How they See Us: The Perception of Black ESL Teachers in the United States

Olive Nabukeera

Although much research has been put into exploring issues of English language teacher identity, only a few studies have examined the extent to which race and linguistic identity play a role in the professional experiences of Black educators (Charles, 2017; Cooper & Bryan, 2020). Despite calls for the improvement of faculty diversity in TESOL and the emerging plethora of studies on race and racialization in the field, only a handful of studies have captured the realities of teaching English as a second language (ESL) while Black in the United States (Nabukeera, 2022; Penn, 2017). To contribute to the growing scholarship of Black teacher research, reflect and examine my own teaching journey as a Black African woman working in the United States and as part of my doctoral studies, I conducted a qualitative study that aimed to showcase the lived experiences of seven Black ESL teachers and administrators: 2 males and 5 females, working in the United States. I believe that these narratives highlight the valuable contributions of Black teachers in ESL classrooms, but also shed light on the tremendous challenges encountered by educators who do not fit snugly into the dominant stereotypical perception of what it means to be a teacher of English.

The study primarily aimed to answer this question: "To what extent does the perception of a minority race, ethnicity or language play a role in the teaching lives and professional careers of Black ESL educators?" Drawing upon positioning theory and critical race theory as analytical frameworks, the participants' underlying ideological views were examined so as to ascertain how Black teachers interpreted their professional experiences. As a social constructionist theory, positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990) was used to examine narratives, analyze word choices, and nonverbal cues in order to form conclusions about how teachers saw themselves and interpreted their roles as English language instructors compared to their interpretations of how they were positioned by their students and colleagues. Critical Race Theory provided the framework within which to explore how the centering of racial and linguistic identity in American society contributes to Black teacher perception. Using findings from a questionnaire and semi structured interviews, a model for Black teacher self-positioning was created (see table 1, including sample participant quotes) that illustrates how Black teachers see themselves in the language classrooms. The study also revealed that Black teachers' racial and/or linguistic identities are perceived to be in conflict by students and colleagues, which inevitably informs how they see us.

Relatable teachers	Cultural educators	Life coaches	Models for authentic black representation
Understand international student experiences	Decenter whiteness in ELT	Holistic teaching	Positive images of black people
• Racial stereotyping • Learning other languages • Living in foreign cultures or perceived as foreign • Linguistic profiling • Dealing with unconscious and cultural biases	• Incorporate non-white, non-American culture in language learning • Enhance students' appreciation for own cultures • Diversify course materials	• Motivate and inspire • Offer different perspectives on American life that is contrary to predominant, mainstream culture • Teach life skills that extend beyond ELT	• Shatter stereotypes of blackness • Challenge misconceptions of Black Americans and Africans • Show diversity within black culture that extends is inclusive of other nationalities
I can relate because I think if you have not experienced what it's like to be Othered which you experience a lot in this country, it's hard to relate to what our students experience	*I think English is often tied to whiteness. And I don't think that's fair. Especially when I am not a white person. And so, am I pushing the language or am I pushing white culture, white American culture? That's a lot of what I look at a lot of times.*	*Speaking several languages is the biggest asset because was I think students have a feeling that I can identify with them. That gives them a feeling that I am one of them and have a deep appreciation of that, and I bring that into the ESL classroom. More than my race.*	*"Students have their own opinion of Black people, so I try to show them, like, no, I'm normal too. I travel well, I'm educated, so there's nothing to fear"*

Table 1 – Black ESL teacher self-positioning model

How Black teachers are positioned

According to Davies & Harré (1990), interactive positioning occurs in situations where "what one person says positions another" (p.48). And unlike reflexive positioning, where an individual has a right to position themselves differently depending on the context, interactive positioning is much more significant as others can avail, restrict, or deny opportunities to the person being positioned. It is well known that both teachers and students carry into the classroom their own personal beliefs about others that consciously or subconsciously contribute to the learning environment. In this study, the participants felt that the dominant stereotypical perceptions regarding teachers' appearance, speech, and culture, played a tremendous role in some of the ways that black teachers are perceived.

"*You are something different*" - The teacher-participants stated that ESL students are usually quite surprised, even enamored to have a Black teacher particularly because they have never had one before. As such the excitement is usually because we are "something different" as was expressed by one of the participants. And that although global perceptions of Black Americans have contributed to international ESL students' half-baked understanding of Blackness, most students seem to show a genuine enthusiasm and willingness to learn from and engage with Black teachers. While this finding was somewhat surprising as it countered some of the negative reports of racism that were reported by teachers in similar studies (Charles, 2017; Penn, 2017), it also speaks to the need for more Black teacher visibility.

"*You don't look Black*"- Four teachers in this study reported that they are often thought of as being not Black enough or not Black at all, either because of a lighter skin complexion, ability to speak other languages fluently, having a non-American sounding name or being biracial. Some of the comments stated by teachers were: "they don't think I'm black", "they don't automatically go black first or black at all", "they think I'm Arab", "they think I have white in my family", "Because I am Afro-Cuban, I have been asked by my students are you one of them or are you one of us?". What these statements reveal is two-fold. First is the tension between an individual's racial self-identification compared to how others assign race to Black people who do not fit a prescribed image of Blackness. What happens to a teacher's sense of self and belongingness if they are constantly being put in a position where they have to explain their racial identity? The second is the underlying assumption that all Black people look the same, which serves to perpetuate the notion that Black people are a monolith. I would venture to argue that part of this archaic thinking is due to the lack of Black teacher representation at work. In the sense that perceptions may begin to change if students are exposed to more Black teachers and from a variety of backgrounds. For teachers, the necessity to straddle the line between leaning into one's own Blackness while at the same type being aware of what that means to others is a level of mental gymnastics that the average non-black English teacher does not have to deal with.

"*You speak so well for someone Black*"- The comments made to Black teachers about how they speak English are well documented by researchers in other studies (Charles, 2017; Cooper & Bryan, 2020; Hernandez, 2016). And just as in those studies, most participants reported that they had been called articulate especially by peers, and supervisors; whether directly stated or implied. One was told that she "speaks so well for someone Black" and that she did not "sound Black", while two participants were told they "sound white". The issue with these comments is that being well-spoken, a trait that is expected of any English teacher, is considered as somewhat exceptional when ascribed to a Black teacher. Another teacher-participant, Francine, stated that "I'm very conscious of how I speak. I code switch. I speak as I should, as they would want me to. Not as I want…that's my way of keeping a professional persona because I really don't want them to see me". The implication is that racialised interpretations of Blackness are often imposed on Black teachers that teachers feel the need to take on a separate work identity in order to fit in ESL spaces. The mental and psychological toll in having to retain one's sense of identity is adequately summarized in this quote by Talia who stated that: "I don't think they [white people] understand what I have had to do in order to become a teacher. In order to be taken seriously".

In conclusion, although none of these participants used the terms racist or racism to articulate their experiences, Black teachers continue to contend with restrictive racial and linguistic conceptualizations of Blackness that serve to delegitimize their identities in the workplace. It must be reiterated that this study showcased educators working in the United States. It would be intriguing to examine the extent to which the Black teacher experience in the US is comparable to other contexts, such as France, where the conceptualization and societal perception of Blackness differs. Nonetheless, I believe that the lack of Black teacher diversity and representation in ESL contexts within adult English language programs, not just in the United States, but around the world, has contributed to these restrictive ideologies and generalizations about Black educators because if they don't see us, how will they know us?

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Flip the Script: A Practical Framework for Re-imagining Classroom Engagement

Dr. Ngan Phan Le Hai



Photo by FatCamera/Getty via Canva

"How can I make my lessons more engaging and relevant?"

It's a question most of us ask, whether we're brand new to the classroom or 20 years in. We have access to more materials, tools, and ideas than ever before. And yet, it's easy to fall into routines: slides, worksheets, drills. Tried and tested, sure, but not always inspiring.

That's where the **FLIP the Script** model comes in, a flexible, four-part framework designed to help you breathe new life into your lessons: one small tweak at a time. You don't have to overhaul everything. A single fresh idea can be enough to spark new energy in your students and in yourself.

Let's walk through the FLIP model together with real examples and ready-to-use steps.

What is FLIP? FLIP stands for:

F – Freshen the Format

L – Loosen the Control

I – Inject the Unexpected

P – Personalize the Content

Each individual element helps answer a core teaching question. Used together they form a toolkit you can draw from to rethink how, what, and why you teach.

Freshen the Format

Key Question: How can I present this differently?
Teacher's Role: Experimenter & Designer
Student's Role: Engager & Reactor
Focus: Delivery & Structure

Grammar Speed Dating

Instead of giving students a worksheet on conditionals, turn it into a speaking activity where they rotate partners and use target grammar in conversation.

Steps:

1. Write 4–5 If questions on the board. (e.g. "If you won the lottery…?")
2. Set up chairs in pairs around the room.
3. Students ask and answer one question per rotation. After 2 minutes, they switch partners.
4. Optional: Have students remember a fun answer to share with the class.

Why it works: It adds movement, laughter, and natural repetition of the grammar point.

Other quick ideas:

- Turn reading into a scavenger hunt or into a gallery walk.
- Turn a listening task into a comic strip.
- Replace drills with a board game or peer quiz.

Thinking box: Start by changing how you introduce content. Could this be a story? A game? A student-led explanation?

Loosen the Control

Key Question: Who makes the decisions?

Teacher's Role: Facilitator & Co-learner

Student's Role: Leader, Initiator, Decision-Maker

Focus: Power & Agency

Student-Designed Rubrics

Instead of giving your students a ready-made rubric, create one with them.

Steps:

1. Ask: "What makes a good presentation?"
2. List their answers (e.g. clear voice, visuals, timing).
3. Group them into categories (e.g. content, delivery, creativity).
4. Turn these into assessment criteria and agree on point values together.

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Why it works: Students understand what's expected and feel more invested in the task.

Other quick ideas:

- Let students choose their project topics.
- Let them vote on the order of class activities.
- Offer a choice between group or solo work.

Thinking box: You don't have to give up all control. Start small with choice, and expand gradually—even in more traditional systems.

Inject the Unexpected

Key Question: What twist could make this more memorable?

Teacher's Role: Creative Disruptor

Student's Role: Curious Explorer

Focus: Surprise, Novelty & Emotional Engagement

The Mystery Box Starter

Start your lesson with a closed box and tell students the topic is inside.

Steps:

1. Bring a small box (or even just a bag).
2. Say: "Today's lesson is in here. Guess what it is."
3. Give a few fun clues or hand out mystery envelopes.
4. After several guesses, open the box to reveal the theme (for example, persuasive language through strange ads).
5. Dive into the activity.

Why it works: Curiosity boosts attention and attention leads to learning.

Other quick ideas:

- Show a weird photo and ask, "What's the story?"
- Introduce a wrong fact and ask students to fix it.
- Rearrange the classroom into an unusual layout.

Thinking box: Surprises don't have to be physical. Twists in delivery, context, or role are just as powerful.

Personalize the Content

Key Question: How does this relate to their world?

Teacher's Role: Connector & Empathizer

Student's Role: Self-Revealer & Meaning-Maker

Focus: Relevance & Identity

Passion Podcasts

Ask students to create short podcasts about topics they care about—gaming, cooking, football, and using the week's grammar or vocabulary. They apply language meaningfully and share what matters to them.

Steps:

1. Teach a grammar or vocab focus (for example, past simple).
2. Ask: "What are you passionate about?" (e.g. Sports? Cooking? Music?)
3. In pairs, students plan a short podcast episode sharing a story or giving tips.
4. Record using phones or apps (or just present to the class).
5. Reflect together on language use and what they learned.

Why it works: It blends creativity, self-expression, and real language use.

Other quick ideas:

- Use examples from students' favourite shows, games, or TikToks.
- Invite them to bring in objects that matter to them.
- Link writing tasks to their actual goals, like emailing a host family.

Thinking box: Personalization supports engagement and student well-being, especially in mixed-level or multicultural groups.

Final Thoughts: Flip a Little, Change a Lot

Flipping the script doesn't mean flipping your entire syllabus. It's about infusing small sparks of innovation into your teaching: one decision, one twist, one moment at a time. Every teacher can start by experimenting with just one letter of the FLIP model. Ask yourself:

Can I freshen this format?

Can students make a choice?

Could I surprise them today?

What makes this relevant to them?

Even modest changes can have a powerful ripple effect: increased participation, more smiles, deeper thinking, and stronger connection.

So, flip a worksheet into a game. Flip a lecture into a mystery. Flip a rigid task into a personal story. Flip the script because when we do, our students might just flip their view of learning too.



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Lights, Language, Action!

Bringing English Alive Through Drama in the EFL Classroom

Evi Karydi



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Why Drama Belongs in Every Language Classroom

Picture a classroom where students aren't just speaking English because they have to, but because they genuinely want to—on stage, in character, and fully immersed in the moment. That's the magic of drama! It creates authentic, engaging situations where language truly comes to life. Beyond just a tool for performance, incorporating drama into EFL classrooms nurtures creativity, boosts confidence, enhances fluency, and encourages teamwork. By focusing on communication and real-life interactions, drama allows learners at any level to break free from monotonous textbook exercises and embrace meaningful, expressive language use. This article dives into practical strategies for integrating drama into your EFL classroom—no prior acting experience necessary!

Why Use Drama to Teach English?

Drama serves as a fantastic bridge between the structure of language and its practical use. It transforms abstract vocabulary and grammar into real, tangible experiences. As Maley and Duff (2005) point out, drama offers "a framework for creative and imaginative use of language," which helps learners develop both accuracy and fluency. Here are some benefits of incorporating drama in English as a Foreign Language (EFL):

- Boosted motivation and participation among learners
- Enhanced pronunciation, intonation, and overall fluency
- Improved speaking and listening skills
- Increased confidence in communicating in real-life situations
- Opportunities for fostering intercultural understanding and empathy

Drama is particularly beneficial for those who learn best through movement and interaction, allowing for a more personalized and engaging approach to instruction.

Setting the Stage: Creating a Safe Environment

Before diving into dramatic activities, it's crucial to cultivate a classroom atmosphere filled with trust, respect, and a sense of play. Many students—especially teens and adults—might feel anxious about performing. Start with low-pressure, inclusive games and gradually progress to role-playing and performances. Here are some tips for fostering a drama-friendly classroom:

- Kick things off with group games and movement activities to warm up
- Focus on the learning process rather than just the final performance
- Celebrate creativity and originality, rather than striving for perfection
- Encourage pair and group work to help ease any anxiety
- Ensure that instructions are clear and demonstrated effectively

Drama Techniques That Work in EFL

Here are some essential drama techniques that resonate well with learners of all ages and levels:

a. Role-play

In this activity, students step into the shoes of real or imagined characters, whether in everyday scenarios or fantastical settings. It's a way to practice functional language skills like making requests, giving advice, or solving problems.

Example: At a restaurant, a student plays the waiter while another takes on the role of the customer, practicing how to order food and handle complaints.

b. Teacher-in-Role

Here, the teacher immerses themselves in a character from a story or situation. This approach transforms the learning experience, encouraging students to engage with the 'character' instead of the teacher.

Example: The teacher acts as a pirate captain on the lookout for a crew. Students must persuade the captain to let them join the adventure using their best persuasive language.

c. Hot Seating

In this technique, a student (or the teacher) embodies a character and faces questions from the class. It's a great way to foster question formation, inference, and critical thinking.

d. Freeze Frames / Tableau

Students create a still image that captures a moment from a story or situation. The rest of the class then guess what's happening or come up with dialogue inspired by this moment frozen in time.

e. Improvisation

In this lively exercise, students create scenes based on a prompt, an excellent way to enhance their spontaneity and fluency. Example: 'Two people stumble upon a treasure chest in the forest—what unfolds next?'

Drama Activities by Level and Age Group

For Young Learners (A1-A2):

- Action Stories: Engage kids with simple stories that have repetitive patterns and gestures. They can join in with sound effects, movements, and lines to make it lively.
- Puppet Theatre: Let the learners craft their own puppets and perform short dialogues or scenes.
- Magic Door: Imagine there's a magic door. Ask, 'What world are we stepping into today?' and create scenes together.

For Teens (A2-B1):

- Problem Solvers: Divide into groups and present them with a 'problem' to role-play their way through it, like planning a school event or surviving a zombie apocalypse.
- Drama Circles: Each student contributes a line to build a scene in a circle, adding to the creativity.
- Role-Reversal Debates: Students take on the opposite viewpoint of their own beliefs, practicing the language of opinion and persuasion.

For Adults (B1+):

- Real-Life Scenarios: Get ready for job interviews, negotiations, or medical appointments through practice.
- Forum Theatre: Act out scenes that involve conflict or social issues, allowing audience members to pause and suggest different outcomes.
- Autobiographical Monologues: Learners prepare brief speeches based on their real-life experiences to share with a partner or the group.

Post-Drama Language Work

After an activity, encourage students to reflect, discuss, and jot down any new language they encountered. Here are some follow-up ideas:

- Create vocabulary mind maps based on the scene
- Engage in reflective writing (like, 'What was your character feeling?')
- Write dialogues to script out improvised scenes
- Focus on grammar (such as past tenses or conditionals used during the role-play)

This approach not only reinforces learning but also connects it to the curriculum.

Assessment and Inclusion

Drama plays a vital role, allowing teachers to evaluate:

- Fluency and the use of the target language
- Pronunciation and intonation
- Interactional strategies like turn-taking and clarification

Moreover, drama fosters inclusion by enabling learners of all abilities to participate in various ways, whether it's designing props, narrating stories, or writing scripts. It encourages teamwork, empathy, and social-emotional learning, all while helping students grow their language skills.

Drama and Storytelling: A Natural Pair

Drama and storytelling go hand in hand, like two best friends, with so many activities giving learners a chance to dive into the characters' motives, dilemmas, and emotions. For instance:

- Act out a scene from a story but give it a twist with a different ending.
- Step into a character's shoes and answer some questions as if you were them.
- Bring a folktale from a learner's home country to life through dramatization.

This approach beautifully combines understanding narratives, sparking creativity, and sharing cultural experiences.

CLASSROOM APPROACHES: SPOTLIGHT ON DRAMA

Simple Steps to Help Save Time as a Teacher

Laura Edwards

As teachers, we are always thinking of our students. We make an effort to customise lessons, find relevant materials and create engaging activities our learners will love. These tasks outside the classroom can eat into our free time. However, there are ways to regain some control of this. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - the 3 Rs of the environmental movement - can remind us to reduce the time we spend looking for materials, reuse the materials we have and recycle our students' contributions. The ways to do so are endless, but this article will focus on the first element, Reduce, as a means of getting started.

As with all good projects, you begin by taking stock, by reflecting on your habits and actions, and asking yourself what it is that's preventing you from being efficient. In your teaching preparation, what is the biggest drain on your time and energy? When I ask colleagues, a number of time-wasters crop up, such as distractions, miscommunication and repeating the same tasks over again.

Reduce distractions

If we strive to be more efficient, being organised is essential. The first step is to reduce distractions, specifically technology-related distractions. Responding immediately to emails, text messages and social media notifications is a problem because when you're on task, every interruption sets you back. Not only the time it takes to read the message, but also the time it takes to mentally return to what you were doing. The truth is that by allowing others to disrupt your schedule (be it Instagram, WhatsApp, or a marketing email from a favourite clothing store), you let their wants take precedence over yours - you allow others to steal your time.

Thankfully, technology, the cause of the problem, also provides solutions. Start with notifications. Go through the list in your phone settings and decide whether you really need messages from Netflix, Facebook and Amazon. Turn off everything that's not essential. Be ruthless. Then start utilising the 'Do not disturb' function on your phone and computer to silence calls, alerts and notifications for a specific period. You can still allow chosen apps or people (your child, your boss) to contact you during this time, which makes it a very practical feature.

Next, put your phone on silent mode and leave it in another room. An unnecessary precaution you may think, but the authors of the article 'Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity' found that a smartphone placed out of sight but close to hand, in a bag or pocket, still had a negative effect on the cognitive functioning of many smartphone users.

On the topic of cognitive functioning, now might be a good time to remind you that multitasking is a myth. The brain doesn't actually tackle tasks simultaneously, but rather quickly switches focus from task to task, causing a start/stop process each time. This practice can reduce productivity by as much as 40% (American Psychology Association website). Of course, the solution is to break the habit and show people and tasks the respect they deserve, but this is not easy. We've become accustomed to writing emails while listening to a webinar, or planning lessons and simultaneously keeping a Whatsapp conversation going while watching TV. Such behaviour easily leads to mistakes or miscommunication.

To stop this, try the Pomodoro technique, a time management method which breaks tasks into 25-minute intervals of high concentration followed by 5-minute breaks. Pomodoro is the Italian word for tomato, the shape of the kitchen timer that inspired the technique's creator. The goal is not to complete a specific task within these 25 minutes, but to maintain uninterrupted focus for the allotted time, enjoy a brief break, and then resume. After 4 sessions, you take a longer break. When a distracting thought pops up, make a note to return to it later and get on with your task. Initially, focusing for 25 minutes may be hard, but your ability to concentrate over longer periods will soon improve.

There are many Pomodoro apps with pre-set timers which are simple to use. I use Pomodor on my computer and Focus Keeper on my phone. Of course, an app won't magically fix anything - you need to develop habits that will guide you to a state of focus. That means making the conscious decision to work on one task, ignore all interruptions and push every distracting thought aside.

Improve Communication

Now you're ready to focus, you can deal with the issue of ineffective communication with students. We have all found ourselves repeating a message multiple times to different people, or even giving a student the same instructions again and again. The problem could be in our mode of communication - we tend to share information in a way that suits us best at the time. How often have you added a hasty 'And don't forget…' at the end of a lesson? However, for students, this may not be the right mode at the right moment. To help reduce ineffective communication and avoid some of this unnecessary repetition, we can try providing important information in both oral and written modes. To do this best, you'll need a digital noticeboard. Without some kind of shared info space, you are forcing students to come to you for everything, from homework tasks to exam dates or submission deadlines. You're taking their autonomy from them and making more work for yourself.

Your digital noticeboard doesn't have to be fancy - use what you know. With one-to-one classes or very small groups, a simple Google Doc can be great. The same idea works with Word or Pages. I create one document for the duration of the course, which I share with the students giving them editing rights. In each lesson, after adding a new heading (the date and topic), we use the document as a whiteboard writing up notes and new vocabulary, with students brainstorming and writing their ideas directly into the document. When reviewing the document after class, students can add comments or questions, which we cover in the next meeting. The document becomes a depository for announcements, homework, images, and links to videos or audio files. Everything is gathered in one place, accessible at any time. As the document grows in length, it provides a record of the learning process, which both sides are responsible for. Missing a lesson doesn't mean missing out. When everyone has the link, 'I wasn't there last week' is no longer an acceptable excuse for not being prepared.

For larger groups, *linoit.com* is a free digital bulletin board where you post sticky notes to a canvas - ideal for brainstorming, project presentations or discussions around question prompts. Visual learners can choose different colours for their sticky notes or the words they write. When reviewing lessons, red text or notes could be used to identify concepts or words they don't understand, yellow for those they need help with and green for things they're confident about. If you're using Lino.it as a class notice board for one-way communication, assign different colours to different types of information. Yellow notes could be for reading homework, green ones for video links, and so on. You can post video and audio links too.

The advantages of having a shared space like this are multiple. I particularly like how organised it makes my teaching, but I also appreciate how this gives students responsibility for their learning. Emailing the teacher to say 'I forgot what you said' is something many just won't do, out of embarrassment or shyness, and as a result, they miss out. No matter how nice you think you are as a teacher, it is nicer yet to allow students to access learning materials or important information without having to come to you.

These ideas are just some of the many ways in which you can adjust how you operate in order to manage your time better. When in doubt, return to the 3 Rs - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - to help you make your teaching preparation more sustainable.

(For References, see p. 15)



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The Native Speaker Delusion: Ten Years On

Lara Bediones

A Decade of Delusion

In the 2015 Fall Issue of the Teaching Times, the lead article was "The Native Speaker Delusion" by Marek Kiczkowiak. He called the belief that native speakers are "by definition linguistically and instructionally superior to any non-native English speaker" "delusional." Kiczkowiak wrote in 2015: "It's time we faced this delusion head-on and put to rest the old question: 'Native or non-native: who's worth more?' posed by Peter Medgyes two decades ago. Instead, I propose that we start talking about what it means to be a good English teacher."

Ten years later, is the ELT industry really still perpetuating this delusion?

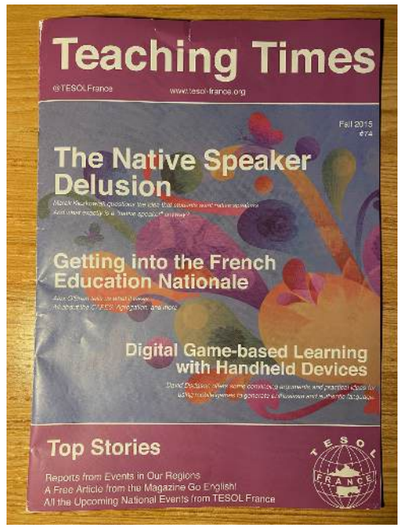
Asked to comment on the article's anniversary, Kiczkowiak modestly replied that he had nothing new to add and no longer worked in ELT. Yet, his pioneering voice still shapes the conversation, laying the groundwork for much of the activism that followed. His site TEFL Equity Advocates, his articles, videos, and his PhD dissertation—Native Speakerism in English Language Teaching: Voices From Poland (University of York, 2018)—remain foundational in any discussion of native-speakerism.

During a recent webinar titled Defeating Systemic Bias in ELT: How Real Teachers Are Changing the Narrative, participants cited his work while discussing how to dismantle native speakerism. The event showed how teachers are mobilizing across countries to speak with one voice. The issue is not NS versus NNS, but fighting systemic practices that continue to exclude many qualified professionals.

Legal and Industry Frameworks

If the industry continues to tolerate bias, European law does not. Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, language, birth, or nationality. Requiring a passport from one of the 'Big 7' anglophone countries is therefore illegal in Europe. Professional organizations have supported these protections. TESOL International reaffirmed this in its 2006 Position Statement Against Discrimination of Nonnative Speakers in the Field of TESOL, while TESOL France actively enforces it by refusing job ads that demand "native speakers only."

Despite these clear standards, many qualified teachers are still routinely excluded on the basis of birthplace or passport. One teacher who refused to accept this was Rachel Tsateri. In 2021, the CELTA and DELTA-certified teacher was rejected solely because she was not a native speaker. With documented evidence and community support, she pursued legal action, and the case was settled after a judge warned the school it would lose in court.



She received €3,000 in compensation, reinforcing a 2017 ruling by Germany's highest labour court that "native speaker" in job ads constitutes discrimination as it indirectly relates to ethnic origin. Like Kiczkowiak, she said she had nothing new to add. Yet her case continues to circulate today, a landmark for others challenging discrimination.

Among those inspired by Tsateri was Vincent Richard in France. In 2022, he was also rejected because he had not been born in an anglophone country. He brought his case to the Défenseur des Droits, an independent constitutional authority for the protection of rights and freedoms, which in February 2024 issued a decision confirming discrimination and recommending financial compensation. Although it was non-binding, it was a symbolic victory. When asked about his experiences, Richard says he continues to face rejection, but insists that teachers must pursue their rights whenever discrimination is clear.

Collective Advocacy

Determined to continue his active response to unfair hiring practices, Richard launched an initiative in May 2025. Together with three other educators, he co-authored an Open Letter to the Council of Europe, signed today by nearly 600 ELT professionals around the world. The letter denounces the misuse of CEFR levels—especially C2—as shorthand for "native-like." Such distortions exclude multilingual teachers, mislead students, and reinforce systemic bias. The Open Letter calls for a clear separation between proficiency and identity, responsible job ads that specify real requirements, and awareness campaigns to protect CEFR's credibility.

GLOBAL ISSUES

The Open Letter shows how the debate has matured over the past decade. What began as Kiczkowiak's critique of a delusion has become collective advocacy aimed at Europe's most influential institutions. And as Richard reminds us: the ideal English teacher is not native, but global.

Global Voices

One of the Open Letter authors is Kuwait-based glocademic Natalia Wright. After nearly a hundred unsuccessful applications abroad, she noticed that rejections were tied to nationality rather than ability. For Wright, the "ghost of the native speaker" still haunts recruitment. With a doctorate in education, she argues that only professional competence should matter, not origin. Her strategy is transparency: speaking openly about bias online, in conferences, and in research, so institutions cannot ignore it.

In 2016, Ana Jovic's turning point came when she began applying for online jobs outside Serbia. Shocked by rejections despite her qualifications, she discovered Kiczkowiak's blog and realized her experience had a name. That recognition turned her into a "Native Speakerism-Buster." Jovic acknowledges that explicit 'native speaker only' ads have declined in Europe, but stresses that covert filtering persists. For her, inclusion must move beyond politically correct language to genuine equity in hiring. She contributed both to the Open Letter and was presenting at the webinar Defeating Systemic Bias in ELT.

Discrimination and Exploitation

Meri Maroutian, the founder of The Non Native Speaker and the host of the webinar, is also a co-author of the Open Letter. While legal victories address overt discrimination, advocates like Maroutian are exposing subtler forms of bias. She reframes native speakerism not only as discrimination but also as economic exploitation. The industry, she argues, profits from non-native teachers twice: first as learners who invest heavily in certifications, and again as teachers who are often paid less despite holding higher qualifications. "Biases in hiring force non-native teachers to become overqualified simply to compete for the same opportunities," she explains. Maroutian has become one of the strongest voices against native-speakerism. By discussing the economics of exclusion, she shifts the conversation from ideology to material inequality. She runs a community on Discord and offers masterclasses to empower teachers worldwide.

Beyond the Native Speaker Delusion

Kiczkowiak ended his 2015 article by citing James Taylor's piece Get Involved, which urged teachers to take action: "we all have a responsibility to tackle NS favouritism… Every action, however small, matters." Taylor suggested discussing equality with students, raising the issue in schools, and questioning employers when unfair treatment occurs.

Ten years on, the list has only grown: attend webinars, join communities that challenge bias, raise your voice on social media, and, yes, sign the Open Letter to the Council of Europe.

A decade after The Native Speaker Delusion, systemic bias remains entrenched in ELT. Yet, the debate now has a wider vocabulary, from delusion to systemic bias, from identity to accentism*, from isolated cases to collaborative initiatives. With legal precedents, teacher-led initiatives, and growing global awareness, there is reason for cautious optimism. Real change will come when the industry — and its learners — fully recognize English as a lingua franca, not the linguistic birthright of a few.

Will I still be writing about this in 2035? I think it's high time I put my Fall 2015 issue away for good.

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(See glossary on p.27 for terminology)



Lara Bediones is the founder of Teacher Tribe, a community for language educators in France. Across classrooms and boardrooms, she advocates for multilingualism, teacher well-being, inclusive practices, and early literacy. Her passport says non-native speaker but her students couldn't care less.

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Setting up as an Auto-Entrepreneur to teach English in France

Yvonne Chappell

Covid 19 has changed the way many businesses operate in France, including the English teaching business. Many language schools in France are now offering online English courses, which means that you could be 1000km from your learner but still have regular classes. For some of you this might be the chance you have been looking for to start your own business. So how do you set about doing it? Well you might find that your town offers courses for would-be entrepreneurs – I found that this was the case in Strasbourg, my nearest city. There was a week-long course offered which explained everything I needed to know about setting up a business, for a small fee, but it was worth it.



(Photo by Brooke Lark via Unsplash)

Probably the easiest option is to become a micro-entrepreneur (also known as auto –entrepreneur).

Anyone resident in France can become an auto-entrepreneur, but if you are not a French citizen you will require documentation to prove that you have the right to live and work in France. If you are from another EU country, then your passport or ID card is sufficient. If not you will need a visa or residency card that allows you to work. For Brits who were here before the UK left the EU, the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement Residence Permit is acceptable. Be aware, though, that for Brits, regulations are getting tougher now and I have been asked for this card twice recently.

The actual registration process is fairly straightforward and can be done online: just go to www.autoentrepreneur.urssaf.fr and follow the steps there. You will be asked to register under a professional category; for teachers, this is profession libérale. Urssaf will send you a Siret number, which means that you can then start working as you have a registered business number. You will also be attached to a social security scheme which enables you to make contributions to your pension and healthcare. N.B. There used to be a separate social security scheme for auto-entrepreneurs but since 2020, auto-entrepreneurs have been ascribed to the general scheme. These social charges can be paid monthly or every three months. Social charges are 22% of your earnings but you only pay them on the money you earn, so if one month you do not make any money, then you pay nothing. You will also be taxed on your earnings (if you pay tax). You can opt to pay your tax at the same time as you pay your social charges or you can do it when you complete your annual declaration.

So, what are the advantages of this system?

- You only pay taxes and social security charges on what you earn
- It is easy to set up
- You can do it in addition to your main job
- You do not pay VAT
- You can earn up to €72,000
- Most people work alone but you can have an employee under certain conditions
- You are eligible for sick pay after you have worked a year and have earned over €4,000
- You don't have to have your accounts audited though you are obliged to keep them

And the negatives?

- You cannot claim for any materials that you buy in order to do your job - books, computers, educational games, creation of a website etc.
- You cannot claim mileage
- If you are sick in the first year then you will have no source of income if you do not work
- You are alone, you have no colleagues to bat ideas around with; other auto-entrepreneurs could be competitors and may not want to share ideas with you. In other words it can be a bit lonely out there…
- If the student cancels then often you are not

paid unless you agree on this before starting the job
- If someone sues you,your personal assets are also at risk as you are not a limited company

There are other ways of setting up a company/enterprise, such as EURL - Enterprise Unipersonelle à responsabilitié limitée - but these are more complicated and if you are thinking of doing it I would advise you to see professional advice or contact your local chambre de commerce.

Another thing to bear in mind if you want to offer training to a wide range of potential clients, is the need for quality assurance certification. It used to be that there were very few barriers to becoming an English teacher in France. This has now changed and many teachers have now obtained QA via Qualiopi, a quality certification brand for training and skills development service providers. All salaried workers in France have a right to training which is paid for from Mon Compte Formation. However, to be on the list for Mon Compte Formation you have to have gone through the Qualiopi process which can be tough and also expensive. You can still offer courses without having Qualiopi accreditation but then people have to pay for themselves or their company has to pay directly, which can depend on the company.



Yvonne Chappell is an English teacher based in Strasbourg she works both as an auto-entrepreneur and as an employee. She did her research for her MBA on a comparison between the employment legislation in the UK and France.

Supporting Newly Qualified Teachers

Do you remember your first teaching job? Were you thrown in the deep end or guided into the pool shallow end first? ***Liam Tyrell*** *explains the challenges, development and support systems of the newly qualified teacher.*

Starting Out

I remember my first ELT job clearly, I interviewed on the Friday and was told to start on the Monday - evening classes to begin. "Come in around 5 on Monday" the DOS said, and I spent the weekend excited about starting. At 5pm on Monday I arrived at school and was handed a copy of Headway Pre-Int. and shown to a classroom.

"You're on page 73, photocopier is over there and you can get markers from my office - class starts at 6, and there's a break at 8 for 20 minutes."

That was the DOS again with my induction. Welcome to teaching - hope you survive! I did in the end, mostly through having understanding students, sympathetic colleagues, and a fair amount of grit and resilience. I'm now on the other side of this dynamic as a teacher trainer and department head with responsibility for recruitment, and it's my mission to make sure I do better by our newly qualified teachers (NQTs) than throwing a book at them and seeing if they sink or swim. While my solutions to this problem were local, hopefully the ideas behind them, if not the suggestions themselves, will be beneficial across a variety of institutional and employment contexts.

The challenge for NQTs

In mainstream education, an NQT, or novice teacher, is said to be a teacher within the first 12-24 months of their initial training. In much of the English language sector most new entrants will only have 4-weeks training under their belt before going into the classroom as a "qualified" teacher. This situation is exacerbated by the inattention paid to orientation and induction post-hiring, and compounded further by the lack of in-service training and development provided by language teaching organisations.

From my experiences hiring NQTs and hearing reports from former trainees, it's possible to identify key problems that they have when they start out. The literature supports these anecdotal reports, with Baguley (2019) categorising 6 key areas of challenge.

1. **Hours**

On pre-service courses, teachers may teach one hour every two days and they often spend 4+ hours preparing. The workload increases as they start out teaching with the potential for up to 30 classroom hours per week. In the Irish context, English lessons for adults generally last 3 hours - triple the amount that the novice has ever planned for.



(Photo: ilkercilik via Canva)

2. **Support**

Novice teachers enter a staff room where most teachers have more experience than them, contrasting their pre-service course experience of being surrounded by peers also struggling to figure things out. For lessons, they will not receive the same level of detailed and structured support that they are used to from tutors.

3. **Pressure**

Pre-service courses rely on free classes for the teaching practice component, which means that students in those classes have lower expectations. When starting out, novices will come up against the higher expectation levels of fee-paying students and often the parents of those students. Novices and new hires can end up on the standby rota in schools too, meaning that they have to prepare at the last minute for classes, adding to the pressure felt.

4. **Limits**

Novice teachers have been trained to deliver one-off lessons in their pre-service courses, without necessarily seeing how one lesson links to the next or to the overall goals of a course. They will also be limited in terms of the levels they have experience with and perhaps the number of students they have taught in each class.

5. **Assessment**

Assessment is normally touched on briefly in pre-service courses so NQTs will have few strategies for dealing with this. In the school environment they will be responsible for assessing learning both formally and informally and may be required to prepare their students for an external summative assessment.

6. **Students**

On pre-service courses the students are normally attending of their own volition and aware that their teachers are trainees. As a result, the students are wonderfully understanding and cooperative, and their motivation is quite high. In the school setting, novices will face classes with demotivated students or those with behavioural issues. They can often be required to teach young learners or teenagers too, despite not having done this in their training courses.

The Development Pathway

When considering how best to build an orientation/induction process that supports NQTs through the challenges listed above, it's worth thinking about how teachers develop. Fuller's model of teacher development may be slightly dated, but its simplicity lends it great utility for this purpose. Three stages of development are proposed:

Stage 1: Self-image and interpersonal relations.

At this stage the teacher is primarily concerned with looking the part. Do I look like a teacher? Do others see me as a teacher? Often the novice will be most interested in whether the students like them or not.

Stage 2: Instructional methods and teaching tasks.

The next major concern of the novice is the tasks and activities they use in class. In this stage the key is the materials and methods and whether they are useful and useable. The key ways the teacher measures this are by student engagement with materials and the accessibility of exercises/explanations.

Stage 3: Assessing learning and teaching impact.

In this stage teachers move on to worry about whether what they are doing is impacting student learning. Normally reaching this stage coincides with further training or education, for example industry qualifications such as Delta, Dip. TESOL or academic qualifications such as M.A. TESOL.

Support System Needs

Having assessed the challenges for novices, and examined the typical development pathway, we can start to build a support system for our NQTs in our institutions. In our case, we built our system based on four pillars.

1. Socialisation

We have to make sure newly qualified teachers feel like they fit in straight away. They need to know everyone, not just the other teachers.

2. Procedures

We have to have the procedures in place to make it easy for them to get up and running. They need something to rely on so they can focus on all the other new things.

3. Reinforcement

We need to make sure that we are reinforcing their self-image and building confidence by monitoring and encouraging.

4. Training

We need to continue their training and fill in the holes that will surely exist. We have to appreciate that this will be an ongoing, long-term process and won't happen overnight.

In Practice

Considering all of this, we built a progressive system with different kinds of support throughout the first year of employment and beyond, as follows:

Weeks 0-1 Induction

A combination of information and socialisation. Most importantly, an observation of the class/level they will teach and some supported planning time.

Weeks 1-4 Starting

Reduced teaching load, continued support with planning. Buddy-up with an experienced or compatible teacher for support. Take care with the choice of teacher for this and make sure there is training and reward for their involvement too.

Weeks 4-12 Building

Build confidence with consistent work with one group and/or level. Allow them to find their own way but be available. Aim to do feedback and observation towards week 12, but be sure these are developmental rather than judgemental.

Weeks 12-52+ Developing

Set clear development goals and provide support to help the NQT reach them. Feed these goals into the whole school development programme. Identify priorities related to their stage of development.

Conclusion

Newly qualified teachers face a lot of challenges as they start out and the ELT sector as a whole has a responsibility to improve how it manages orientation, induction and developmental support for them. Schools that can do this and do it well, will have better-developed staff who they will retain, and in the long run, better learning outcomes for their students.

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Theme-based Approach to Literature Review Writing

Iroda Saydazimova and Kholida Begmatova

A literature review (LR) is a fundamental component of an author's research process, which helps to identify the niche in the current knowledge and formulate research questions (Rowley, 2005). While Knopf (2006) defines it as a critical summary of the research conducted till today, Cisco (2014) describes it as "a thematic synthesis of sources used to provide readers with an up-to-date summary of findings on a particular topic." (p42). LR writing is a common practice in undergraduate and graduate university programs, and it's often perceived as a challenging writing task. Students often struggle to produce a logically synthesized thematic narrative of findings (Galvan, 1999) or use appropriate language and style. Thus, Wagner, Lukyanenko, and Paré (2022) highlight the need for AI support to complete time-consuming and mechanical steps, such as literature searches. In our context, a LR is part of a larger project, not a stand-alone piece. To alleviate the complexity of this task for students, we teach a thematic approach to LR writing and provide guided use of AI for literature searches and generating themes. This article describes how we approach this assignment within our Academic English (AE) summative assessment task at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT).

Teaching and Learning about Research

WIUT foundation-level students carry out coursework - a brief research report in pairs. It involves conducting primary and secondary research, where students must express facts and opinions following the features of academic writing and evaluate information and ideas from different sources.

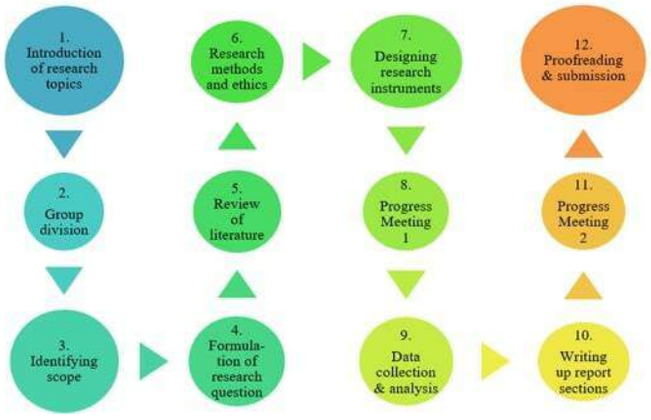


Figure 1 Process of teaching and learning research
(Source: Makovskaya & Saydazimova, 2023, p.217)

This module has two main phases in teaching and learning research: 1) carrying out research and 2) writing a report (see Figure 1). The journey starts with introducing broad topics and students autonomously forming groups for this semester-long project. Once students have chosen the research partners, they do background reading to formulate their research questions. Students are also asked to review relevant sources and write. Next, lecturers introduce notions such as methods and ethics so research partners can decide on their strategy, process and instrument (e.g., questionnaire, interview) for collecting primary data. After this step, students have an initial progress meeting with the lecturer to receive feedback on their accomplishments and weaknesses. They then start collecting primary data, and when a sufficient amount has been obtained, they begin writing the remaining sections of the report, including methods, findings and the conclusion. Before submitting their reports, students have another progress meeting with the lecturer to present the finished reports and get final feedback on language, structure and content.

How to conduct 'literature searches'?

One of the critical stages in writing to conduct secondary research and select relevant and reliable sources. For this purpose, we implement CRAAP (currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose) criteria to check the quality of the literature. Since students often feel tempted to use AI to generate text for their papers, we should warn them that AI language models like ChatGPT can be unreliable because they can generate fake citations with author credentials that do not exist. They may also generate incorrect or fabricated content. Therefore, using established academic databases or search engines is the most appropriate way. To look for manuscripts, we encourage our students to use university databases and search engines such as Google Scholar or AI-based platforms, including www.scite.ai or www.elicit.com. These AI platforms are quite effective as they show only published papers and help students determine the level of the source's credibility.

So how do we introduce the 'literature review'?

The process of introducing LR writing, particularly thematic paragraphs, is an engaging yet challenging task. During three consecutive seminars, each lasting 120 minutes, students are introduced to the concept, structure, language, and approach to LR writing (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 Process of introducing LR writing to students in seminars

In the first seminar, students become familiar with the concept, role and structure of LRs through the discussions of video tutorials and a sample LR. The detailed analysis of the sample thematic LR helps students see the alignment between theoretical explanations and the authentic product. At this stage, we include practical ideas on how to build a synthesis matrix - a table where they organize the sources according to the authors' arguments and findings on an issue. In the next seminar, students identify themes and create clusters of study findings and arguments under each of them. The clusters are the studies under review that have similar (sources sharing the same ideas), conflicting (sources contradicting the previous ideas) or different (sources with unique ideas) ideas - all related to one common theme at a time. Understanding themes and clusters helps students try theme-based paragraphs with the lecturer's scaffolding. In the concluding session, students provide peer feedback on

each other's LR drafts. For example, they analyze language - tense usage, terminology, common phrases, in-text referencing - single and group citation styles and reporting verbs, and academic style.

Structure and Organization

Having selected relevant and reliable sources, students usually face difficulties structuring the LR (Cisco, 2014). One common improper approach they use for writing LRs is an author-driven format. With this approach, they simply provide a series of summaries of sources, with each functioning independently and separately from the others. More specifically, as given in Figure 3, students produce separate paragraphs of every author's findings in the main body of the LR. Usually, one may observe a lack of paragraph connections which subsequently creates confusion.

However, with a theme-based structure, students can develop summaries and syntheses of different findings under several themes in the main body section of the LR (see Figure 3). Students are expected to read and select appropriate sources on their topic, notice the shared patterns and sort them under related themes.

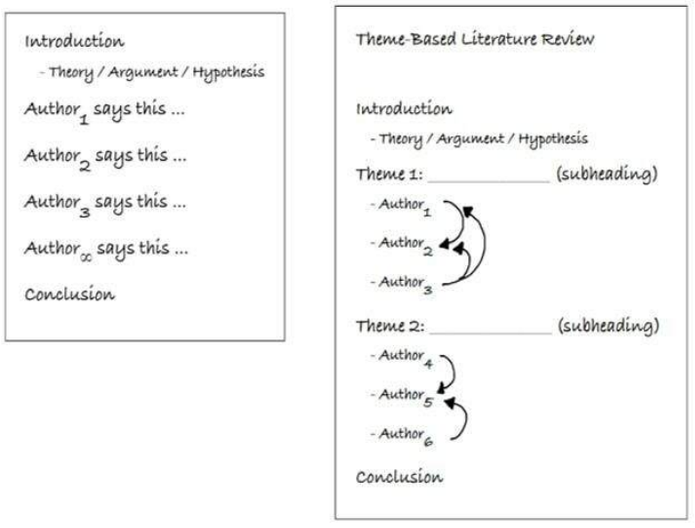


Figure 3 A common student approach to LRs versus the theme-based literature review outline
(Source: Cisco, 2014, pp.47, 50)

This LR writing approach allows sources to reappear across several themes. One easy way to understand it is to associate it with the 'theme bucket' method. As displayed in Figure 4, each bucket represents a theme that includes 'contributions' - findings, arguments, and concepts - from various sources. Each theme bucket could be filled with any number of sources, which can range between single or multiple papers. These theme buckets can represent sections in the body portion of the LR. Very often, every theme bucket is labelled with a subheading that reflects its main idea. By employing this LR writing format, students can produce a thorough review of various source findings on one research topic.

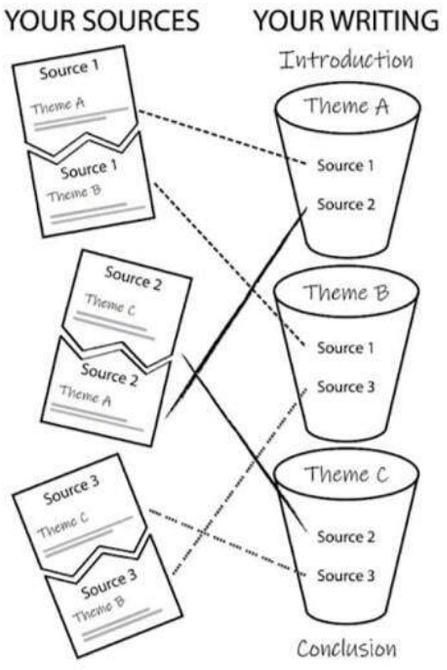


Figure 4 Sorting sources by 'Theme Bucket' method
(Source: www.uvm.edu/undergradwriting)

One alternative way to assist students in generating themes for their LR is to use AI-based platforms. We use the research assistant bot AIResAsst at www.poe.com for this impacts class dynamics and student engagement positively. Firstly, students need to download and save the relevant sources in the soft version in a single folder on a computer. Next, to get the AI bot to identify themes that emerge from the literature, they must attach all the downloaded articles and include the following prompt (See Figure 5):

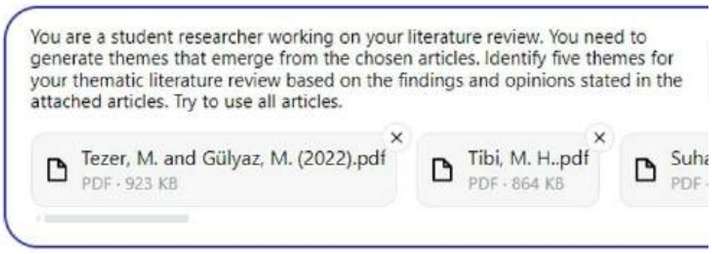


Figure 5 Example of the prompt

The AI bot will generate a list of possible themes based on the findings mentioned in the attached files. To make the process more efficient for students, we can get the AI bot to indicate which articles contain the findings and concepts that fit the identified themes. For this, another prompt can be: 'Mention which attached sources can go under these themes. Include the names of the attached documents.' As a result, the bot will produce a list of suggested themes along with sources that contain relevant ideas.

At this stage, it is essential to raise students' awareness of ethical issues. We should explain that AI can be an assistant but not a replacement for students when completing academic tasks. From this stage onwards, students should write their LRs based on the themes generated by AI or the ones they have identified independently using the traditional theme-bucket method.

Regarding the pedagogical implications, we suggest that teachers be flexible and accepting of AI in the educational process. Our philosophy is that the more restrictions we place on students, the more tempted they are to use AI. Their curiosity about AI and rebellion against strict policies can lead to inflated cases of academic dishonesty. Instead, embracing these novelties can make the teaching and learning process even more exciting and productive for students, triggering their intrinsic motivation to experiment with technology for academic purposes. With this paper, we want to equip our colleagues and teacher-researchers with practical ideas they can apply in teaching LR writing while staying on the same wavelength as current technological advancements.

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Breaking Habits: From Group Presentations to Podcasts and Zines

Claire Duborg

In this article, I'd like to share my journey from using traditional group presentations to student-produced podcasts and zines as innovative tools to enhance student engagement in the classroom.

It all started with a realization while teaching one of my courses on career preparation. Although traditional group presentations had their merits, I noticed that they often left certain students behind. Some thrived in the spotlight, while others struggled to express themselves effectively in front of the class. To add to the challenge, I often found the audience either nodding off or multitasking on other assignments during these sessions.

Determined to create a more dynamic and engaging learning experience, I decided to explore alternative methods. The growing popularity of podcasts and zines inspired me to leave the beaten track: I saw an opportunity to use these mediums to promote student-driven learning and creativity.

With excitement and some apprehension, I introduced the concept of student-produced podcasts and zines to my class. I was pleasantly surprised to discover their interest and knowledge about the different types of podcasts available. Although I provided clear guidance on the objectives and expectations of the project, I also emphasized the freedom for students to explore their interests and express themselves creatively.

As students plunged into their research and project development, I observed a remarkable transformation. Those who once struggled to participate in group presentations found their voices through podcasting, confidently sharing their insights and perspectives. Others discovered a passion for visual storytelling as they brought their ideas to life in the form of zines.

What struck me most was the diversity of approaches and topics embraced by my students. From exploring the intricacies of marketing strategies to the world of finance, each podcast and zine reflected the unique interests and talents of its creators.

Throughout the process, collaboration played a pivotal role. Students worked together in small groups, pooling their skills and expertise to make high-quality productions. The sense of camaraderie and shared achievement was obvious as they collaborated on scriptwriting, recording, design, and editing. A number of students managed to find an expert in their field to interview; others created witty sketches; but they were all focussed on capturing and maintaining the listener's attention.



Photos from top left clockwise by charlesdeluvio, Jason Rosewell, Luke Porter on Unsplash

At the end of the project we didn't have a marathon session listening to 10 podcasts; instead, each group had the opportunity to pitch their podcast and zine in order to convince us that their work was worth listening to and reading. As presentation day approached, anticipation filled the air. Students eagerly promoted their podcasts and zines, engaging their peers in lively discussions and sharing insights gained from their research and interviews. It was a proud moment for all involved, as we witnessed the culmination of weeks of hard work and creativity.

The integration of student-produced podcasts and zines in language learning highlights the importance of voice, tone, pronunciation, content, and editing. These mediums provide invaluable opportunities for students to work on essential language skills as well as encouraging creativity and engagement. As educators, embracing these innovative tools allows us to create dynamic and inclusive learning environments which not only inspire but which also elevate our students' language proficiency and communication abilities.

A Step-by-step guide:

Introduction to the Project:

Clearly outline learning objectives, project deliverables, and evaluation criteria for students. Emphasize the importance of student-driven learning and its impact on language acquisition and career development.

Exploration of Tools:

Introduce students to free online tools for podcast production and zine creation. Provide step-by-step guidance on scriptwriting, recording, editing, and design. Encourage experimentation with different formats and styles. For example, Audacity and Canva.

Showcase of Sample Work:

Share excerpts from past student projects to illustrate vocabulary acquisition and storytelling skills or, if it's a new project, listen to extracts from different commercial podcasts. Highlight the diverse range of topics and approaches, showing creativity and innovation.

Group Work Session:

Facilitate group discussions to brainstorm project ideas and tailor assignments to individual interests and learning environments. Provide guidance on selecting relevant topics and conducting thorough research.

Project Implementation:

In small groups, students conduct research on specific business sectors, interview professionals, and produce 15 to 20-minute podcasts presenting their findings. They also create complementary zines incorporating visuals and infographics.

Document Submission:

Students upload their podcasts and zines for evaluation and feedback, using designated online platforms such as Padlet.

Presentation Day:

Groups pitch their podcasts and zines in class, engaging in discussions and responding to questions from peers and instructors.

Inclusion Elements:

Materials/Technologies Required: Computers with internet access, free online podcasting and design tools, access to interviewees and business sector resources.

Links to Additional Resources: Provide links to resources on podcast structuring, practical tips for podcast creation, and examples of zines related to business careers.

Reference

Stephen Duncombe. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. Verso, 1997. p.6



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What do French Learners Really Need?

Oftentimes, French students arrive in our classrooms with an inhibition to speak and write. These inhibitions can prove incredibly challenging to overcome. That's where ***Catherine Aygen's*** *5C method comes in and helps your French students start to gain traction.*



(Photo: Jaime Lopes via Unsplash)

Working with French learners for 12 years has sometimes frustrated me, sometimes confused me, but has led me to reflect deeply on what they really need from us, and from there to create a professional English communication programme for my corporate clients, though the following ideas will work with all French learners.

In France, being able to speak and write correct French is a marker of a good education and people are harshly judged on bad grammar. This fear of judgement then overflows into their use of English, giving learners all sorts of inhibitions. Our job is to help our learners overcome these inhibitions and this can be done by working on the areas that are most useful for them.

My professional communication course for French learners is based on the 5 C's:

1. Confidence
2. Communication
3. Clarity
4. Conciseness
5. Correctness

Confidence

Many of our learners are still traumatised by their language-learning experiences at school. Imagine every time you dared to open your mouth, you were told what you are saying is wrong, in front of a whole class? You would probably give up ever trying to say anything.

Our learners, come to our classrooms with this baggage. They need a totally different kind of learning context and we need to be aware of affective factors, particularly anxiety and motivation.

How can we do this?

1. Creating a safe environment where learners are able to push themselves beyond their comfort zone. More concretely, this means giving thinking time before answering questions or remembering vocabulary, praise when it's due and giving regular, concrete feedback.

2. Motivation. When progress is slow, motivation wanes. Setting small, measurable goals that are revisited regularly is very important, as is helping the learner find real-life opportunities to use what they have learnt.

For example, I work with a company with two native English speakers on the staff; my learners often set themselves a goal to go and ask one of these people a question or to have a chat at the coffee machine.

Communication

The second C is about getting students away from aiming to speak perfect English and helping them to see that, in fact, non-"perfect" communication is often preferable. This means a discussion with the learner about how and where they need to use English: unless

they are in a position in the public eye, having confidence in their ability to communicate effectively is generally more important than speaking "correctly".

Looking at grammar simply as a tool for communication rather than as something to get full marks in, is a new way of thinking for many of my learners, having been force-fed grammar at school. It's worth introducing learners to the concept of English as a lingua franca and using that as a basis for teaching. Scott Thornbury has a good outline of what grammar learners need to communicate.

Clarity

Do you always understand your learners? Can you imagine you were not used to the French accent: would you understand them then? Our French learners all have certain pronunciation issues, but again the aim is to work on the ones that cause the most comprehension problems and which cause learners the most pain.

Word and sentence stress: One result is unintelligibility, another severe boredom if you are listening to a presentation without sentence stress. French is a syllable-timed language, so the whole concept of stressing some syllables is quite alien, but anyone who is speaking in public or on conference calls needs to work on it.

Some vowel sounds that cause confusion between two words are, for example the long and short /i/ or the sh and ch sounds.

Missing /h/ or /h/ in all the wrong places: It's very difficult to eliminate, but I always introduce strategies to work on h as it leads to much smoother pronunciation in general. We practise connecting words together so there are no gaps for any stray h's. It's a very difficult sound to master, but it can be done with focus and practice.

Spelling and pronunciation differences: Learners often pronounce words like bought and blood based on their spelling. Work on pronunciation of common words can help show how much spelling and pronunciation differ.

Conciseness

How many times have you read a piece of writing from a French learner and found it was very "heavy"? This heaviness often overspills into speaking. In French, the more complicated the language you use in speaking and writing, the more eloquent you are perceived to be. In English, particularly in business English, this is not the case. French favours nouns, English favours verbs and adjectives. French favours lots of background information at the beginning, English favours getting straight to the point. French is very impersonal, with lots of passive sentences and indirectness, such as using "on" or "il faut". English is much more personal: addressing your reader as "you" and writing in the first person using "I" is normal. I had a learner who had to write a report for an American client about a product issue and what had been done to make sure it wouldn't happen again. It was full of "This action was taken…", "it was necessary to…" Rewriting it to emphasise what he and his team actually did and the results they achieved made it much clearer and more impactful.

So how can you help your learners be more concise?

- Always put the important information first.
- Always choose a verb if possible. Eg. I made a decision = I decided.
- Avoid passives.
- Use you, we and I.
- Use modals instead of phrases such as "I had the possibility to…"
- Use possessives and compound nouns. Eg. Instead of "the subject of the meeting of Thursday", use "Thursday's meeting subject".

Correctness

By correctness, I'm not contradicting what I said about using English as a lingua franca. What I mean is that there are certain times when French learners tend to use the wrong language and it can cause great misunderstanding. The main area is lexical: false friends.

We often hear people say they are feeling very sensible? Or that the company benefits are good? Other listeners are going to think they understand, but there is going to be a miscommunication. The problem with false friends is that they are deeply embedded in our brains because of their context in the L1, and it's very hard for our brains to believe that they are mistakes. For this reason, I do a lot of practice and review of these kind of words.

Conclusion

Of course all learners are different and we should not overgeneralise about the learning needs of a group of people as a whole. However, as most of our French learners are products of the French education system, their needs as adult learners arising from their earlier learning experiences are extremely similar.

When creating a communication course for your French adult learners, basing it around these 5 C's - confidence, communication, clarity, conciseness and correctness - is a very good starting point.

References:

Thornbury, Scott, and Diana Slade. 2006. Conversation: from description to pedagogy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press



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