and Oxford (1995), however, reported a significant relationship between strategy use and proficiency among 374 students at the University of Puerto Rico.

Griffiths (2003, 2013, 2018), furthermore, reports on a study in which 348 students at a language school in Auckland, New Zealand, were surveyed regarding their reported strategy use, using the 50-item version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, Oxford, 1990), and these results were correlated with their proficiency levels. It was found that there was a significant relationship (Spearman's rho,  $r=0.27$ ,  $p<.01$ ) between reported frequency of language learning strategy use and the students' levels. In another study in the same environment, a significant relationship was again found between proficiency level and strategy use ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.01$ , Spearman's rho) when Griffiths (2003, 2008) surveyed 131 students using the ESL (32-item) version of the ELLSI (English Language Learning Strategy Inventory). The ELLSI was constructed using strategy items suggested by students as ones they had found useful, using the rationale that strategies the students themselves said they used were likely to be more valid and reliable than items imported from elsewhere which might not be contextually, individually or culturally appropriate (for details, see Griffiths, 2003). This questionnaire consists of 32 language learning strategy items such as 'Making friends with native speakers' (item 28) or 'Consciously learning new vocabulary' (item

16) which students are asked to rate from 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always or almost always) according to their perception of how frequently they use it. The alpha co-efficient for reliability for the ELLSI was calculated at .87, which is in the range described as 'very respectable' (Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995, p.7).

Another study which shows a significant difference according to language learning strategy use was conducted by Griffiths (2003, 2006) using the ELLSI over a period of three months. Altogether there were 30 students who were surveyed at the beginning and end of their courses. During this time there were five students who were promoted three or more levels and nine students who were not promoted at all. The median total ratings increase for the frequently promoted group was +21, whereas the median for those who were not promoted was only +3, a difference which was found to be significant ( $p < .05$ , Mann-Whitney U). In other words, overall, the most successful students were the ones who most increased their strategy use over the period of the study.

### **Strategy Instruction**

A major underlying principle of much of the research and writing on language learning strategies has been the possibility that knowledge gained about learning strategies might be made available to other students to help them to learn more effectively. In other words, it is believed that language learning strategies are "teachable" (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989, p.291, authors' italics) and that learners can benefit from instruction in learning strategies. According to this view, "the teacher's role expands from being mainly concerned with imparting knowledge to including the facilitation of learning

by raising awareness of strategy options and providing encouragement and opportunities for practice so that students might be assisted towards the goal of managing their own learning” (Griffiths, 2013, pp.144-145).

A number of programmes have been designed over the years with the aim of instructing students in the use of language learning strategies. CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) was one of the first strategy-based instruction programmes, developed by Chamot and O’Malley (1986, 1987). Another well-known programme is Strategies Based Instruction (SBI) conducted by the University of Minnesota. Underlying strategy-based instruction is the premise that “language learning will be facilitated if students become more aware of the range of possible strategies that they can consciously select” (Cohen, 2011, p.116).

The principle of the teachability of language learning strategies, however, is by no means universally accepted. Attempts to train learners to use learning strategies more effectively have, according to Rees-Miller (1993, p.679), produced “only qualified success”, and she gives details of less than totally successful attempts at learner training to support her claim (e.g. O’Malley, 1987; Wenden, 1987). Given the level of controversy around the teachability issue, Rees-Miller (ibid.) questions whether the time might be better spent directly teaching the language the students need or want to learn rather than trying to teach them how to learn, which many of them do not see as particularly useful, and which takes time away from their ultimate learning goal.

In order to explore the effectiveness of language learning strategy instruction on language learning, O’Malley (1987) randomly assigned 75 students to one

of three instructional groups for listening, speaking and vocabulary acquisition. In these groups, they received training in metacognitive, cognitive and socio affective strategies, or no special strategy instruction (control group). A significant difference was discovered in favour of the treatment groups for speaking, but not for listening, while the control group actually scored slightly higher than the treatment groups for vocabulary. The reason for this, according to O'Malley (ibid.), was that students were unwilling to adopt the new strategies, especially when they knew a test was imminent.

An intensive English programme which included a language learning strategy component at an American university is described by Wenden (1987), according to whom the students were advanced, of various cultural backgrounds and with varied reasons for learning. According to a questionnaire, less than fifty percent of the students thought that the strategy training had been useful, leading Wenden (ibid., p.164) to conclude that "learner training was not considered relevant in its own right". This result supports Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco's (1978) belief that "long lectures on strategies, or even lengthy discussions on the subject, would [not] be particularly profitable" (p.225).

In a study involving 26 students at the Center for English as a Second Language at Southern Illinois University who were divided into three groups, Carrell, Pharis and Liberto (1989) investigated the effects of metacognitive strategy training on ESL reading. The participants included both graduates and undergraduates from various linguistic backgrounds, of differing ages, and of both sexes. The researchers discovered that, in the context of their study metacognitive strategy training was effective in enhancing reading ability by speakers of other languages, a result which accords with O'Malley et al.'s

(1985) conclusions regarding the importance of metacognitive strategies.

Tang and Moore (1992) also investigated the effects of the teaching of cognitive and metacognitive strategies on reading comprehension in the classroom by using three recent adult immigrants to New Zealand. The researchers concluded that cognitive strategy instruction (title discussion, pre-teaching vocabulary) improved comprehension scores, but the gains were not maintained beyond the end of the treatment. Metacognitive strategy instruction, on the other hand (involving the teaching of self-monitoring strategies) appeared to lead to improvements in comprehension ability which were maintained longer term.

In Hong Kong, Nunan (1995) involved 60 students in a 12-week programme “designed to help them reflect on their own learning, to develop their knowledge of, and ability to apply, learning strategies, to assess their own progress, and to apply their language skills beyond the classroom” (p.3). The programme was based on a bank of tasks and students also kept journals, from which Nunan (ibid, p.8) concluded that “strategy training, plus systematic provision of opportunities for learners to reflect on the learning process, did seem to lead to greater sensitivity to the learning process over time”. Nunan (ibid.) recommended that language classrooms should have a dual focus, teaching both content and an awareness of language learning processes.

At an Australian university, a study of strategy use by four independent learners, carried out by Simmons (1996) over a period of six weeks consisted of a series of intensive individual training sessions aimed at raising awareness of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. At the end of the six weeks, Simmons (ibid.) concluded that students had increased the number and variety of their

strategy use and were more aware of the strategies which suited themselves as individuals. Simmons (ibid., p.75) suggests that “making the learning process more transparent” is important in order to empower students to direct their own learning.

Cohen (1998, 1999), after studying a group of language students who were participants in a strategies-based instructional programme at the University of Minnesota, concluded that the programme had made a positive difference in speaking performance. Cohen summed up the pedagogical implications of his findings as indicating that language learning strategies should be both explicitly taught in the classroom and embedded in daily tasks.

The effects of strategy intervention on the writing skills of two teenage British learners of French were studied by Macaro (2001). When he compared the students’ pre-intervention written work with their post-intervention output, Macaro concluded that their writing had improved, which he attributed in part to the planning, composing and checking strategies that they had learned to use.

In Japan, 210 college students were divided into two groups for reading instruction (Ikeda and Takeuchi, 2003). The treatment group included 73 high-proficiency and 23 low- proficiency students (total N=96) while the control group included 82 high-proficiency and 32 low-proficiency learners (total N=114). Classes were held weekly for one and a half hours, and explicit strategy instruction in reading was conducted for 20 minutes. The researchers found no increase in frequency of strategy use among the low-proficiency students, but increased frequency in strategy use was found among the high-proficiency learners, and this increase was retained when students were re-tested five months later.

The effects of strategy instruction on vocabulary acquisition were studied by Eslami Rasekh and Ranjbary (2003) who divided 53 Iranian EFL students into a control group (N=26, who were taught according to the regular curriculum) and a treatment group (N=27, who received metacognitive strategy instruction). According to the researchers, the treatment group which received strategy intervention showed significantly higher gains in vocabulary than the control group.

Nakatani (2005) divided 62 female students studying on a 12-week oral communication course into two groups. One group (N=28) received metacognitive strategy instruction and they significantly improved their speaking test scores, while improvements in the control group (N=34), who were taught according to normal communicative methods, were not significant.

The effectiveness of listening strategy instruction with 106 students of French at the University of Ottawa in Canada was investigated by Vandergrift and Tafaghodatari (2010). Students in the experimental group (N=60) were given instruction in metacognitive strategies, while 46 students in the control group were not given any strategy instruction. On the final assessment, the experimental group was found to significantly outperform the control group. It is difficult to summarize such a mixed bag of results relating to the effectiveness of language learning strategy instruction and how best to go about it. As Griffiths (2013, p.149) sums up: "These results seem to indicate successful instruction for some types of strategies but not for others; success for strategies relating to some skills, but not for others; success for some students but not for others; and success in some situations, but not in others".

Griffiths (2003, 2013, 2018) reports on a study at a school in Auckland, New Zealand, where students new to the school were involved in a Study Skills class about mid-way through their first week in order to raise awareness of how to study effectively so that they might obtain maximum benefit from their time at the school.

Since this special class seemed to be quite successful, it was decided to offer a Study Skills class on a regular weekly basis, at a time (Wednesday afternoon) when regular weekly option classes operated. These classes were offered for a month, at the end of which time they would be offered again or discontinued, depending on demand. Commercially available texts such as Ellis and Sinclair (1994) and Willing (1989) as well as teacher-generated materials were used for the class, attendance was recorded and student and teacher feedback was informally noted in order to assess the effectiveness of this approach to language learning strategy instruction. Although the maximum number of students allowed in a class (N=12) initially chose the special Study Skills option class, by the end of the month the drop-out rate was high and few of the students were actually attending the class. Informally asked why they were not attending, students reported that after two or three weeks there was nothing new, and they would rather be learning grammar or vocabulary or practising skills (foci of some of the competing classes).

They did not perceive the class as useful on a long-term basis and therefore either didn't attend or asked to change class. Teachers who taught the class reported finding it difficult to find or create suitable materials and they were discouraged by lack of student interest. In the light of this rather negative feedback, the class was not re-offered the following month.



So, is there anything we can learn from this experience about how strategy instruction should be carried out?

### **Providing strategy instruction: how?**

Tang and Griffiths (2014) provide several important principles underlying effective strategy instruction.

- An important element of strategy instruction is the raising of students' awareness of language learning strategy options (Rubin, 1987). If students know the alternatives available, they are in a better position to make informed choices.
- According to other writers (e.g. Graham, 1997; Wenden, 1991), strategy training needs to be explicit, otherwise students will not transfer the new strategies they have learnt beyond the immediate task to new ones.
- Practice is another important ingredient of strategy training (Oxford, 1990). If new strategies are rehearsed, they will become automatic and stored in a student's individual strategy repertoire to be called on as needed.
- Others argue that strategy instruction should also be implicit (for instance, Cohen, 1998; Harris, 2001). That is, strategy instruction needs to be embedded into regular classroom activities and practised. However, it needs to be done in such a way that it is not seen as just a waste of time and a distraction from the real task of learning new language.
- Another important dimension of strategy instruction is evaluation. This is important so that students can reflect on their strategy use and make adjustments as necessary.

Effective strategy instruction, then, should aim to raise learner awareness of strategy options by means of both explicit and implicit instruction and provide opportunities to practise and evaluate.

### **Providing effective strategy instruction: what?**

Although the content of strategy instruction programmes may vary according to student needs, situational constraints or target requirements, in general, it is possible to suggest some key features. According to the findings of studies by Griffiths (2003, 2006, 2008, 2013, 2018), the frequent use of a large number of language learning strategies is reported by higher level learners. This finding would seem to indicate that, in general, more is indeed generally better when it comes to reported frequency of language learning strategy use.

It is also possible, however, that not only the overall reported frequency and quantity, but also the type (quality) of language learning strategies chosen may be important. Griffiths (2003, 2008, 2013, 2018) identified three basic types of strategies (Base, Core and Plus) all of which may have an important role to play in the promotion of successful learning.

- Base strategies are the kinds of activities that students employ in the early stages of their learning: memory strategies are the largest single sub-group here.
- Core strategies are a group of activities used highly frequently across all students: this group includes strategies relating to pronunciation, function, use of resources, and the regulation of learning.
- Plus strategies, that is, those that are used by higher level students more frequently than by lower-level students may be particularly important.

Among these plus strategies are strategies relating to interaction with others, to vocabulary, to reading, to the toleration of ambiguity, to grammar, to the management of emotions, and some also include listening and writing.

- Core-Plus strategies. In addition to Plus strategies, higher level students report making highly frequent use of Core strategies. The Core-Plus group is very varied, and includes strategies relating to the learning of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and function. This group of strategies employs all four skills and is used to control interaction with others, ambiguity toleration, affect and the use of resources.

In other words, high level students do not restrict themselves to a narrow range of strategies: they use a wide variety of activities in the pursuit of their goals. Given this wide range of strategy types, it would probably be a mistake to suggest that strategy instruction programmes should encourage any particular strategies or groups of strategies. Successful students seem to employ an eclectic repertoire of activities which they choose to suit the situation, the learning target and their own individual characteristics (such as their gender, age, culture, personality, style, etc). The important thing would seem to be to make students aware of their strategy options, whether explicitly or implicitly, to provide opportunities to practise, and encourage them to evaluate their strategy use and, where necessary, to make changes.

Students also need to learn how to choose and use their strategies so that they work well in combination with each other, often called strategy orchestration (e.g. Anderson, 2008). Strategy orchestration is a complex operation, and strategies are not isolated phenomena. The ability to use strategies effectively in harmony with each other is an important skill. Because of its complexity,

strategy orchestration is not an easy skill to teach, since it is highly individual, and depends on numerous factors such as proficiency level, autonomy, age, nationality, motivation, personality, style, beliefs, gender, affective states, identity, investment and so on. It is also contextually dependent, and may vary according to the particular situation in which the learner is working or living: the same learner may not use the same strategies in a different environment, for instance if a student studying English in a foreign language environment, such as China or Kuwait, goes to study in an environment where the language is spoken as the L1, such as the UK, USA, Australia or New Zealand. Strategy orchestration may also differ according to the learning goal: strategies which work well for a General English course may or may not work as well for an exam-focused course. In other words, as Griffiths (2013, p.166-167) puts it, “it is not possible to provide a pre-set formula for effective orchestration. Each learner needs to experiment for him/herself to determine the combination which produces the best results given the unique blend of individual, situational and target variables. Nevertheless, discussion of the orchestration issue may well be helpful to assist students to work through the possibilities and arrive at a harmonious outcome”.

### **Cause, Effect, and the Tornado Hypothesis**

The question of cause and effect is highly problematic when considering the relationship between language learning strategies and the development of proficiency. If we discover, for instance, that higher level learners use a strategy such as reading newspapers in the target language, should we conclude that such a strategy contributes to their proficiency, and that, therefore, all students should read newspapers; or is it the case that higher-level students already have sufficient proficiency to deal with such material, which would have been far too difficult at lower levels?

Rather than viewing strategy use and proficiency development as a linear process, it may well be more useful to view the relationship as spiral, where a strategy (such as learning vocabulary) facilitates reading, which, in turn, exposes the learner to more vocabulary, which then makes more and more difficult texts available, and so on in an ever-expanding spiral pattern which has been termed the Tornado Effect (Griffiths, 2003, 2013, 2018). In other words, it is probably not useful to try to impose higher level strategies on students who are not ready for it: this may well be discouraging and demotivating and cause students to lose interest and confidence. At the same time, if teachers are aware of the higher-level strategies that are available, they can begin the process of gently encouraging students to push their own boundaries and engage with activities which will contribute to spiralling proficiency.

### **Teacher Education**

A number of writers have emphasized the importance of teacher training and cognition in recent years (for instance, Bailey, Curtis and Nunan, 2001; Borg, 2009; Freeman and Richards, 1996; Harmer, 2012; Woods, 1996). However, although studies (e.g. Green and Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003, 2008, 2013) indicate that language learning strategies are significantly related to achievement in language learning, language learning strategy issues are rarely dealt with prominently in teacher education prospectuses and materials, if at all.

- Since a number of writers (e.g. Chamot & Harris, 2018; Cohen, 1998, 1999, 2011) suggest that teacher education is the key to progress with strategy instruction, we need to consider what teachers need to know about strategies in order to facilitate strategy development by their students.
- Perhaps, first of all, teachers need to have an understanding of how

strategies are defined, what they are and are not, and how they are related to successful learning.

- They should know that research has shown that higher level students use many more strategies more frequently than lower level students, and that some types of strategies (especially the plus strategies) seem to be significantly more related to successful learning (in terms of higher class levels) than others.
- Techniques for integrating language learning strategy instruction into the fabric of lessons should be learnt, making strategy instruction both explicit and embedded so that students become aware of their actions and are able to transfer this knowledge to other situations.
- Practice should be provided so that new strategies become automatic, and so that learners do not have to deliberately think about them every time.
- Teachers should also remember that strategy development follows a spiral rather than a linear pattern. According to this model, one strategy (for instance, learning new vocabulary or trying to pronounce the language in a clear and easily comprehensible fashion) facilitates the development of others (for instance, writing letters, or seeking conversation partners) which then develops confidence for more challenging writing and interaction, and so on. This spiral pattern, or Tornado Effect has the potential to greatly accelerate language development.

### **Directions for Further Research**

Many questions regarding language learning strategy instruction remain to be answered.

- We need, for instance, to explore ways to motivate students to become more strategically aware, so that they do not think it is just a waste of time and a distraction from their main learning goal.
- We need to know how to allow for different learner characteristics, in various contexts, studying for diverse learning targets so that all of these multiple variables can be accommodated and the best possible strategic options can be offered.

- We must investigate ways of developing materials related to language learning strategies which can be incorporated as language learning exercises in their own right but with implicit strategy instruction underlying the language input.
- Strategy orchestration (how strategies can be used in effective combinations) remains an under researched area, and techniques for researching spiral phenomena such as strategy development require much work.
- When considering strategy research, care should be taken that an appropriate instrument is chosen or constructed, and that appropriate analysis techniques are employed, remembering that Likert-scale data is by its nature non-parametric, and that, therefore, non-parametric tests (e.g. medians rather than means, non-parametric correlations such as Spearman's rho, and non-parametric tests of difference such as Man-Whitney U or Kruskal-Wallis) are more appropriate.

## **Conclusion**

Although attempts at strategy instruction have not always been successful (for instance, Griffiths, 2003; O'Malley, 1987; Wenden, 1987), there have been some success stories (e.g. Chamot & O'Malley, 1986; Cohen et al., 1998). This therefore raises the hope that teachers might be able to promote the development of language learning strategies by raising awareness of strategy options, by making strategy instruction both implicit and explicit, by providing opportunities for practice in order to develop automaticity and confidence, and by encouraging students to evaluate their own strategy deployment.

In order to achieve this, teacher education is critical. Teachers need to be made aware of the need to integrate strategy instruction into the content of their lessons and to be given training and practice in how this should be done. Since research shows that higher level students report frequent use of a large number of language learning strategies, teachers need to raise students' awareness of strategy options and to encourage students to practise, expand and effectively orchestrate their language learning strategy repertoires.

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# Helping Students Develop Communicative Efficiency in Speaking

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## **Abstract**

Communicative Language Teaching (abbreviated as CLT) is believed to promote language learning in the classroom. This approach plays an important role in contributing to students' oral production. By putting the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (abbreviated as CLTA) into practice, English language teachers are able to move away from the ineffective, traditional methods of language teaching in order to encourage more realistic opportunities for communicating. This paper explores the shift from traditional methods of language teaching to the CLTA, and it defines the CLTA. Furthermore, it states the value and significance of using communicative activities in English language teaching classes. Moreover, it suggests different types of communicative speaking activities and games that could be implemented in class. Finally, it provides some strategies necessary for enhancing speaking classes in English.

## **Introduction**

In Kuwait, individuals are mostly exposed to the Arabic language as it is the official language; however, because the English language is considered important in Kuwait, it is also mandatory for students in schools, colleges and universities to be taught English as a Second Language (abbreviated as ESL). In order to learn a second language efficiently, it is vital to practice all four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Zardini & Barnabe, 2014). Harmer (2007) explains a dynamic relationship between input and output, shown in Figure 1.

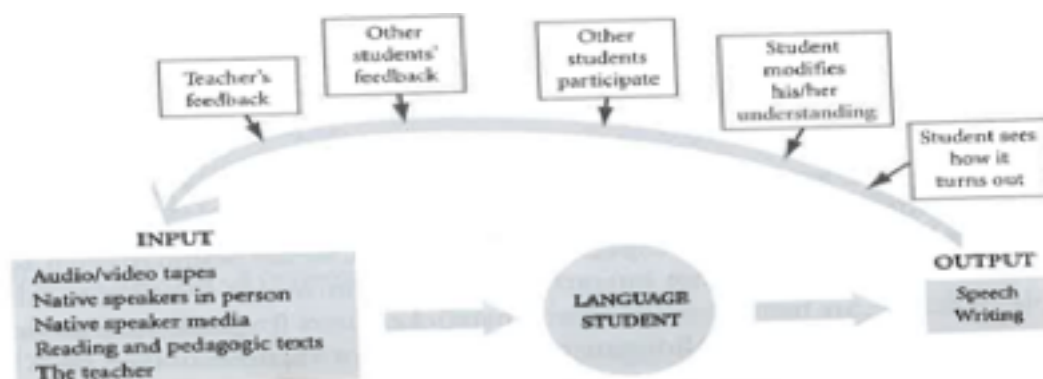


FIGURE 1: The circle of input and output

(Harmer, 2007, p.266)

What an individual hears or reads, which is referred to as the input, can influence what an individual says or writes, which is referred to as the output. According to Ur (1991) "Of all the four skills...speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing" (p.120). Speaking English is important for Kuwaitis because it is widely spoken by the large expatriate community that resides there. Moreover, it is a common lingua franca around the world. Therefore, speaking English is crucial for the development of Kuwaitis in different areas, such as economic, political, social and cultural. For these reasons, the emphasis of this paper will be on speaking. The goal of speaking in a language context is to communicate efficiently.

Teachers in Kuwait can often encounter challenges when trying to help their students become efficient in English. One challenge is it is not an easy or fast process (Zardini & Barnabe, 2014). Another challenge is Kuwait still has quite a lot of work to do when it comes to English teaching reform and improving the English teaching quality. Therefore, this paper will suggest ways in which teachers can equip themselves with the techniques that will help them achieve this objective.

Moving from traditional teaching methods that are still being used by some teachers in Kuwait is one way to improve communicative efficiency. Richards & Rodgers (2014) explain that, over the years, there has been a noticeable a shift from traditional teaching methods:

“Chomsky’s attack on behaviorism and his theory of linguistic competence was an example of such a shift- one that had a significant impact on approaches to language teaching. The emergence of the field of second language acquisition similarly prompted a shift in thinking about the nature of second language learning and new approaches to language teaching.” (p.38)

A newer paradigm of understanding about language teaching and learning is the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (abbreviated as CLTA). Although this approach has been around for a while, it is not always accepted, understood or applied by ESL teachers in Kuwait. This paper will point out the problem with traditional methods of second language learning, and it will focus on the benefits of the CLTA to language learning. It will explore how games and other teaching tools could be incorporated to promote more student involvement and communication in English.

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### **The Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA)**

A new paradigm of understanding about language teaching and learning is the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (abbreviated as CLTA). According to Harmer (2007) the approach focuses on how language is used. Activities in CLT tend to be more student-focused where the students are involved in real or realistic communication.

Successful achievement of the communicative task being performed is as essential as the accuracy of the language being produced. The CLTA provides a wider perspective on second language learning. It encourages teachers to be more conscious of the fact that the sole goal when teaching students should not be how to perfectly manipulate the structures of a second language. Strategies must also be developed for relating these structures to their communicative purposes in real situations and in real time (Littlewood, 1987).

Notably, in an ESL class, not all CLT activities are at either end of the spectrum. Some activities may be more communicative while others may be non-communicative depending on the objective. For example, the activity “Have you ever...” has been used by ESL teachers to help students practice particular grammar structures in an enjoyable way. This is more of a prescribed structure.

However, a peer interview discussing the topic “A holiday you went on” would be more communicative. In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), according to Richards & Rodgers (2014) there is a sequence of activities. The first step involves “Pre-communicative activities”. This step focuses on “Accuracy-based activities”.

In these activities, emphasis is put on the presentation of structures, functions, and vocabulary. The second step involves “Communicative activities” which are fluency-based activities. These activities focus on information-sharing and information-exchange. It is important to have a balance between accuracy and fluency based activities. For beginners, it may be helpful to focus more on learning to use grammar and vocabulary in more prescribed forms of practice. On the other hand, opportunities may be needed in order to use the resources that have been acquired in fluency work which replicates realistic language use (Hedge, 2000).

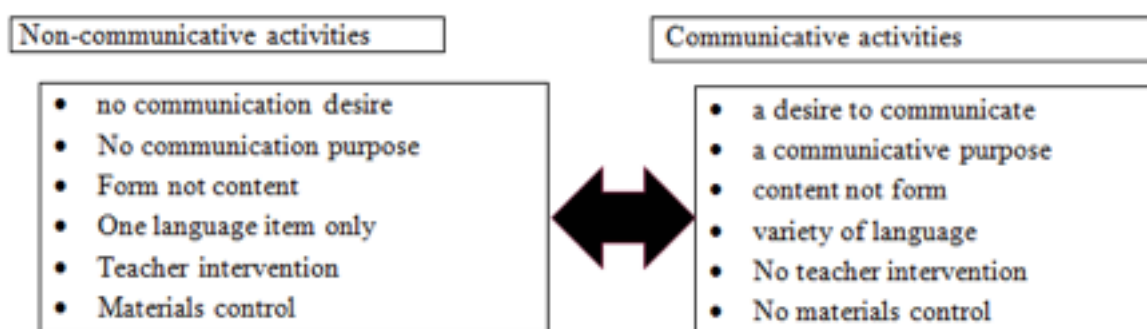


Figure 2: The communication continuum (Harmer, 2007, p.70)

## **The Value and Significance of Using Games**

ESL teachers often face challenges when trying to motivate students to learn and when trying to encourage them to participate in class.

Games are known to be entertaining and amusing, and therefore, they could add excitement to a lesson. Although they are more student-centered, teachers are also able to get enjoyment out of them. Rixon (1981) defines a game as an activity which involves decision-makers co-operating or competing with each other. It also involves them seeking to achieve their objectives, within a set of rules. Some college or university teachers may be reluctant to play games in class as they may feel that games are “childish”, “disruptive” or even “a waste of time”.x

However, Mubaslat (2012) maintains that games are worth implementing in class as they play a significant role in improving second language acquisition. The author further goes on to argue that games are not only used for fun. They have pedagogical values as they motivate students, provide opportunity for real communication and lower students’ stress levels. In order for the games to be effective, they need to be managed appropriately.

When trying to maximize student participation, it is necessary for teachers to cater for their students’ characteristics for example their age, learning style, and interests. In addition, when choosing games, teachers should consider their students’ ability level, and they should choose games that suite the purpose of the class content. Lightbrown & Spada (2006) argue that:

**“The principal way that teachers can influence learners’ motivation is by making the classroom a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, engaged in activities that are appropriate to their age, interests, and cultural backgrounds, and most importantly, where students can experience success” (p. 185).**

Thus, if games are appropriately managed, they can be effective learning aids.

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### **Types of Speaking Activities and Games**

As mentioned above, the main goal of using games in ESL classes is to encourage practice in the target language. As stated by Harmer (2007), Hedge (2000), Ur (1991) and Wright et al. (1997) the following list of games could be implemented in an ESL classroom.

#### **A. Caring and sharing games**

These games involve the students feeling comfortable sharing personal information with each other. The challenge of these games is that students may be unwilling to share their personal information with others as they may feel shy.

#### **B. Information-gap games**

These games involve students talking to each other in order to solve a puzzle,

describe and draw a picture, describe and arrange items, or find similarities and differences between pictures.

### **C. Formal debates**

In a formal debate, students are required to come up with their own arguments for and against a particular topic. They can plan and practice their arguments in groups. The audience can be involved in the debate; however, their involvement is less scripted.

### **D. Unplanned Discussion**

It is a discussion that just occurs in class; thus, it is unplanned by the teacher. The teacher can elicit information by prompting and encouraging the students to speak. Moreover, it is important how teachers deal with errors during an unplanned discussion as they need to be careful not to discourage students by correcting them every time they produce an error. Before discussions, teachers could teach “gambits” or “lexical phrases” in order to help students become more fluent. According to Hedge (2000) these are “items of prefabricated language, learned holistically as chunks, and include not only phrases but clauses and sentences too” (p.55). For example, “Can I interrupt please?” or “I agree with that point but...”. One example of an impromptu speaking activity could involve choosing items in a bag and talking about the item for 30 seconds. Another activity could include choosing half-minute topics which are on cards that are placed in a box. Students can select any card from the box and talk about the given topic for half a minute.

### **E. Prepared talks**

This is an activity where students prepare a talk. They can create a presentation

on a topic of their choice. These presentations tend to be more formal because they are prepared in advance. However, it is advised for students to maintain eye contact instead of reading from a script. Therefore, the students will need time to rehearse their talks. Feedback can be provided to the students and can be based on particular criteria for what makes a good presentation.

#### **F. Miming games**

Miming can be done in pairs, groups, or even as a whole class. One student has to perform the mime which can be an action, person or object while the other student(s) have to guess. This situation enables students to use real communication. It practices the skills such as observing and improvising.

#### **G. Word games**

The focus of these games is on a word as opposed to a sentence. For example, the focus could be on spelling or meaning, or it could be on inferring a word in context or figuring out the parts of speech of a word. One example is the game “Who Wants to Pass This Course” could be played in class to practice and prepare for vocabulary. It involves students answering set questions about the target vocabulary. The question may focus on meaning or parts of speech etc. Another example is the game “Guess the Word or Phrase” where students are expected to practice and prepare discussion using phrases for agreeing, disagreeing and giving opinion. Students can use synonyms, gestures, or definitions to explain the given words or phrases.

#### **H. Question and answer games**

These games involve the students asking and answering questions usually to practice a particular grammar structure. One example is the “Yes” and

“No” game which involves pair work and oral interaction in order to practice question forms, pace and intonation. Another example is the game “Alibi” which encourages oral interaction by having students ask and answer questions in the past tense.

### **I. Card and board games**

Examples of these games are “Snakes and Ladders”. Other variations can be made in order to achieve the full value.

### **Suggested Strategies for Enhancing Speaking Classes**

Kayi (2012) provides the following suggestions for teachers teaching speaking:

- Involve each student and increase participation by assigning roles or doing collaborative work
- Reduce teacher speaking time and observe. This will increase student speaking time.
- Provide positive feedback
- Do not interrupt students to correct mistakes
- Elicit information by asking “WH” questions
- Circulate around the classroom during group/pair work
- Provide the vocabulary beforehand
- Diagnose problems faced by students who face difficulty
- Provide more opportunities to practice

Fujioka (1998) mentions a strategy to promote speaking in class. It is called “The Talking Stick”.

“It was a method used by Native Americans, to let everyone speak their mind during a council meeting, a type of tribal meeting. According to the indigenous American’s tradition, the stick was imbued with spiritual qualities that called up the spirit of their ancestors to guide them in making good decisions. The stick ensured that all members, who wished to speak, had their ideas heard. All members of the circle were valued equally” (para. 7).

This strategy can be used in the language classroom in order to encourage students to speak. When implementing this strategy, there are some rules that should be followed for it to be successful. The student holding the stick is the only one that is allowed to speak and voice an opinion. The rest of the class must remain silent, however. They are not supposed to comment on what the speaker has said as to avoid being judgmental. Each student will have their turn to voice their opinion.

## **Conclusion**

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that speaking English as a Second Language (abbreviated as ESL) is extremely valued in Kuwait for many reasons. However, teachers need to be able to shift from traditional teaching methods, and they need to be more open to practice the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (abbreviated as CLTA) as it plays a vital role in the contribution of learners’ oral production. By actively involving the students in games and by using some of the suggested strategies, teachers will be able to motivate their students to speak more efficiently in class and voice their opinions without feeling high levels of stress. Furthermore, it will provide the students with opportunities to practice the target language in real situations and in real time.

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# **Engaging English in Class and on Stage through Fairy Tales**

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## **Why Engage English through Literature, Fairy Tales, and Drama?**

Why learn English through literature? Alongside language development, literature enriches the student as a person. Learners lose themselves in story, the oldest teacher of all time, told in authentic language and contextualized in plot, character, and setting. About matters that matter the most in life --love, hope, struggle, and strife --literature opens the horizon of human experience to learners, inviting them to interpret, ponder, weigh possibilities, and wonder: “Who am I? What are my roots? Where am I going? What will I become?” (O’Shea and Egan, 1978, p.51).

Literature offers students rich opportunities to enhance reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar. At the same time, students can enrich their understanding of relationships, culture, and geography as they reflect upon the characters that inhabit the pages. In his book *Literature and Language Teaching*, Lazar puts it this way: “Literature provides wonderful source material for eliciting emotional responses from our students and using it in the classroom is a fruitful way of involving the learner as a whole person” (Lazar, as cited by Mikešoá, 1993). Frey remarks that literature is “One of the richest gifts pf people’s culture that brings them together (Frey, as cited by Mikešoá, 1929). Contextualizing language via literature provides English learners with a win-win situation as they delve into themes that speak to everyone and emerge enlightened in life.



## Why Fairy Tales?

As a unique form of literature, fairy tales offer the advantages to language pedagogy listed above as well as additional plusses. Linguists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm collected and published their stories in the late 1800s in an effort to maintain the oral tradition of Germany. Entertaining children was not their intention; malevolent and brutal elements peppered the early tales. Over time, violence and cruelty faded away and fairy tale versions emerged which are suitable for all ages and came to resonate with all audiences through story, film, and even cartoons. (Hathaway, 2012).

Foundation language program materials may fail to engage students. Program authorities choose course books which instill reading skills such as skimming, scanning, and inferring via multi paragraph articles on high interest themes such as travel, nutrition, art, and psychology. Comprehension exercises check students' understanding of main ideas and supporting details. However, although the subject matter is of high interest to administrators, it may not be to students. Traditional academic reading texts may fail to engage students in reading and may instead lead to "a boring and monotonous classroom atmosphere which can discourage language learners to participate actively during the teaching-learning process" (Wijaya and Tedjaatmadja, (2018).

In *Literature and Language Teaching*, Lazar writes "The texts traditionally prescribed for classroom use may generally be accorded high status, but often seem remote from and irrelevant to, the interests of our students. In fact, being made to read texts so alien to their own experience and

background may only increase students' sense of frustration, inferiority, and even powerlessness" (Lazar, as cited in Mikešoá, 1993). As a result, students may fail to engage in these texts and may even actively resist doing so, missing the benefits they are designed to foster.

Using fairy tales, on the other hand, attracts student engagement. Tales in the language classroom take advantage of students' natural wonder, curiosity, and enthusiasm whereas common course books may not. Around the time the Grimms recorded their tales, fairy stories made their debut in the classroom as a teaching resource. They are especially suited to language teaching for several reasons, starting with their charismatic content. "Once upon a time" casts the spell, a portal opens, and students enter the world of magic and wonder. Wizards, goblins, and elves magnetize attention as they play out the power of good over evil, and wit, modesty, and honor over cruelty, royalty, and injustice. One researcher observes that whereas comprehension of traditional academic reading passages can be a passive process, fairy tales "demand" active reading by virtue of emotional involvement. Readers feel anger, sadness, fear, and frustration as they experience fantasy along with awe (Higgins, as cited in Mikešoá, 1971).

Furthermore, fairy tales enrich as they enchant. Ancient wisdom, history, culture, and values are transmitted in these stories. Students enhance their emotional intelligence and confirm the bedrock values of humanity as they see kindness quash evil and courage lead to victory. Justice is done in fairy tales. They transmit humankind's moral compass, trust in life, and faith in fairness. Heroes face danger and win in the end, and students reinforce right values (Frey, as cited in Mikešoá, 1929).

From “once upon a time” to “happily ever after” students remain in a state of fascination and “flow.” Language follows naturally. While spellbound, students absorb grammatical patterns and vocabulary unconsciously. Sentences and clauses tend to be repeated in fairy tales providing language students focused practice in phonology, grammar, spelling and vocabulary. Immersed in the story, students derive the benefits of language which is authentic and contextualized. Lazar comments on student engagement in literature, “Pupils may be so absorbed in the plot and characters of a literary work that they acquire a great deal of language almost in passing” (Lazar as cited in Mikešoa, 1993).

Part of their magic as language class materials is that fairy tales are short and syntactically simple, thus easily approachable. The tales lend themselves easily to a variety of language activities.

A few examples follow:

- Personal Creative Glossary: Students enter new words from the fairy tale in their personal glossary following any format they fancy, including drawings and designs. The Glossary should include a Quotations section for favorite fairy tale lines (Mikešoa, 24).
- Animated Choral Reading: In groups, students read aloud sections of the fairy tale, enhancing the experience with gestures, facial expressions, and varying voice intonation. Helping shy students to become more vocal, animated choral reading activates components of drama (Mikešoa, 46).
- Surprise Dictation: As classmates write, one student dictates a sentence

from the fairy tale, but leaves half of it to be filled in. Students are free to complete the sentence in any way they wish, either predictably or with a surprise (Mikešoá, 27).

- Listen Envision: One student reads a short scene from the fairy tale. Classmates imagine and draw what they hear (Mikešoá, 28).
- Hear What's Wrong: Using an illustration from the tale, a student describes it but with mistakes. Classmates listen carefully and compete to catch them (Mikešoá, 29).
- Seeing Is Believing: To maximize engagement, the teacher reads the tale while students immerse themselves in it. Their goal is to lose themselves in the story (Mikešoá, 29).

### **Why Engage English through Drama?**

The answer can be found partially in the famous quote often used for project based learning: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." These powerful words are attributed to American scholar and inventor Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) (Frost, 2012). Franklin declared them centuries ago, yet they resonate in language teaching today.

Scrolling forward from Franklin's time to the 1800s, the grammar translation approach attempted in vain to instill language via de-contextualized exercises ("Grammar -Translation Method" 2017). By 1969, however, one researcher had discovered drama as a successful approach to language teaching, and listed its impressive powers: "Drama increases creativity,

originality, sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, emotional stability, cooperation, and examination of moral attitudes, while developing communication skills” (Dervishaj, 2009, p.54). Grammatical, lexical, and syntactic building blocks create meaning through their use in quasi-real communication on the stage. Students who perform their language skills for an audience tend to retain them. In modern times, researchers concur: drama fosters engagement, and engagement fosters language acquisition. With its dialogue and stage directions, all created to be enacted and understood, drama represents a major power tool in the language learning process (Fleming, 2009).

### **Why Combine Drama and Fairy Tales to engage English?**

What happens when the benefits of fairy tales as a compelling form of literature and the benefits of drama are combined in the language classroom? Literature alone, while authentic and replete with language and life lessons, cannot be mined unless “we can get students to connect with a book on this kind of empathetic or emotional level. When students read a novel, whether young adult or classic, they only begin to enjoy it, care about it, respond to it, and want to read it critically when they have some personal stake in it. What’s in it for them?” (Baxter, 1999, p.120). This is where drama comes in. A significant body of research validates the power of drama to “involve students, so they learn.”

Combining fairy tales and drama in the language classroom is a win-win situation. As a form of literature, fairy tales fascinate. Dramatizing literature creates engagement which, in turn, attracts language aspects. It follows that approaching fairy tales through drama promotes language acquisition.

## **Language Skill Benefits of Dramatized Literature and Fairy Tales:**

- **Reading and Writing.** 107 studies in US grades 4-12 provided clear confirmation that “Drama instruction has a positive, robust effect on a range of verbal abilities. Clearly drama is an effective tool for increasing achievement in story understanding, reading achievement, reading readiness, and writing” (Hetland & Winner, 2000). For foundation and university students, dramatized literature provides rich material for reading comprehension, and analysis/synthesis papers on character and theme (Hismanoglu, 2005).
- **Speaking and Listening.** Dramatizing fairy tales as a form of literature improves students’ communicative competence in the target language “dramatically.” Acting as their respective characters, student actors must speak to be understood by the audience and their co-characters and listen well to catch and react to crucial cues and co-actors’ lines. In a student actor’s own words, “...when you pretend to be someone else, it’s easier to talk in front of people” (Carson, 2012, p.57) This student comment reflects Krashen’s (1981) research on lowering the “affective barrier” to promote learning of language skills (Carson, 2012). More specifically, in their evaluations of their read-to-act experience, students named improved pronunciation as an outstanding benefit. Drama further enhances their mastery over prosodic and semiotic features, such as gesture, posture, gait, expression, and gaze (Boudreault, 2010).
- **Enhanced Memory of Ideas and Facts.** Since Vygotsky’s revolutionary research on the crucial value of social interaction and playful experimentation

on cognitive development, neuroscientists have been studying how mood and emotion affect cognition and memory. Findings show that “learning in a positive emotional context increases retention” (Pogrow, 2010, p.19). Interpreting a scene from a fairy tale in English involves the whole person, mind, body, and soul, in the life-like use of language.

- Authentic Context Language Enrichment. With each turning page of a fairy tale, vocabulary and grammar come to life in the minds of the readers who see them purpose driven in the authentic context of plot, setting, and theme. “Literature provides learners with a wide range of individual or syntactic items. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas, which develop and enrich their own writing skills” (Hismanoglu, 2005, p.55). Once dramatized, students recycle and deploy those same lexical items and syntactic structures by adding them to the script. Finally, students take their script to the stage where they internalize the language therein and find the acting skills necessary to convey it to the audience (Fleming, 2006)

- Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles: Students are not uniform in learning style. The ground-breaking theory of multiple intelligences advanced by Gardner (1983) reminds us that certain students do well in traditional “seat-based” learning situations aimed at the acquisition of Bloom’s “Knowledge:” (remembering previously learned information), and “Comprehension:” (demonstrating an understanding of the facts) (Bloom, et al.1956). However, although the memorization learning style

usually employed in these two domains may lead to superior grades, that knowledge is often ephemeral. Most students do not thrive seated in traditional classrooms, but prosper via other learning avenues: visual, auditory, kinesthetic or tactile. Dramatized literature activates all learning styles. The teamwork involved in the preparation of dramatized literature - reading a chapter, writing a script, viewing related movies for ideas, - and performing it - acting, sound and lights, music, costumes, backstage, marketing /advertising, - requires all these intelligences. Students choose the particular task which appeals to their learning style.

### **Life Skill Benefits of Dramatized Fairy Tales: the 7 Cs and Beyond**

Language skills transmitted to English learners through dramatized literature come with mega plusses: the “7C” life skills, and a host of transformations:

- The “7Cs:” Creativity, Collaboration, Critical thinking, Commitment, Confidence, Camaraderie, and Compromise. The process of brainstorming, negotiation, teamwork, and experimentation all required to choose a fairy tale, cast roles, synthesize ideas from film versions and available scripts, rehearse, decide how to act, commit to keep trying, and stay calm under the stage lights integrates these life skills and allows students to internalize them interactively.

- **Transformations sparked by dramatized literature:**

1. The teacher-centered classroom transforms into a beehive of student-centered activity where one teaching voice is replaced by several student voices acting and negotiating meaning.



2. Students in “wilting sunflower” status transform into “live wires” as they connect with each other, the audience, and the tale.
3. Plot, character, and theme become highly charged and compelling.
4. Bloom’s learning domains shift from Knowledge and Comprehension to higher order Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation.
5. Leaders among students shift to higher confidence as they call upon skills they never knew they had.
6. Followers among students in backstage, sound and lights, costume and make-up commit to better teamwork as they see their tasks’ importance to the performance.
7. In rehearsals, all students transform from ordinary pupils to directors and script writers as they advise each other, make decisions that matter, and experiment to compromise.
8. Students shift mental images as they visualize stage moves and props.
9. Students experiment with roles in life by transforming into other characters in another time and place.
10. The ordinary classroom experience transforms into unforgettable brainstorming, rehearsal, and stage sessions.

## **Conclusion**

Drama and literature represent ways for foundation English learners to improve, and fairy tales are a condensed and enchanting form of literature. Combining all three – drama, literature, and fairytales, creates a powerful pedagogical triangle for English foundation programs. This paper has detailed the benefits of dramatizing fairy tales in the language classroom or on stage. Charismatic content and cultural enrichment are part of their magic. Known and loved the world over, fairy tales distill the power of literature into a compact and accessible episode. While under their spell, students forget the struggles, disappointments, and sadness that may trouble them. Within the tale, they witness good and evil, loyalty and betrayal, jealousy and selflessness, fear and heroism. They identify with the characters as good banishes evil, bravery is vindicated, and love survives. Powerful magnets to student engagement, fairy tales illustrate universal values for life thus mirroring the shared bedrock of humankind’s culture. Unlike traditional foundation course books and even other forms of literature, fairy tales appeal to students’ innate curiosity and attraction to fantasy. Dramatizing them promotes a host of language and life skills. By enacting fairy tales in class or on stage, all have a chance to shine, both as individuals and as a team. With the phrase “...and they lived happily ever after” students exit the portal back to the real world as they exit the stage, with enhanced self-esteem, refreshed cultural wisdom, and improved English skills. Watering wilted sunflowers brings them back to life in minutes. Dramatizing stories does the same for our students, while also providing practice in a host of both language and life skills.

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# **Wink Wink Nudge Nudge: Inferencing in an Academic Setting**

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## **Abstract**

Teaching English is increasingly geared towards providing students with the 21st century skills such as critical thinking, rather than simply providing instruction in the language skills. For example, reading and listening are the basic skills students in academic setting need to be able to succeed in to further their language acquisition such as understanding the main ideas or details of a text or a lecture. In order to acquire such skills, we arm the students with strategies such as skimming and scanning which are very useful strategies, especially in an academic setting. However, there are additional skills that are needed and are becoming an integral part of any academic setting. Furthermore, in order for students to succeed in their academic, and later in their professional lives, they need to be good readers/listeners and be able to process the information they receive analytically. These skills include critical thinking and inferencing. Therefore, focusing on reading/ listening inferencing provides a platform for the development of critical thinking skills. The workshop focused on inferencing skills and discussed some strategies as well as points to note as EFL students faced a challenge in gaining knowledge in this skill.

According the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, inferencing is “a conclusion or opinion that is formed because of known facts or evidence.” This ability can be enhanced if students are taught certain strategies. In the context of the Middle East, developing inferencing skills is especially important as this skill is not allocated the attention it deserves in public schools. However, inferencing is a critical skill that cannot be ignored and needs to be developed in teaching listening and reading. Although inferencing is part of the reading/listening curricula in academia, it is useful to bear

in mind that this is also a life skill that will be required in the student's academic and professional life. Therefore, teachers need to keep in mind that the context is really important. In addition, special attention is needed when selecting the materials to teach such skill, as cultural knowledge and background knowledge play a major role in this skill. As stated by Marzano (2010), "Inferencing is often based on the assumption of shared knowledge".

The workshop described in this paper allowed the participants to be closely acquainted with teaching this much-needed skill in an engaging and interactive way. The practical ways of teaching inferencing that were presented in this workshop were versatile, and might be applied to all levels of teaching English. The activities were suitable to different types of classrooms, and did not always heavily rely on technology. Some activities included pictures and printouts; others depended on the use of computers and projectors. Additionally, some theoretical background on inferencing was given using a PPT presentation. The aim was to utilize the available visual aids and teaching materials to focus on the improvement of this crucial skill. Inferencing skills were introduced in a gradual way, starting with the most basic skill, such as involving visual aids (pictures and videos) and moving on to the more advanced skills based on the intonation of the speaker.

**The following are the main activities presented:**

**1. The workshop starts with a warm-up: under the title: Who are they?** The presenter brought a bag of "garbage" which supposedly belongs to one of the presenter's mystery new neighbor. As a group, we sorted through each item and have the attendees connect trash evidence by tapping into



their schema about the items to form an inference about the new neighbor.

## **2. Activity 3: Inferencing is an Educated Guess**

A YouTube video was used that explains the concept 'Inferencing' in a very simple and interesting way.

## **3. The second activity is under the title: What do I see?**

Different photos are placed around the classroom and a sheet of paper was posted under each photo with the following questions:

- What do you see?
- What do you understand?
- What do you conclude?

The participants formed a small group of 3-4 to come-up with the final conclusion and then the findings were discussed in the larger group. This activity will demonstrate a simple way in making inferencing.

## **4. Activity 4: Nothing Can Go Wrong with Mr. Bean**

A video of Mr. Bean in an exam room. This video is to demonstrate in a very funny and light way the implementation of the concept 'Inferencing'. One of the presenters pointed out at what point the participants can stop the video and what questions they can pose. This activity is to demonstrate general inferencing using body language and facial gestures.

## **5. Activity 5: Where is this Place?**

A video with cartoon characters, taking place in a famous city. Some of the architecture and certain hints are shown, through this the presenter will ask where this taking place is? The purpose of this is to understand situational inferencing.

## 6. Activity 6: The Sentences

- Carl looked at his watch. He left the room in a rush and headed for the classroom. (Shared Knowledge)
- “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?”  
(What we understand about the personality)
- A hair divides what is true and false. (a deeper understanding of the world)
- “I think, therefore I am.” (Philosophical inferencing)

This activity demonstrates that this skill can be used with different abilities of learners. It starts with a very simple concept of inferencing and then moves to more complex sentences that need more knowledge of the English language and more in depth analysis.

## 7. Activity 7: Reading Passage

“Thank you for making this library possible with your generous funding, when I attended here as a young cadet, Jimmy Carter had just been elected president. After I graduated I wished that I had another four years just like Jimmy.” Adapted from House of Cards

- The speaker graduated from a military school.  
True                      False
- Was the speaker successful in getting his wish to stay four more years?  
Explain why or Why not?

This activity to demonstrate how it is important for the students to be successful in the inferencing skill they need to share the common shared knowledge of certain concepts or words such as the word ‘cadet’. In addition a shared historic or cultural information or background knowledge is crucial.

## 8. Activity 8: Let's Listen

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyH44gA50M8> –Context clue
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_frM44bBMfA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_frM44bBMfA) -situational context
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Bsl5nuqHYY> – cultural
- <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/video/are-you-toxic-relationship> - wrong inferencing

A set of videos that will be used as an audio which is the most challenging part of inferencing as students are relying on their listening skills. They need to notice the words, pay attention to the context, intonation & tone. There is no access to facial expressions, gestures or looking at the words in sentences visually. Moreover, each video is selected carefully to demonstrate the different types of inferencing. The last video the focus is on wrong inferencing to demonstrate that, common knowledge is vital for a full comprehension of this skill.

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# **Application of Creativity in Language Learning through Task-based Learning (TBL)**

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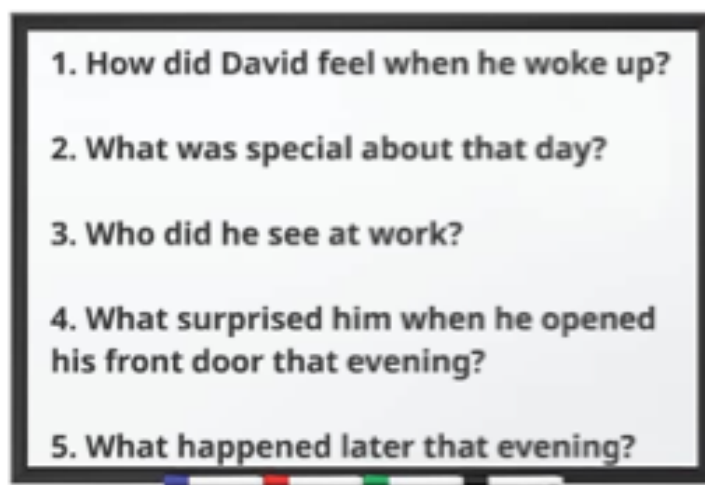
## **Abstract**

Creative lessons should not be seen as fun lesson fillers, but as a way of teaching. Actually, the importance of creativity in language learning and teaching has been addressed by English Language teaching (ELT) experts, and this paper focuses on the application of creativity through Task-Based Learning (TBL). TBL consists of a framework that emphasizes the role of creativity, as it consists of flexible tasks that are student-centered. It will explore two types of Task-Based Learning (TBL) activities: 'Reverse Reading' and "Erasure".

A good example of a TBL activity is one known as "Reverse Reading". This activity was posted by Mike Harrison (2011), an ELT professional, with the intention of making a reading class less mundane. This activity followed some of the generic principles put forth by Alan Maley (2016) for developing various forms of creativity, which he refers to as heuristics. Maley (2016) explains that heuristics are like a rule of thumb that work by trying things to see if they work out. Consequently, risk takers are more creative teachers because if an activity does not work out, they will see it as a learning moment rather than an indication of failure, (Richards, 2015). According to Xerri & Vassallo (2016) risk taking is an essential part of creativity as originality is discovered through trying something new. Maley (2016) suggests a few example heuristics, and one of which was to reverse the order. The RR activity does just that: instead of reading the text first, like a typical reading class, it starts off with introducing the questions first and then introducing the text. In fact, a text may not even be required depending on the teacher's objective.

The activity consists of the following basic steps (Harrison, 2011):

1. Dictate questions using target language (see example below)
2. Tell your students you forgot the reading text.
3. Ask students to write the answers anyway. They have to make up the answers and they can be as silly as they like. (Set a time limit for this).
4. When they are done answering questions, students compare answers in groups of 2 or 3
5. Students are asked to choose the best answers, and then to write the story to link their answers together.
6. Finally, students share their story with the class.



Adapted from <http://mikejharrison.com/2011/03/reverse-reading-comprehension-writing-lesson-activity/>

Another good example of a TBL activity is one known as “Erasure”. The modern drive to analyze traces of erasure mainly started with Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher who used “sous rature”, or “under erasure” as a tool to appropriate texts and reconstruct them with new forms and meanings. In other words, the materials that undergo any form of erasure are bound to go through deconstruction in order to be reconstructed into new

meanings and forms. This reconstruction often resonates with the shifting of its creator's cultural, social, political, and economic needs and interests. Hence, Heidegger's device is described as the "typographical expression of deconstruction" which means that objects that undergo erasure are always in flux, and are driven by progress (Taylor 113).

Applying erasure to words first appeared in Heidegger's 1955 essay entitled "Zur Seinsfrage." In this essay, he "crosses out the word Being, to write it as being crossed [Being]" in order to help define nihilism. Heidegger writes:

**The contemplative thinking of Being in terms of the unrepresentable coming to presence of beings is the only thinking that can hope to transcend the nothingness or nihilism of the world of representations, a world rooted in the metaphysics that represents Being as a being. (Van der Walt 211)**

In his essay, Heidegger contemplates the problematic nature of defining any entity in this world, let alone words. As shown in the example above, he leaves both the word and deletion remain clear in his writings because his philosophy states that the erased word is both "inaccurate" and "legible" at the same time (Spivak xiv). In her translator's preface of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak summarizes Heidegger's philosophy by writing that "since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since the word is necessary, it remains legible" (xiv). This is comparable to the idea of a palimpsest which comprises a new "legible" text and "inaccurate" and outdated remnants of an erased text (xiv). Heidegger's theory is mainly concerned with bridging the absent meaning to the present meaning by letting both the words and their deletion remain.



Whiting out and blacking out are two different erasure methods that help encourage learning autonomy and improve writing, reading, grammar and critical learning skills. One of the earliest examples of erasure application started with the idea of the palimpsest, which is defined by The American Heritage Dictionary as “a written document, usually on vellum or parchment that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of erased writing still visible” (894). The purpose of this workshop was to shed the light on the traditional methods and ways of utilizing the erasure theory to teach and assess language. These methods vary from cloze exercises to reverse reading comprehension practices and others. It also looked at new and modern ways of implementing blackening out and whiting out as two erasure methods in the curriculum, for language teaching and assessment.

The workshop highlighted that the key to a successful activity boils down to its flexibility and creativity. Any TBL activity can be improved upon by tailoring the subject to the specific needs of the students. However, the only way of improving or modifying any activity is to be a risk-taker and try new methods. Beautifully summarized, the notion of creativity in task based learning is that “If you’re not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original,” Robinson 2006 (Xerri & Vassallo, 2016). All elements considered, the reverse reading activity the Erasure activity are great examples of applying TBL.

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# Creativity in the classroom

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## **Abstract**

Over the last ten years, the internet has made available an abundance of free web based and downloadable tools that can help us to help our students develop their language and communication skills, but how do we decide which ones work for our students?

During this talk a number of tools were investigated that can be exploited by teachers to enhance creativity.

The talk began with a rationale for the inclusion of creativity as a necessary element within our teaching practice. It explored the improvised nature of speech production through a comparison to music and the improvised nature of jazz.

The speaker also referenced A Maley “Linguistic creativity in particular is so much part of learning and using language that we tend to take it for granted. Yet from the ability to formulate new utterances, to the way a child tells a story to the skill of a stand-up comedian, to the genius of a Shakespeare, linguistic creativity is at work.”

The speaker identified key areas where creativity is at play within authentic use of language, these being; free speaking practice, activities that involve

personalisation, activities that involve our culture and those that involve curiosity and imagination.

The speaker also pointed towards the relationship between tools and our evolutionary development into a sophisticated society and the relationship between tools and creativity.

The remainder of the talk linked together these elements of creativity with tools and activities that teachers could exploit within their classrooms. These included the use of images to stimulate creative writing. The speaker pointed to three sources. <https://unsplash.com/> a site that provides a wide range of royalty free images for use in the classroom and the development of course materials. <https://commaful.com/> a site that enables students to combine images, gifs and short video clips with their own creative writing. <https://www.writeabout.com/ideas/> a site that has a collection of images combined with story starter ideas to get students writing.

In the next part of the talk the speaker focused on the development of text and some tools to encourage students to develop their texts.

The sources used for this part of the talk included:

**<http://www.telescopictext.com/> a site that students can interact with to discover how a simple three word sentence can be developed into a descriptive paragraph.**

<https://docs.google.com> a tool that can be used to encourage students to work collaboratively to improve their texts.

In the next part of the talk the speaker focused on dialogue and suggested three tools that could be used to encourage students to explore dialogue. <https://toontastic.withgoogle.com/> a free mobile app that students can use to create their own animated movies using a range of characters and backgrounds and their own recorded voiceovers. <https://ifaketextmessage.com/> a site that enables teachers and students to create imaginary text messaging interactions to stimulate imagination. <https://itunes.apple.com/app/textingstory-chat-story-maker> an app that can be used to create videos of SMS text interactions for the development of reading skills.

In the next part of the talk the speaker looked at three ways that video could be exploited to develop creativity. <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/nikpeachey/silent-videos/> is a collection of short video clips that don't include any dialogue. These can be used to stimulate students' creative and critical thinking skills. Teachers can use these to encourage students to imagine dialogue, develop narrative and build empathy. <https://www.kapwing.com/> is a tool that enables students to build their own subtitles into the videos they watch. <https://www.timeline.ly/> is a tool that teachers can use to build interactive course materials based around the videos.

The final part of the talk looked at tools to encourage students to build personalized narrative. The speaker pointed to two resources. <https://spark.adobe.com/home/> is a tool that students can use across platforms to create spoken narrative based around their own sequences of images. The narrative can be exported and shared as digital video. <https://steller.co/> is a tool that students can use to create and publish digital books. These can combine images, video and their own text.

To close the talk the speaker suggested three ways of keeping up to date with digital tools and developments in creative teaching. <http://thecreativitygroup.weebly.com/> is the home of the C-Group, a group of educators committed to developing the use of creativity within the language classroom. This group is free for any teacher to join. <https://www.scoop.it/t/tools-for-learners> is a regularly updated collection of more than 1500 digital tools that teachers and learners can use to develop their digital skills and creativity. <https://tinyletter.com/technogogy/> is a twice monthly newsletter that teachers can subscribe to and which will help them keep up to date with regular input about digital learning and creativity.

The complete presentation from this talk along with all links to resources can be downloaded from: [\*\*http://technogogy.org.uk/tool-for-creativity.pdf\*\*](http://technogogy.org.uk/tool-for-creativity.pdf)

The second workshop entitled Creativity in the English Language Classroom – Workshop

This workshop examined creative teaching ideas from two books that were edited by Nik Peachey and Alan Maley for the British Council.

These can be downloaded for free from:

[\*\*https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/creativity-english-language-classroom\*\*](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/creativity-english-language-classroom) and [\*\*https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/continuing-professional-development/teacher-educator-framework/\*\*](https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/continuing-professional-development/teacher-educator-framework/)

## demonstrating-effective-teaching-behaviour/integrating-global-issues-creative-english-language-classroom

During this workshop participants were able to evaluate some of these ideas and see how they could be adapted to their teaching context.

The complete presentation from this talk along with all links to resources can be downloaded from: <http://technogogy.org.uk/Creativity-workshop.pdf>