

Special supplement: where to next?

# el·gazette

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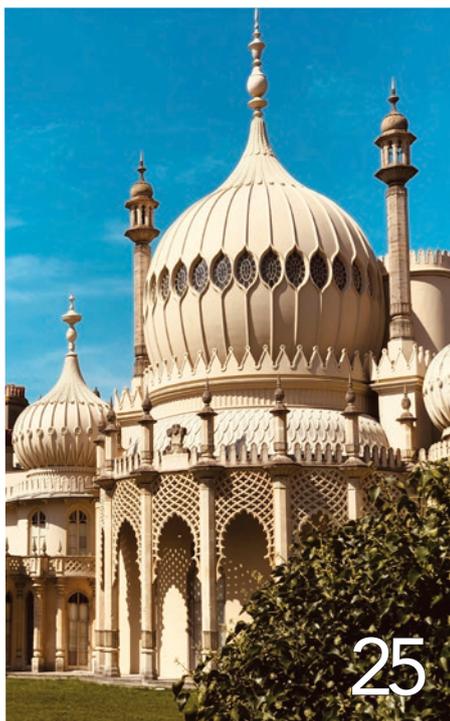
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# A glimpse of what's to come

## What are you most looking forward to this Spring?

Easter has come and gone! But with the eggs and the bunnies and the chocolate safely waving goodbye in the rearview mirror, we're looking ahead to what's next.

For many of you, that means IATEFL is on the horizon! Brighton's colourful atmosphere and crashing waves are certainly calling. If you're planning to attend this year and just can't wait for everything Brighton has in store, we have something special just for you...

In this issue, you will find exclusive articles from four of IATEFL's plenary speakers to whet your appetite ahead of 16 April.

“Do you hate exams or do you consider them a necessary evil?”

Flip to page 10 for our first special article by Vicky Saumell, all about the 'AI revolution'.

On pages 25 and 32, we've had a quick catch-up with speakers Zarina Subhan and Rose Aylett. What will they be talking about, and what are they most looking forward to for IATEFL 2024?

Last but not least, you will find our interview with Letizia Cinganotto over on page 20. We'll be discussing the multilingual classroom in today's 'liquid' society.

Of course, that's not all we have for you this April.

How does English shape both our personal and professional lives? On page 12, Pearson's Mike Mayor explores the impact on society around the world.

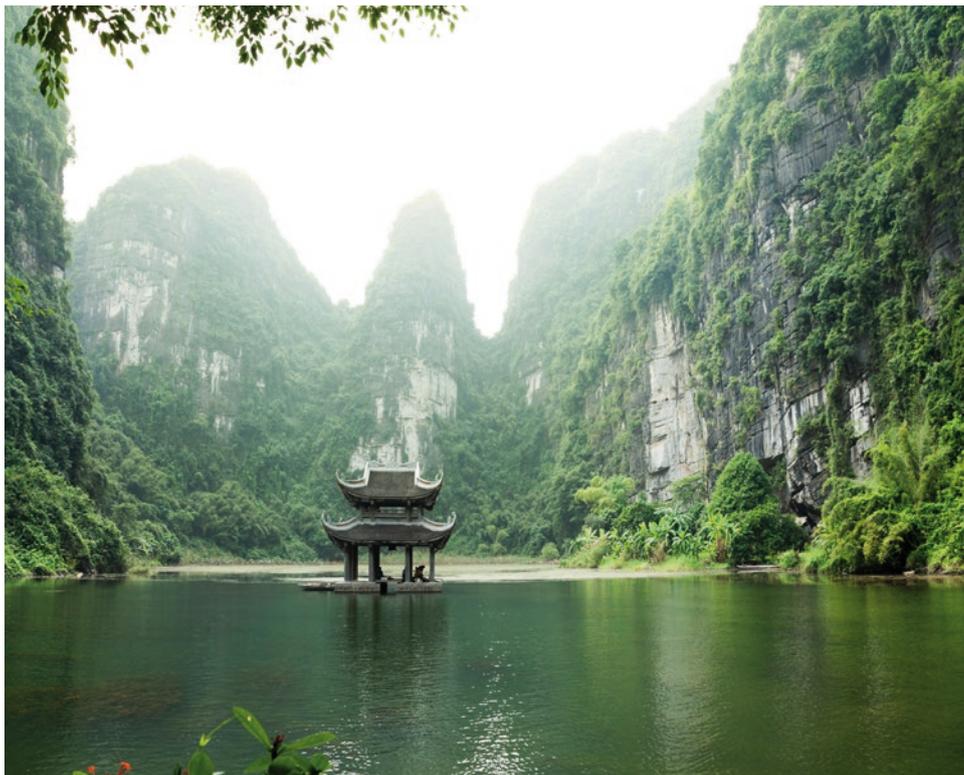
But what about those who may struggle to access English? On page 26, William Grice explores the challenges that come with teaching English to refugees.

Do you hate exams or do you consider them a necessary evil? Take a glimpse at page 28, where Fabio Cerpelloni speaks to teacher and YouTuber Christian Saunders about why he is against traditional examinations.

And, as always, take a look at page 13 where this issue's special supplement begins. We're looking at how teaching should change and how it should stay the same. Plus, we whip out the crystal ball to predict the student markets with the most potential growth.

All this and more inside your *EL Gazette*!

LAUREN BILLINGS, EDITOR



Which student markets have the potential to grow?

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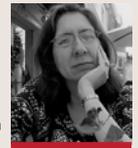
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# Latest update on abandoned Afghan British Council teachers

*Where are they now? Joseph Seaton of At Risk Teachers gives an update on the teachers left behind in Afghanistan.*

**B**ack in the Summer of 2021, with the Taliban poised to take control of Afghanistan, the British Council ensured they got all their managers and office staff safely out of the country, knowing all too well they would be in serious danger if they were left behind.

Sadly, while the risk to managers and office staff was keenly recognised, the danger to British Council teachers was somehow overlooked. As a result, over 100 former BC teachers were left in a very perilous situation when the Taliban took power.

The teachers were rightly terrified, as the Taliban had mounted a number of complex attacks against British Council employees and premises over the years. What made the situation worse for the teachers was the fact they held public facing roles, and were highly recognisable within their communities. Further to this, they had been employed to teach English and 'UK-values' – including 'Equality, Diversity & Inclusion' (EDI) – values despised by the resurgent Taliban.

The BC had actively recruited the teachers to work on prestigious and sensitive UK Government-funded programmes, such as English for Afghans, *English for Religious Leaders* and *English for Civil Servants*. Some of the teachers had taught for the British Council for more than 10 years. They all worked directly for the BC and took great risks to do jobs they believed were important and meaningful.

Understandably, they were all shocked and devastated when they were left behind; shocked that they had not been treated with the values of equality and inclusion they had been employed to teach, and devastated because they knew how much danger they were in.

In the months that followed the Taliban takeover, a number of the teachers suffered greatly at the hands of the Taliban, with some



being victims of physical violence, while many others suffered threats, intimidation, blackmail and requests for forced marriage. In almost all cases the hostility they suffered was because of their work for the Council.

Having been unfairly rejected from the UK Government's 'ARAP scheme', the teachers all knew they had no choice but to go into hiding. In order to survive, they had to become invisible. They could not work or take their children to school. Many could not even go out, while others had to flee their hometowns and hide out with relatives in other provinces.

In 2022 the UK Government launched 'ACRS', a new scheme designed to relocate those who had served the UK in Afghanistan, and been left in danger. By late 2022, most of the teachers had received approval for the scheme and the FCDO instructed them to travel to Pakistan to await relocation to the UK.

What the teachers weren't told was that they would have to

wait for a further year in limbo in Pakistan. They waited, whole families stuck in single hotel rooms, unable to leave the confines of their hotels, for fear of deportation back to Afghanistan, and back the Taliban regime they had fled.

Eventually, after repeated delays, in late 2023 the UK Government started to relocate the teachers. The relocation process continued into this year, and today, over 80 Afghan British Council teachers have at last been safely relocated to the UK, in recognition of their work for us, and the danger we left them in. They have suffered immensely over the last two and a half years, but remain optimistic and determined as they begin new lives in Britain. At least 15 still remain in hiding in Afghanistan, waiting for visas and passports, while others are still stuck in limbo in Pakistan, waiting for a date to be flown to the UK.

While the struggle and hardship is not yet over for all the teachers, it is promising that many have now been relocated. The

UK Government and the British Council need to work together to ensure the teachers still stuck in Afghanistan or waiting in Pakistan are relocated to safety as soon as possible.

They also need to learn important lessons from this travesty, and ensure that teachers we employ are treated better in future. It is wholly unacceptable to recruit people to teach 'UK-values' in a country where those values are despised, then leave them to fend for themselves when we make a hasty exit.



**Joseph Seaton** has been a teacher, teacher trainer and programme manager for many years.

From 2016-2020 he was English Manager & Deputy Director at British Council Afghanistan. Since the Taliban took power he has been running the At Risk Teachers campaign.

# Canadian **visa rule** changes mean the end for IELTS Brides

What do Canada's visa rules have to do with young Punjabi women?  
*Melanie Butler reports...*

**O**n 29 March this year, Canada's visa rules changed, quashing the dreams of the so-called 'IELTS Brides'; young, poor Punjabi women with an aptitude for English who marry into richer families that pay for her travel and university fees in order to secure a Canadian work visa for their sons.

Canada has now withdrawn work rights for spouses of international students on undergraduate courses, bringing this practice to an end. This clampdown follows a bout of agent scams, which sadly lured Indian students into breaking visa law.

Though this change in work rights affects the ambitions of IELTS bride – which the *Gazette* first reported on in June 2020 – it does not appear to be caused by them.

The brides' story has grabbed the attention of the Indian press, who claim educational travel agencies have turned into marriage bureaus and that Punjabi press marriage adverts were filled with requests for 'IELTS-clean brides'.

By 2021, stories of brides leaving or divorcing their husbands when they got to Canada had started to break in India; a scandalous act in a country with a divorce rate of just 1%.

Manisha Gulati, Chairperson of the Punjabi Women's Association, told Channel 18 television they had heard of some 'cheating' women, but this was nothing compared to the 30,000 frauds of Non-resident Indian men.

'Contract marriages to go abroad is an old Punjabi social problem ... we need stringent laws to protect both women and men,' said Gulati.



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# Still hanging in there

*Test management versus test wiseness in repeated IELTS takers.*

**T**est management, but not test wiseness, improves IELTS scores, providing some support for the validity of the exam, according to a study by Masoomeh Estaji and Zahra Banitalebi, at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Increasingly, students are taking exams such as IELTS more than once. This study assessed whether students' preparation strategies changed with repeated attempts and how this impacted their scores.

Strategies for taking tests are generally of three kinds: aside from actual language learning strategies, there are also test-management and test wiseness strategies. Students are not just learning a language; they are learning how to pass a specific exam.

Test-management strategies increase the student's ability to handle the test content in expected ways, such as multiple choice versus cloze questions, as applied to different language skills such as writing versus speaking. An example of two possible writing strategies might be to begin with either a list of key words or an overall outline. Crucially, test management strategies are not independent of the content being tested.

Test wiseness, on the other hand, is essentially a collection of strategies to enable a student to gain marks irrespective of whether they know the correct answer, for example by looking for predictable patterns in answer options or producing rote-learned passages in response to rote-learned cues. A well-constructed, valid test should minimise the success of test wiseness, otherwise repeating the test will lead to higher scores without any real improvement in language proficiency.

The 178 Iranian students taking part in this study took the mock or actual IELTS test three times and participants answered the 49-item Test-Taking Strategy Questionnaire between attempts. Students also answered a set of



open-ended questions asking about possible changes in learning strategy and the reasons for such changes. Structural equation modelling on this longitudinal data was able to show how strategies related to test-management and test wiseness changed over time and impacted test scores.

Adopting more test-management strategies led to higher listening and speaking scores and a decrease in use of test wiseness led to improved reading scores. Moreover, higher scoring students tended to favour test management over test wiseness from the start.

Most students changed their strategies in preparing to repeat the test. The main influence on strategy choice was personal experience of previous tests: '5,6, [and] 6.5 are my scores [in listening] because I changed my strategies. [I realized that] Finding exact words in choices

are mistake, we should not choose them. I understand questions themselves now in L.'

The Internet, tutors, books and friends also influenced strategy changes: 'There is a website they interview good candidates. They mentioned these strategies. But not all of them are good.'

Students also gave examples of changes in test wiseness: 'I made a huge improvement in Listening because I changed my bad habits of looking for mandatory patterns in options.' Although not everyone changed their bad habits, such as this student trying to impress with their over-use of the passive voice: 'Unfortunately, did not help. I used as many passive structures [as I] could. The more I used, the worse it got.'

The positive impact of test management strategies and especially decreasing test wiseness supports the validity of the IELTS exam at least for reading,

listening and speaking. Although the results are not a resounding endorsement at least the use of test wiseness did not improve scores on any of the skills. Also, although no changes in strategy significantly impacted writing, this could be due to the outcome measure, IELTS bands, being rather broad to register smaller changes and although test scores generally improved with repeated attempts – the improvements were modest and 'not more than a half-band score in all four skills' – perhaps some actual language learning strategies would help.

## REFERENCE

■ Estaji, M. & Banitalebi, Z. (2023) A study of test-taking strategies of Iranian IELTS repeaters: and change in the strategy use? *International Journal of Testing*, 23: 3, 205-230. DOI: 10.1080/15305058.2023.2195662

# Prediction

## The crystal ball method of IELTS preparation.

Students preparing for the high-stakes IELTS exam, by focussing on accessing and preparing predicted answers, increase exam proficiency at the expense of language proficiency, according to a study by Hui Ma and Sin Wang Chong at Southeast University, Nanjing, China and Queen's University Belfast, UK.

Students all around the world take the IELTS (International Language Testing System) exam as part of their requirements for higher education and a broader range of employers. This study recruited 101 Chinese third and fourth year undergraduate students at a Chinese University to take an online survey and 53 students also took part in small group interviews to investigate how students prepared for the exam and whether their methods were effective.

Results from the online survey showed that students' use of preparatory materials was associated

with higher IELTS scores. These IELTS-specific materials often used past papers and as well as the official textbooks, and students also practised using test items that had been memorised and shared online: *Jijing*. 'Predicted' test answers were also bought online.

Students also attended test-training classes at their own college or privately elsewhere (in-person or online) with the aim of improving scores by 'achieving test-wiseness'. Of the students that used such training courses, 52% achieved higher IELTS scores. Private teachers were deemed especially astute in monitoring the IELTS test item bank that changes every four months. From an interview: 'My teachers from the private IELTS training agency told us that in August the writing topics will be education and government, [so] we only need to focus on these two.'

The reputation of private courses rests on the accuracy of

their predictions leading to some dubious practices: 'Some private agencies – maybe due to the purpose of attracting students – will send someone to wait outside each examination site, asking information from students who just finished the test and telling other students which topics have been tested, so you don't need to prepare such topics anymore today.'

Familiarisation with the exam format and preparing rote learned answers featured strongly in accounts of exam preparation. This tended to be done working alone rather than via interacting with teachers or fellow students – even for speaking practice. 'The speaking score can be easily and quickly improved. The person only needs to rote-learn the predicted speaking materials well enough and perform it in front of the examiners for around ten minutes.' Analysis of the results confirmed students' general impression finding no relationship between interactive behaviours and IELTS scores.

On a positive note, students comment that becoming thoroughly familiar with the exam format frees them to focus on answering the questions (test

management). Clearly, however, there had been a lot of 'teaching to the test' in response to student demand and consequently 36% of students agreed that the 'IELTS test has limited my English learning scope'. Apart from the use of practice materials, students also gained firsthand experience: 33% had already taken the IELTS exam more than four times.

The problem of exam versus subject proficiency is not particular to English language exams, but the breadth of the potential 'curriculum' does pose particular challenges. Many students apparently see repetitive exam practice and memorising banks of rote answers as a reliable and relatively fast way to exam success, a gamble that may pay off for some but not others and increases the distance between IELTS scores and general language proficiency.

### REFERENCE

■ Ma, H. & Chong, S. W. (2022) Predictability of IELTS in a high-stakes context: a mixed methods study of Chinese students' perspectives on test preparation. *Language testing in Asia* 12, 2 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-021-00152-3>

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# The AI factor

*IATEFL is almost upon us. In the first of our four IATEFL Specials, plenary speaker **Vicky Saumell** gives us a sneak peak of her talk.*



This year, I will be delivering the opening plenary at the 2024 IATEFL Annual Conference in Brighton where I will be discussing the impact of Artificial Intelligence in language teaching and learning. With that in mind, I can't help but think about the journey that brought me to this point.

It all started in 2010 when I was awarded the Latin American scholarship to attend the 2010 IATEFL Annual Conference in Harrogate. Yes! A fully-funded scholarship! I was quite sceptical about it, but I applied anyway and, lo and behold, I got it! Thus marked the beginning of my journey with IATEFL, a 15-year-long adventure that has changed my professional life!

I began as just a member but quickly got involved with the

IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG; my area of interest. By 2013, I was volunteering for LTSIG, a committee that saw me wear a few different hats: Community Manager, Treasurer, then Coordinator. These volunteering years were fundamental in my professional development. In the meantime, for a couple of years, I was also a member of the Publications Executive Committee and used this opportunity to learn about publishing, editing and public relations. My tenure with LTSIG came to an end in 2023, but the lessons learnt and the connections made will last a lifetime.

During all these years, I have continued to teach in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I'm from. However, I have also dipped my toe in teacher training, materials writing and presenting. All these

new roles have allowed me to travel extensively and to share my experiences with other teachers at the same time.

And now we are in 2024! The opportunity to share my experiences with, and reflections about AI with the IATEFL community on the biggest stage I could have dreamed of comes with a great responsibility. I found myself thinking over and over again about the title, the stance, the content of the plenary, and so on.

I have always been more of a practitioner than an academic, but I wanted to look at AI from a different perspective, rather than just the practical side that I've seen in numerous talks and workshops currently being offered. While I value this perspective, I wanted to take this

opportunity to examine how AI is impacting the language learning industry through the lens of the different stakeholders in our profession and, in so doing, reflect upon the current state of AI and some of the issues that need to be addressed going forward.

In these past months, the AI revolution has turned our conversations upside down. Everyone has an opinion, and rightly so! Language professionals are trying to make sense of AI and how it can be used to their advantage. In the process, we have stumbled upon obstacles. Now, teachers are craving information about the potential green and red flags of AI.

In my experience, I have found that AI can make a great personal assistant to help us generate ideas, support research, create tasks,



generate images, and so on. And this is only the beginning; we can't tell how far it will get.

If you were to ask my opinion, I would say the obstacles lie in the perception that AI knows more than we do. When we allow AI to take over our decision-making

processes, that's when we give up our independence; when we rely too much on it or trust it blindly. AI is a data-driven mathematical operation. It simulates human language from the data it has been fed and it is a reflection of our society. As such, it carries

the same biases, but without the human element.

There's no denying that AI will continue to grow. But we can hope that the red flags will also be addressed and researched in order to improve these processes, flaws and issues. I look forward

to having an open, honest dialogue with and about these developments. I look forward to seeing a balanced approach to using AI, where we understand the differences between artificial and human intelligence that we can use to our advantage.

Vicky will be speaking at IATEFL on Tuesday 16 April.



**Vicky Saumell** is a teacher, trainer, materials writer and presenter. She holds a degree

in Spanish-English Literary and Technical Translation, a Diploma in the Theory and Methodology of TESOL and a degree in Educational Technology. She has worked for major publishers, especially in the areas of project-based learning and the meaningful use of technology for language learning. She has been the IATEFL LTSIG Coordinator. She currently teaches at primary and secondary level schools in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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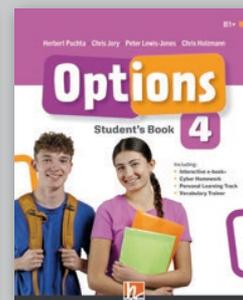
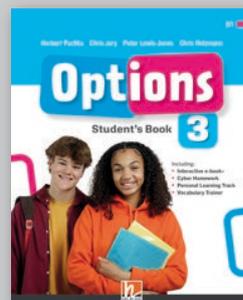
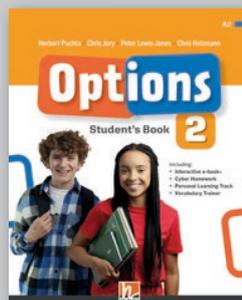
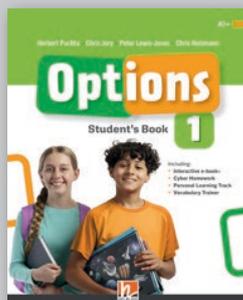
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# The key to a world of opportunities

*How does English shape both our professional and personal lives? Pearson's Mike Mayor explores the impact of English around the world.*

In today's interconnected world, effective cross-border communication is more crucial than ever. A new report from Pearson highlights the pivotal role played by English proficiency in accessing career opportunities and personal growth. *How English empowers your tomorrow* highlights a significant gap between the demand for strong English language skills and the current state of English language training as part of both formal education and in the workplace.

## Why English matters for careers

The research, conducted in five countries – Japan, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and the US – reveals a strong consensus among survey respondents when asked about the importance of English for their careers. Among them, 85% believe that proficiency in English has an impact on professional opportunities, rising to almost nine in 10 who believe that its importance will continue over the next five years. This sentiment is particularly pronounced among younger generations, with 92% of Gen Z and Millennials predicting its continued significance.

Despite this widespread recognition of the value of English, however, the report also identifies a critical skills gap. People are leaving formal education without the English skills they need in the workplace. As a result, 90% of employees expressed a desire for their employers to provide additional language training, to support them in acquiring the skills they need for work, but only a third currently have access to such programs. Further, 72% said they would find their job easier if they had better English skills. All of which indicates that organisations are missing a trick when it comes to increasing productivity, motivating employees and developing high functioning teams. A failure to invest in their workforce's language skills could be having a direct impact on their ability to operate effectively as part of the global economy.

## Why English matters for personal development

The benefits of strong English proficiency extend far beyond the world of work. Nearly 80% of respondents consider English to be important in their personal lives. The findings reflect the power of English as an enabler when it comes to connecting with others, fostering new friendships, and boosting confidence. English gives access to a wider range of entertainment and sources of information, especially online. It opens up study options and makes it easier to

travel and discover new countries and cultures. The report even cites instances where English proficiency empowers individuals to increase their presence on social media, a significant platform for communication and self-expression in today's world.

Social media and English-speaking entertainment are not only motivators for learning English but are also forms of media that people are using to improve their English. With only one in three employers providing language training, and financial considerations blocking many from online or face-to-face tutoring, the study found that around a third of respondents use social media, online games and English-speaking entertainment as ways to upskill their language proficiency. For Gen Z especially, watching movies and TV in English emerged as key when it comes to language learning. These findings highlight the power of informal learning methods and the increasing role technology is playing in language acquisition today.

## The education gap

While social media and entertainment certainly have a role to play, the report emphasises the need for a systematic review of English language learning as part of formal education systems around the world. Whilst the survey respondents had spent an average of just over six years studying English, the research reveals a disconnect between what is taught in schools and the skills needed in the workplace. Around 55% of respondents felt that their formal education hadn't adequately prepared them with the necessary English level and skills needed once they joined the workforce. They cited too much focus on grammar and vocabulary instead of practical applications like conversation and real-world communication skills as the main reasons for not achieving the level of English needed for their work.

## A call to action

Pearson's Impact of English report paints a clear picture: strong English language proficiency is a powerful tool for both personal and professional success. However, in order to bridge the current skills gap, a number of actions need to be taken by the different stakeholders:



- **Educators:** educational institutions need to move away from a grammar-heavy approach and focus on developing real-world communication skills, such as creating opportunities for students to use English in the classroom, with greater emphasis on the productive skills of speaking and writing.
- **Employers:** employers looking to build productive teams and foster staff engagement need to incorporate English language training into their learning and development strategy.
- **Learners:** EdTech, such as adaptive learning platforms, mobile apps, and online resources, mean that learners can now take ownership of their own learning, personalise their approach and focus on areas where they need the most improvement.

In a globalised economy, the ability to communicate effectively in English is no longer a luxury but a necessity. By recognising the importance of English proficiency, investing in quality language training, and embracing new learning methods, individuals and organisations can unlock a world of opportunity. By working together, we can empower the workforce to thrive in a global environment, fostering better career prospects, personal growth, and stronger communication across borders.



*Mike Mayor is Senior Director, Global Scale of English at Pearson. Mike joined Pearson in 2003 and headed up the Longman dictionaries list until his move to the Global Scale of English in 2013. Mike has a BA (Hons) in French Language and Literature and a Masters in English and Applied Linguistics from Cambridge University.*

# Where to next?

Future trends, teaching methods,  
and sticking to the classics



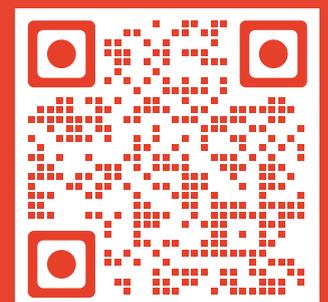
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# If it ain't broke...

...should we fix it anyway?

Life moves pretty fast. Some of us may be clinging to the 'good old days', while others are forever looking to the future. It can be hard sometimes to know what's just on the horizon and whether we should follow the flock or be the black sheep. However, we may have the answer to some of your questions...

In this issue, we gaze into our crystal ball and attempt to predict the future of the foreign student market. Where will your next students be from? Which markets are growing and which are falling behind? We're sensing that the answers you seek are on page 16.

As the market moves into the future, we ask: should exams also be brought into the 21st century? Should tests be fully automated or should we only trust humans to make the right choices? Perhaps there's even a way for human and machine to work in harmony... find out on page 18.

Speaking of machines, how do you prefer to read? The practicality of a whole library in one device or the feel of real paper in your hands? For our students learning to read, there may actually be only one correct answer. Take a look at what the research says on page 22.

Go forth and, as always, happy reading!

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Physical or digital? Which is best for reading comprehension?

editorial@elgazette.com



# The economic crystal ball

## *Predicting the future of the foreign student market...*

**P**redicting the future of markets has often been a mug's game. So, when a recent British Council press release suggested that growth in the number of international students heading abroad for university would slow over the next decade, we wondered if this could possibly be true.

According to the British Council: 'The most significant slowdown in growth rate terms is anticipated in China, with noteworthy slowdowns also expected in other key outbound markets including India, Vietnam, Nigeria and Indonesia. Only Brazil and Pakistan are projected to see an increase in the pace of growth in the 2019-30 period.'

How could they possibly know?

Because, as the researchers from Oxford Economics found, the historic growth in the flows of students since 1998 is highly correlated to the growth in GDP.

In the 30 markets which Oxford Economics examined, GDP growth in any individual country was closely correlated with the number of its students who go abroad. Countries which have seen the fastest economic growth, such as China, India and Vietnam have seen matching growth in the outbound student number while countries with slower economic growth such as Japan, Spain and Canada have seen low growth in their outbound student markets.

However GDP growth alone does not explain everything

Since 1998, when UNESCO started to record global figures, the number of students studying at universities overseas has grown, on average, by 5.4% a year, while GDP has grown, by 3.5%. Simply focusing on GDP leads to an over-emphasis on advanced economies like the US and Germany, where there is sufficient provision of excellent universities and, at least in Germany, a falling number of citizens of university age.

US students, for example, make up just 1.7% of those going abroad to study while the US economy accounts for 25% of global GDP. By contrast, India makes up just 3.1% of the global economy but provides 8.1% of all international students.

Demographics are, of course, a key factor; countries with huge populations and high birthrates, like India, may have a relatively low GDP, meaning that only a small percentage of the population are rich enough to consider sending their children to university overseas. However just 1% of a population nearing 1.5 billion still gives you a market of 15 million.

Besides demographics, two other macroeconomic factors also need to be taken into account...

### Macroeconomic indicators

The first key macroeconomic indicator of potential growth in the size of a source market is a **growth in household income**; more specifically, growth in the number of families

with incomes equivalent to the global middle class. Real GDP growth combined with an increase in the middle and higher income families, is one key indicator of the potential for an increase in the number of students going abroad.

This is true even where population growth is declining. In China, birth rates are plummeting, but going forward, growth in family incomes will continue. By 2030, 66 million more Chinese families will join the global middle class. By contrast, only another eight million US families and just four million Indonesian families are likely to do so.

The second key macroeconomic factor is **exchange rates**. This is not news; we have long known that a higher exchange rate in one country, such as the US, will push students into applying for courses in another one, historically Canada, instead.

However, what if the currency of a particular source country falls against those of all the provider countries? Oxford Economics has been able to weigh the currency exchange rate of each of the 30 markets against a basket of currencies covering all the provider countries. Their analysis shows that exchange rates play a vital role, particularly in price-sensitive countries like Nigeria and Nepal. Indeed, they suggest that although 'GDP and household incomes are more useful as medium-term predictors, exchange rates have more immediate impacts'.

## Risk factors

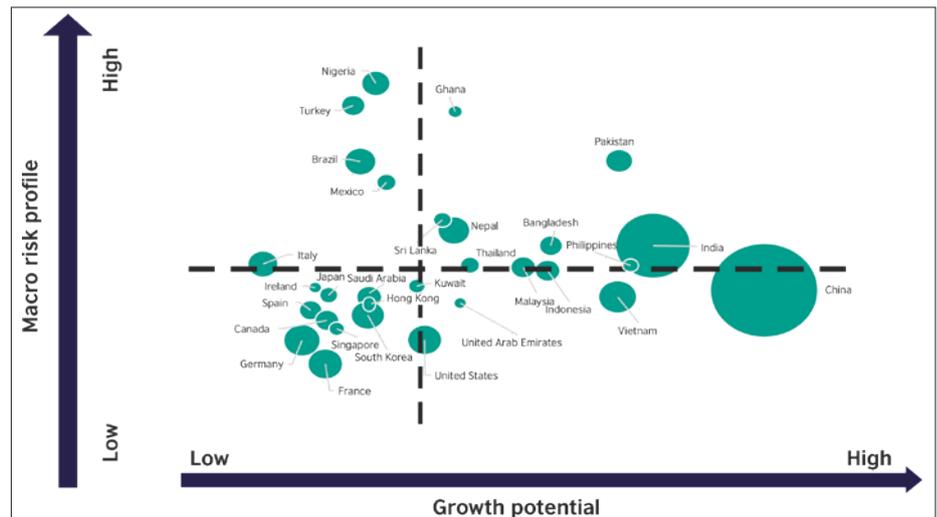
The surge in international student numbers between 1998 and 2019 took place in an era of historically low inflation, resulting in high interest rates. The much higher rates seen since COVID have hit the global middle class particularly hard, and while both inflation and interest rates are dropping, the research suggests GDP growth is likely to be hit in the medium term. Meanwhile, the high rates of inflation in the provider countries has made the cost of living in these countries much higher, even where student fees have been held steady.

Looking in detail at 11 key source markets, the report found that nine of them, including China, India and Nigeria, are going to see a slowdown in the rate of GDP growth. Only Pakistan and Brazil are likely to see consistently faster growth rates between now and 2030. The number of globally middle class families, however, is likely to increase in most countries.

Other macroeconomic risks, such as exchange rate risks, risk of government defaults, political instability, and recurring natural disasters, means that the individual risk profile of each country need to be set against their potential growth factors in predicting which source markets for international students will grow.

On a market by market analysis, only China and India are high volume, high potential markets. Nigeria, Turkey, Brazil and Mexico are all high potential markets but with high risk factors.

## Outbound students opportunity and risk index results



Source: British Council, based on data from Oxford Economics and UNESCO

Note: Size of bubble indicates current outbound international student market size (no. of students). Axes have been positioned at the median country scores for growth potential and market risk.

So who are the rising stars? According to Oxford Economics, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam all have high potential growth with relatively low potential risk.

The report also lists Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, UAE and the US as the 'middle ground': markets with low/moderate risk levels but with lower growth potential.

Looking at the UK as a provider market the report concludes that many of the UK's

current largest inbound markets, outside China and India, fall into the 'middle ground'. 'While the demographic and macroeconomic conditions in these markets are likely to be less supportive of growth ... these primarily high-income economies ... represent more stable markets which can play an important role in a diversified origin structure of international students for the UK in future.'

# Flicking the Work Rights switch

## What impacts student destination choice?

The Oxford Economics report on international student mobility, specifically excludes the impact of government policy. One area of policy, however, has a clear impact on international students' choice of destination: whether they have the right to work in the country in which they study.

Work Rights for all students across all educational sectors – including Vocational Training and Language Training – was a policy first introduced by Australia in the 1980s when it took the decision to enter the international student market and compete with the two major players in the English-Speaking World: the US and UK.

The Australian government claimed that giving students work rights would enable students, who couldn't otherwise afford to, the chance to go to Australian universities. Now, all English-speaking destinations, except the US, give work rights to undergraduate students. The US allows them only to work at on-campus jobs, though graduate students are often given the opportunity to do some paid teaching or research, and all graduates can apply for a Post Study Work Permit.

Most English-speaking countries also allow graduate students to bring dependents and, apart from in the US, they are generally also given work rights.

For students from most countries – especially for those intending to stay for more than a few months – work rights are a key issue in their choice of destination in an era where a bout of high inflation has significantly increased the cost of living.

This can be seen in the language school sector where the number of long stay students in all provider countries have recovered, with the exception of the US and the UK; the only two countries which do not allow long stay language students to work. The impact in the UK, where Brexit has, for the first time, deprived EU citizens of the right to work when they study, full recovery to pre-pandemic levels is unlikely.

The most potent lever a government has to increase, or reduce, the number of international students is to introduce or remove a category of work rights. In 2019, the UK re-introduced post study work rights and numbers rocketed, particularly from Commonwealth countries. Facing high



immigration figures, mostly caused by an increase in work visas, it took away the right of graduate students to bring their dependents and thus reduced the ability of those students to cover their costs of living. Meanwhile, Canada removed the right of dependents of undergraduates to work.

The results in both countries were the same: the number of applications for student visas for lower middle income countries plummeted. Work rights like exchange rates can cause a large and immediate shift in student inflows.

# The continuing need for human beings

**T**he ongoing Home Office English test scandal and the legal action launched by innocent international students wrongly accused of cheating – as widely reported in national and overseas media in February this year – has focused attention once again on the human cost of acting on poorly verified evidence of test taker deception. It is a perfect illustration of what happens when academic misconduct, including fraud, goes unnoticed and is only discovered and investigated retrospectively.

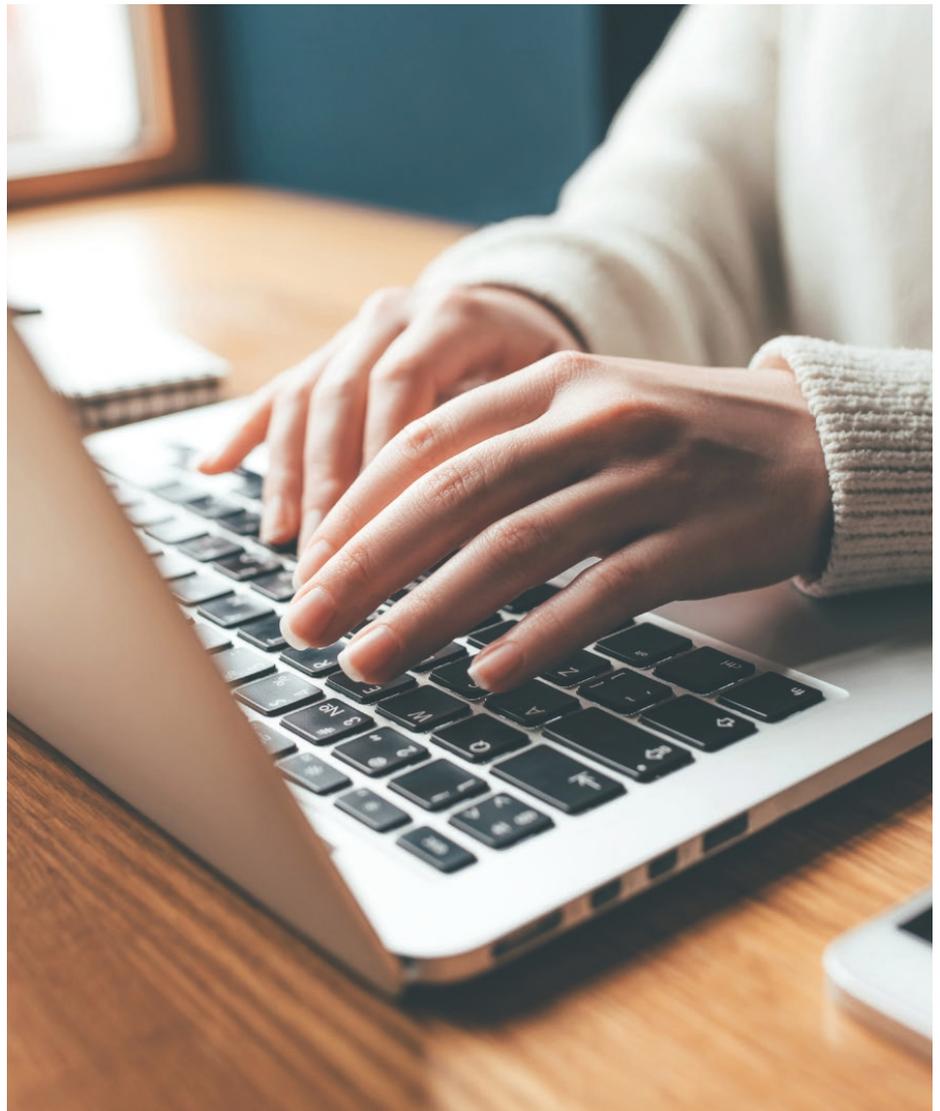
Unfortunately, however, organised fraud, systematic cheating and differing cultural attitudes to test taker behaviour continue to create major problems for universities each year when students who have engaged in academic misconduct are enrolled with insufficient language ability to successfully pursue their studies. So, in order to ensure accurate, reliable and credible test results, academic misconduct needs to be systematically detected and dealt with. However, this needs to be done in such a way as to ensure innocent test takers are not unjustly penalised at any point.

Whilst the **Password Skills Plus** test was developed to deter, detect, and disqualify test taker cheating, our approach to at-home testing starts with the understanding (gained from over 15 years of running online English language tests) that most test takers are honest. The vast majority of test takers will be nervous at the start of their test. Then, as they grow in, or lose confidence their behaviour will change. By the end of the test, their conduct in the test environment may be significantly different to their behaviour at the start of the test. This means analysis of test taker behaviour plays a vital role in detecting academic misconduct and, while Artificial Intelligence has its place detecting specific actions – such as keystrokes and eye-tracking – our experience shows us that humans are still much better at holistically interpreting and evaluating human behaviour.

In order to deter, detect and disqualify cheating when it does happen, we have created a workflow divided into three stages which combine the strengths of both humans and AI:

### 1. Investigation prior to the test session

This would include passport and other identity document authentication, thorough room scanning, and PC checks of both software and hardware. Our IT team work tirelessly to identify, characterise and counter potential new methods of cheating using IT. For example, the use of virtual machines to allow remote proxies to take the test became popular in certain markets in 2023, so new checks were devised to pick these



up. Our compliance team are trained to notice any unusual behaviour that acts as an alert. These findings are regularly shared with our proctoring partners, Measure Learning – who, of course, also share their own new findings – and contribute to the constant updating of proctoring systems and procedures.

### 2. Surveillance during the test session

**Password Skills Plus** tests are invigilated in their entirety by humans (live proctoring). Tests are video recorded from before the test starts – when the test taker is going through ID, environment and technical checks – to the very end of the test when the test taker closes the test down. Proctors will pause testing and remind test takers of the rules if they spot suspicious behaviour and close tests down entirely if they see academic misconduct.

### 3. Analysis after the test session

After our Proctoring partner, Measure Learning, have carefully reviewed test

videos, using both humans and AI, the videos are passed to the **Password** compliance team who then review them again. In addition, and as a separate process, all test results are analysed, with attention being given to patterns we have come to associate with cheating.

Our compliance and IT teams work together to ensure that test results only go into our validation portal – for universities to verify test certificates – when we are sure that they are accurate, reliable and credible. If we are still unsure after all the above checks, we will instigate an online viva. For disqualified test takers, there is of course a robust appeals procedure which acts as a final safety net.

Our mission as a test provider is to ensure that each and every test result is a true reflection of the test taker's ability on the day they were assessed so that **Password Skills Plus** test results always meet the stringent requirements of high stakes university admissions whilst being fair to test takers.

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# The language melting pot in a liquid society

As schools become increasingly multicultural, we speak to **Letizia Cinganotto** about the multilingual classroom ahead of her talk at IATEFL.

**Q:** Letizia, you will be one of the plenary speakers at IATEFL this year. Could you give us a brief sneak peek of what you will be talking about?

My talk is titled *Teaching English and teaching other languages: what's new?*, the primary topic of which is the role of English in our developing 'liquid' society as our world becomes more and more multicultural. It is more important than ever for a shift in language education, including a move to the multilingual classroom.

In the multilingual classroom, English is among a melting pot of languages. It's incredibly important to value that melting pot. We often ask students to leave their L1 at home, when

instead I believe we should be encouraging their own voice and the use of their L1.

As part of my research on this topic, I observed one school in Dublin already using this sort of model, where switching from one language to another in the classroom is natural. Children act almost as a teacher themselves when communicating with their peers. It's a great privilege to talk about my own research on an international level at IATEFL.

**Q:** There are many instances where the first language spoken at home by children in class is likely to be either a related dialect of the standard National

Languages or an otherwise unrelated language. What methods can teachers use to harness students' L1 or to help them acquire the target language?

As I touched on briefly before, peer-teaching, where students act as teachers in their own right, is one way to approach this.

Another way is for teachers to adopt translanguaging practices, such as switching and mixing languages in the classroom, which can be really valuable. Translanguaging practices can enhance a natural flow of conversation in different languages within the classroom. This sort of focus on language awareness is actually recommended in the comprehensive approach



to the teaching and learning of languages from the Council of Europe.

If translanguaging practices are implemented as a technique by a school – similar to the school in Dublin – it means the children are able to see their home language as just as important as the other languages of the country, or the school and so on. It's beneficial to their self-esteem to create this value in their L1, rather than create a 'language hierarchy' with English at the top.

Translanguaging practices may not need to take up the entire lesson but can become a part of the routine that can be inserted to the beginning or the end of a session. It could also be implemented alongside a cultural celebration to encourage learning about other cultures and as a way to use content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

**Q: What problems may arise for the teacher who doesn't share the children's home language?**

At the school in Dublin, it is almost impossible for the teachers to know all the languages as there are so many languages spoken there. In this instance, the students were almost teaching the teachers as well as learning from other students which is very meaningful message in terms of self-esteem.

Teachers cannot be expected to master all languages that may arise, but they have the freedom to learn from the students themselves through a student-centred approach.

**Q: What kind of training might help a monolingual teacher to harness the language(s) in the classroom and, in turn, help with the learning of the target language?**

I think what might be useful would be to attend training courses on transversal strategies and methodologies, such as CLIL, which can be applied to any sort of context. Another very powerful technique is intercomprehension for languages that are quite similar.

It may be difficult for adults to learn a new language. I know a lot of teachers who started studying Japanese or Chinese as adults, which is incredibly admirable. But even so, to feel closer to your learners, you could try to learn a little bit of their first language. Adopting these strategies can enhance your students' learning and also encourage them to work together.

Additionally, as much as possible, try to organise activities that take advantage of 'active learning'.

**Q: If there was just one aspect of the multilingual approach in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) that teachers and students can learn to use, which one would it be and why?**

Translanguaging practices remain my primary recommendation, along with learners taking on the role of a social agent, mobilising resources, and taking advantage of verbal and non-verbal

gestures and body language. It is essential to negotiate meaning to be able to communicate with each other and reach your learning goals, whatever tool you may use to achieve that.

In a class you can use a visual strategy, such as with infographics, images, videos and so on. Be sure to use the multi-modal approach so you are not just relying on text or your voice. That way you can take into account the different cognitive styles or learning styles and you have a higher probability that your message will be received and transform into deeper learning.

At the end of the day, it's a matter of time. You can start this process with very young learners and integrate this approach as soon as possible. It may be difficult at the beginning, but over time you will start to results.

*Letizia will be speaking at IATEFL on Thursday 18 April.*



*Letizia, former Senior Researcher at INDIRE, currently teaches language teaching at the University for Foreigners of Perugia, Italy, where she is also Rectoral Delegate for International Relations and a member of the Board of Directors of the Centre for Language Evaluation and Certification (CVCL). She holds a PhD in synchronic, diachronic and applied linguistics and the National Scientific Qualification as an Associate Professor.*



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# Read the evidence: books are best!



## *Should we be using digital or paper-based learning for reading comprehension?*

**H**as reading on paper had its day? After all, we've switched from chalk to interactive whiteboards and we can set and mark our students homework online. Isn't it about time we introduced the paperless classroom?

The short answer is: probably not. At least, if we want our students to actually understand what they are reading.

In the last two months, two major studies seem to show, when it comes to reading comprehension, books are still best.

Last December, a research team from the University of Valencia published a meta-analysis of 22 papers with a combined sample size of near half a million participants. The research showed that reading digital texts for pleasure improved reading comprehension skills **six or seven times more** than reading something on a screen.

In an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper, co-author Professor Ladislao Salmerón said: 'The association between frequency of digital reading for pleasure and text comprehension abilities is close to zero.'

The outcomes are especially grim for younger learners; reading pixels on a screen digitally has a negative impact on the reading comprehensions skills of primary-age children. Secondary and university students

see a positive effect, but it is nowhere near as effective at improving comprehensions skills as reading print on paper.

From what we can see, there is no research on whether this applies to reading in a target language rather than L1, though we might surmise that if anything the effect is likely to be stronger; reading comprehension is likely to be more difficult in a language you don't fully understand.

So that's a thumbs up for sending learners home with paperback graded readers and a thumbs down for getting them to download it on a tablet. Why graded readers? Nothing improves reading comprehension better than reading for pleasure, but there's not much pleasure in reading something that you struggle to understand. Think of reading comprehension as a sub-skill, just like scanning and skimming, and like all sub-skills it improves with practice.

Scanning and skimming, the Spanish researchers believe, is how we tend to read on screen. Another, **not yet published**, paper from the US suggests that our brain actually processes in a different way when we read on paper.

A team from Teachers College, University of Columbia in New York placed electrodes on the heads of 59 eleven to twelve year olds and gave them texts to read – some in digital format and others in print – and

measured the N400 responses. N400 is an electrophysiological signal which is involved in language processing and semantic memory.

Semantic encoding – storing a word for meaning and not just sound or spelling – plays a vital role in reading comprehension, and the researchers hypothesised that students who were 'deep reading' would show a stronger N400 reaction when presented with an unrelated word during a post-reading test. Following the reading of each text, the individual student was shown a series of words, presented one by one on a screen, and asked to decide if the meaning was related or unrelated to the text. Sure enough, students showed a stronger N400 to the unrelated word when they had read the text on paper.

So, should we ban digital language leaning? Surprisingly perhaps, when it comes to vocabulary, the answer is: maybe not.

In a 1992 paper from Israel, Vered Halamish and Dorit Elias decided to see if, in a vocabulary test, the score obtained would depend on the medium used for vocabulary learning (print or screen) and whether it was correlated to the medium of the test (paper-based or digital).

Digital vocabulary learning has been shown to be more effective than paper-based, but since successful digital vocabulary

learning is based on making the student recall the word, and paper-based vocabulary learning is often word lists which students study time and again, it is not clear whether it's the medium that is important or the methodology.

The team enrolled 79 young adults from Israel, all native speakers of Hebrew, and set them the task of learning vocabulary in Swahili, a language that none of them spoke. The learners were divided into two groups: one group studied the vocabulary on screen, using the recall method, and the other were given paper flashcards and trained to use them for recall learning.

Then they sat two vocabulary tests: half the tests were done on paper, the other half on screen. When the test was presented on paper, the students who had learned the words on paper outperformed those who had learned them on screen, but their advantage disappeared when they took the tests on screen.

So, should you cancel the books for your exam classes?

The answer is definitely not. When a similar experiment was conducted on a test of reading skills, those who had studied from paper books did better even when the test was on screen.

When it comes to reading, it seems, nothing beats a good book.

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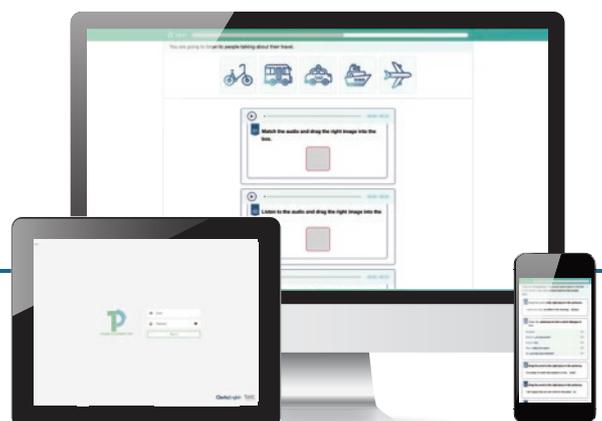
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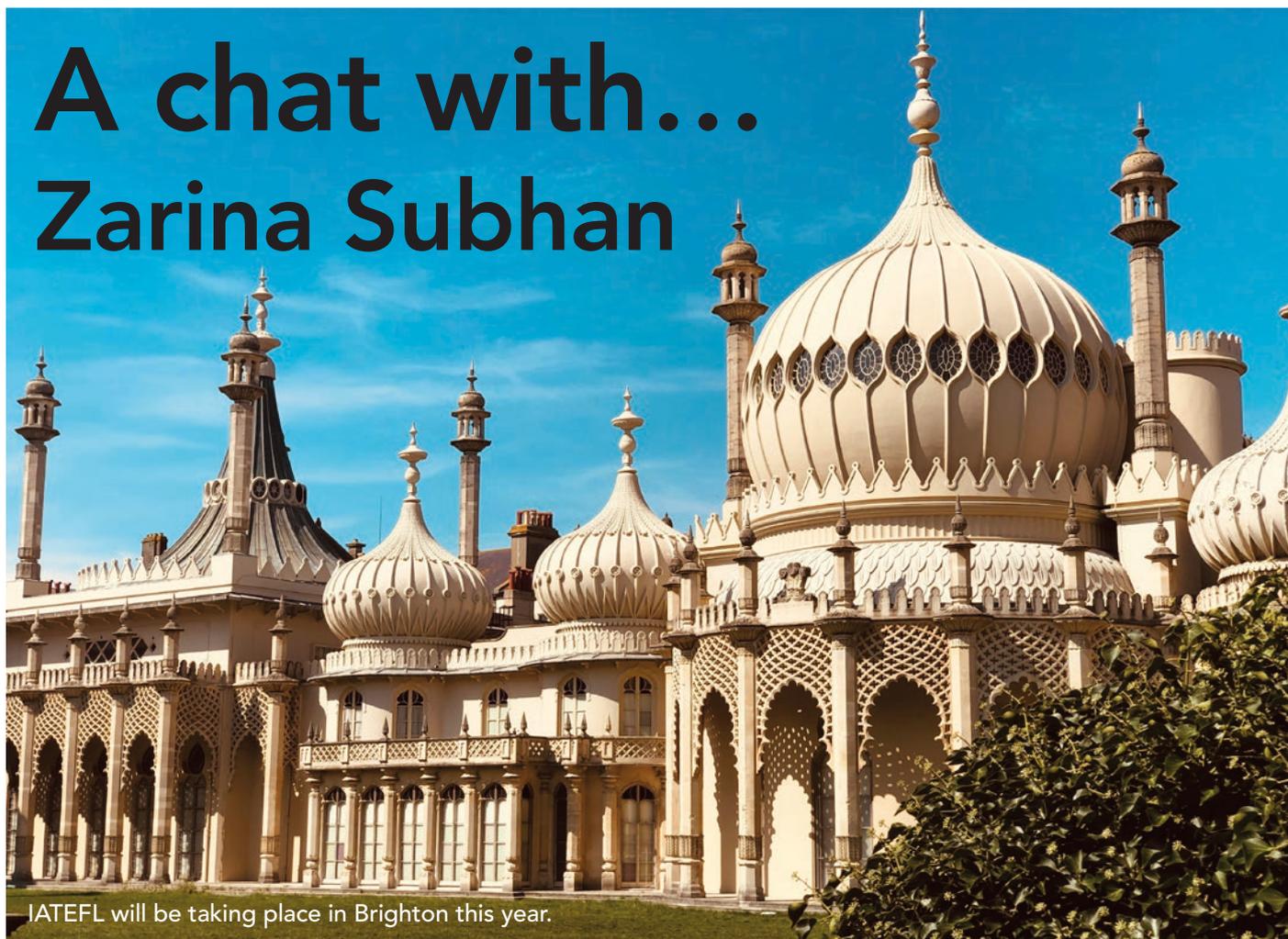
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# A chat with... Zarina Subhan



IATEFL will be taking place in Brighton this year.

## We speak with IATEFL plenary speaker, Zarina Subhan.

**Q:** Have you been to an IATEFL conference before and what are you most looking forward to?

Yes: I first went as an MA student back in 1998, and in 2008 I gave a talk on whether English was a language of colonialism or one of conflict mitigation in the Sri Lankan context.

I'm looking forward to being in the same place as so many language experts at the same time. As well as catching up with friends and colleagues, meeting face-to-face those who

I've only met virtually, including making new acquaintances.

**Q:** How did you first get interested in language?

I suppose I subconsciously became interested in languages by growing up in a bilingual household and frequently visiting multilingual family members in India and becoming trilingual by the age of four. However, not 'performing' well enough for my school French teacher made me feel ironically 'bad' at languages.

**Q:** If you could change one thing about the English language what would it be and why?

I'd probably get rid of idiomatic expressions if I could because they actively exclude speakers who have had to learn the language in a classroom. The chances of slipping up and getting the expression muddled are high and they are so hard to make sense of without a lot of cultural understanding.

**Q:** If you could change one thing about language teaching and/or language learning what would it be and why?

I'm tempted to say exams, but I can see the need for and the value of certificates, so instead I'd get rid of the need for grades

to be dependent on one summative form of assessment, if I could.

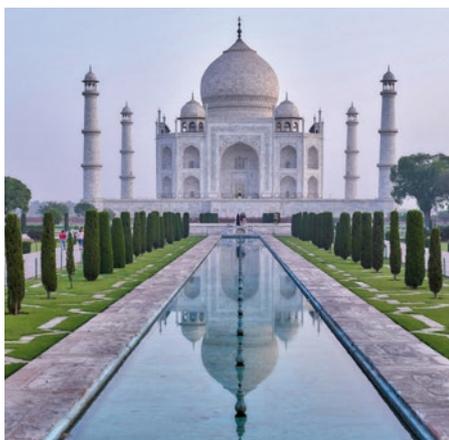
**Q:** If you could have three wishes – one professional, one political (with a small p), and one personal – what would they be?

My three wishes would be:

Professional: to co-write an educationally sustainable textbook with some hand-picked professionals.

Political: to have every person in the world volunteer for six months in another country and have to learn that language from scratch.

Personal: to be unapologetically me!



Zarina spent a lot of time with multilingual family members in India.  
editorial@elgazette.com



*With a background in the sciences, Zarina found a niche in the ELT world in EAP and ESP, which led to a natural interest and flair in CLIL. Through teaching and her MA, she has specialised in teacher education and materials writing that has taken her on various CPD projects around the world. Having seen first-hand the need for education and development, she is a champion for girls' and women's education, with interests in the neurology of learning; CLIL; CPD for teachers; diverse, equitable, inclusive and sustainable education.*

# Enhancing English education in Thailand's refugee camps

*Teacher William Grice explores the challenges of teaching English to refugees in the context of the ongoing crisis in Myanmar.*



recently came across an insightful article in the *Gazette* regarding Professor Hayo Reinders' guidance on English language teaching for refugees. While its focus is seemingly on Western educational settings, the guidance is transferable, especially when we consider the complex situation unfolding in the nine refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border.

To provide some context: Myanmar's history has been turbulent. From the prolonged rule of a military junta from 1962 to 2011 – pushing numerous ethnic minorities to neighbouring countries – to a hopeful period of democratisation under Aung San Suu Kyi, the country has been marked by upheavals. Most recently, in February 2021, the military overthrew the democratically elected government, triggering a devastating civil war that has left approximately 1.95 million Burmese displaced.

Thailand hasn't remained untouched, with refugees pouring in; countless face vulnerability and are forced into exploitative situations. Most shockingly, about 200,000 children lack access to formal education despite the efforts of Migrant Learning Centres operating on the fringes of legality. While the challenges for displaced Burmese migrants resonate with those of ethnic minorities in Thailand's refugee camps, this article focuses specifically on refugee education within the camps that house predominantly Karens and Karenni.

### The complexities we can't ignore

Diving into Thailand's refugee camps reveals a challenging landscape for education. Here, refugees grapple with strict regulations that not only prevent them from leaving but also hinder their access to quality education.

The hurdles are multifaceted, and while infrastructure and resources are limited, it's the bureaucratic barriers which truly disempower refugees' learning opportunities. After all, many students find themselves caught in accreditation challenges, making transitions into Thai or Myanmar formal educational systems all but impossible, and native English-speaking teachers with whom to practice English are technically barred from the camps, too. The complexities of high teacher turnover due to low salaries and poor training add to the challenges and, unsurprisingly, many young people prioritise earning a living over further education in this context.

However, despite everything, there's a glimmer of community-driven curriculum success. Rather than imposing Thai, the host language, to assimilate, educational authorities within the camps are permitted to teach heritage languages, generally Skaw Karen, alongside English and other subjects, albeit via somewhat old-fashioned teaching methods. Admittedly, communities not proficient in Skaw Karen, such as the Tenasserim and Mon among others, are facing increased dropout rates and of

course, Thai authorities may have ulterior motives in discouraging the learning of Thai. Yet, notwithstanding the political nature of language choices, the resilience and community spirit evident in these camp-schools' curricula remain encouraging.

### Applying Professor Reinders' guidance

Thai law prohibits NGO staff from teaching English in refugee camps, however, numerous schools in the less isolated camps employ native English-speaking teachers as volunteers regardless. These teachers live among the refugees without proper permits and, despite risking fines and deportation, clandestinely teach English while evading the Thai authorities. Valuable teaching advice for readers contemplating such volunteering opportunities is now provided via application of Prof. Reinders' guidance (as found in *Supporting Refugees*). After all, many teachers feel ill-prepared to deal with refugees' uniquely challenging needs – educational, social, and affective – with specialised training in short supply, too.

Learning the global lingua franca is highly beneficial for Karen and Karenni refugees, enhancing their self-worth and dignity as well as employability. However, certain challenges need considering, such as limited literacy, L1 interference from multiple heritage languages, limited resources, interrupted schooling, gaps in foundational knowledge, a scarcity of native English speakers for communicative practice, and anxiety or depression relating to imprisonment within the camp.

The literacy challenges are echoed by Prof. Reinders who quotes a group of refugee women from Myanmar as saying: 'We are not literate. We cannot give them [children] that support.' Moreover, serious financial worries, limited career options, and outmoded gender norms, all serve to reduce students' motivation, and ability, to learn English. As a volunteer, you too will face emotional challenges when hearing about students' traumatic pasts and should seek to discuss such experiences in safe spaces.

In navigating such complexities, Prof. Reinders' provides highly applicable guidance. Firstly, it's vital to approach refugee education with respect. Framing learners as vulnerable or requiring charity is both diminishing and unhelpful. Try, instead, adopting an asset-based approach whereby your classes' quirks and challenges are reframed as assets, with self-worth and agency ultimately promoted. Highlighting students' rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds in Mon, Kuki-Chin, and Skaw-Karen is one way of achieving this, as is celebrating their creativity, resilience, and adaptability as refugees. Holistically integrating problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and cultural understanding into literacy development is also beneficial.

Ideally, a systematic assessment of learner needs would be carried out, enhancing the

development of learning plans; however, given volunteers' often limited training, such initiatives remain challenging. At any rate, Prof. Reinders outlines these pedagogic principles, highly applicable to volunteering in Thailand:

1. Relevant: include language topics relevant to life in a Thai refugee camp, such as getting involved in NGO-led sporting opportunities, navigating the camp, or shopping for groceries.
2. Situated: facilitate activities within meaningful situations, like visiting a local-craft workshop, role-playing, or project-based learning; students learn best by doing.
3. Social: incorporate daily rhythms and group activities into lessons – ideally utilising students' Karen and Karenni backgrounds – to convey a sense of normality while promoting collaboration and communication.
4. Affective: emphasise emotional skill-development and self-care to mitigate students' anxiety, frustration, and lack of confidence stemming from the camp's prison-like conditions and limited career opportunities.
5. Scaffolded: reduce students' cognitive load and help them understand (and participate) in lessons by simplifying instructions, using gestures, signposting, slowing your pace, and repeating language; especially important given refugees' often limited literacy.
6. Empowering: Slowly introduce avenues for students to self-regulate. Allow them to take ownership over their learning and academic achievements. This fosters independence and resilience, and is highly empowering.

Supporting Karen, Karenni, and other ethnic minority students in Thailand's refugee camps demands a variety of skills, in other words, with flexibility and empathy being especially key for volunteers. By adapting your teaching methods and adopting Prof. Reinder's principles though, you can significantly help some of Southeast Asia's most vulnerable English learners and make a positive difference to their lives.



**William Grice** is an MEd TESOL graduate with a passion for education and profound belief in its transformative power. Equipped with a CELTA

and practical teaching experience in Vietnam, he has honed his pedagogy, always driven by language's ability to connect people. Committed to fostering communicative competence through an innovative approach, William seeks to empower his students, unlock their potential, and shape a brighter future through the realm of education.

# The argument against exams

*Are exams really a necessary evil? Fabio Cerpelloni speaks to teacher and YouTuber, Christian Saunders, to get his take*

**Q:** Christian, you have some strong views against language exams and tests. What's the reason for that?

To start, it's important to divide the people who are taking exams into two groups. One group take exams because they have to; they might need it, for example, to get a visa or a degree. As a teacher, I see this group completely differently from the way I see the second group, which includes the people I'm trying to reach with my 'anti-exam' content on YouTube. These are students who have been conditioned to believe that passing an exam will give them some useful measure of their language abilities. But I believe exams cannot do that. Exams don't provide any useful measure, certainly not in the way that 99% of students believe they do.

**Q:** What makes you say so?

Language is an extremely complicated thing. And being proficient in a language is not only about being able to use the right words in the right order at the right time. That's only part of it. Language learning mostly involves things that are either extremely difficult or impossible to teach. Some are also extremely

difficult, time-consuming and, in some cases, impossible to measure.

So, if I want to produce an exam that can be administered in an automated way to millions of people at the same time, I am extremely limited in the kinds of things that I can measure with it. The fact that it's a mass-produced product makes it a terrible product by its nature. That's essentially the problem I have with exams. There's plenty of empirical evidence that there's not any good correlation between exam results and academic outcomes. I spoke to Professor Jennifer Jenkins about this issue; she's a researcher who's investigated problems related to the use of native-English-oriented tests to assess the English of users from diverse first languages. She'll tell you this. It's not just me.

**Q:** On your YouTube channel, which is currently followed by over 370,000 subscribers, you used to upload videos to help IELTS test takers. Now you're against international exams. What happened in between?

When I started my YouTube channel, I was still the teacher who had a Union Jack hanging on my wall, if you know what I

mean; I was doing all of the typical things that you do when you first start putting yourself out on social media. I know this is not related, but if you want to be successful on those platforms, some of what you have to do is follow the algorithm. That can lead you to talk about things you don't really want to talk about. And that's what I used to do. 'If everyone's doing exams,' I thought, 'I should make content about exams too!' I wouldn't recommend watching those videos I made. They're terrible and probably give terrible advice as well.

**Q:** You claim to have created the most accurate English test, which people can take on your website. I took your test but discovered it was not a real one as it's impossible to get any of the answers wrong; all of the answers to all of the twenty-five multiple-choice questions are correct. Why did you create a test that looks authentic on the surface but, in reality, it's not?

I designed that test hoping that whoever takes it will have an opportunity to change their mind about exams and test scores. As of today,





16,158 people have done that test. And I hope that a good percentage of them thought, 'Oh, okay. Maybe these online tests are a bit stupid.' But my main motivation for creating it was to reinforce the idea that there's not just one right way to produce language. This is, for me, a key part of my teaching philosophy.

**Q:** But there is a degree of correctness and incorrectness when it comes to language, isn't there? We do need to agree on some language rules. So, for example, if a student says, 'I have watched a great movie yesterday,' which is grammatically incorrect, what would you say to that student?

Yes, absolutely. In your specific example, I would explain why that sentence is incorrect. But then I would say, 'Look, I understood what you said. For me, there's no confusion.' I think this is another example of what you're not able to capture in an exam, which is the hierarchy of mistakes. Not all mistakes are equally important and their importance may also depend on the level of proficiency of the student.

**Q:** In your opinion, how do exams and testing influence the broader educational system, including curriculum

design, teaching methods, and students well well-being?

I don't often tell anecdotes, but I like to tell this little story because I think that it represents the reality for many students:

So, I had this high school student I had been teaching privately for years. He came to class twice a week. We focused on conversation and building confidence, the things that I generally like to do with my learners. Everything was okay.

One day he asked me, 'My mum wants me to take an English test because I'm going to have to do this when I go to university. So do you think in the next class we could do one?' 'Sure,' I said. When he came back for the test, he was a completely different person. From the moment he walked in, he was nervous, he was sweating, he was literally shaking and couldn't concentrate. I was so shocked because he had never been like that. Never.

We sometimes hear stories about kids in high school who want to kill themselves because of the stress of exams. They develop horrible anxiety all for some kind of imaginary result.

The day I saw my student in that emotional state, I thought, 'This has to stop!' Not just in English language teaching. Passing an exam or a test should not be the point of education in general.



**Fabio Cerpelloni** is an English language teacher, freelance writer, author, and podcaster from Italy.

*Learning English became such a great passion for him that he ended up teaching it professionally in New Zealand, Spain, Ireland, and Italy, his native country. You can find out more about Fabio and his work on his website – [www.fabiocerpelloni.com](http://www.fabiocerpelloni.com)*



For almost a decade **Christian** ran a small English school in Galicia in the north-west of Spain but is now best known for his

*online presence as Canguro English where his videos about language learning and interviews with language experts have been watched millions of times by hundreds of thousands of teachers and students from all over the world. Christian is an ambassador for equal access to education through his work with Pencils of Promise, and also fights to end discrimination against non-native speakers of English - [canguroenglish.com](http://canguroenglish.com)*

# Next stop: Turkey!

*Trying to choose the best destination for your skills?  
Teacher **Jonathan Smith** asks: why not consider Turkey?*



**A**s a novice teacher, I first came to Turkey with a single suitcase and a return ticket (just in case) more than 30 years ago. At that time, the country seemed frontier territory, whereas Italy, Greece and Spain were already well-trodden paths for the EFL teacher. Turkey was in the grip of another economic crisis, which meant that, in lira terms, I was already a millionaire on receiving my first wage packet!

I've spent much of my time here in Izmir, although my first job was in the neighbouring town of Aydin. On reflection, I'm glad I was never tempted by the bright lights of the metropolis that is Istanbul, although most EFL teachers inevitably end up there. Salaries outside Istanbul have always been

somewhat lower, but then living costs there were considerably greater, and remain so. If you're working at an international school, you can expect to be paid in dollars or euros, or receive a salary pegged to one of these, which will protect you from fluctuations in the local currency. Otherwise, you'll be paid in Turkish lira, but, if so – with inflation running at over 60% even by conservative estimates – your employer may well provide regular increments. Accommodation and flights may be part of your package, but this is very much at the discretion of the individual school. As the economy in Turkey has been highly volatile, especially in the last year or so, it's hard to generalise on financial matters. Suffice it to say, rents for apartments have risen sharply, and the price of some basic

foodstuffs – once much cheaper – are now comparable with the UK.

The school must also provide a work permit for the foreign teacher, which can take some time to process. When I was new to Turkey, this largely seemed to consist of my being registered with the Turkish Social Security and sipping tea with the local Chief of Police in a rather plush office. It has become more complicated over the years, but the basic requirement has always been a university degree and CELTA or similar.

In the past, there was a certain amount of flexibility regarding this, but the authorities have tightened up quite considerably and the regulations seem to be subject to change. You may, for instance, be expected to provide extra documentation proving the equivalency

of your qualifications to those available at Turkish universities. Because of these changes, many schools have unfortunately given up on employing non-Turkish teachers altogether. However, once you receive your work permit, you'll also receive a TC (Republic of Turkey) number, which enables you to receive treatment at state hospitals and some other benefits, such as a reduction in the cost of prescription medicines. Some employers, as an added perk, may supply private health insurance, which is otherwise quite costly.

In the classroom, the EFL – especially the 'foreign', native-speaking – teacher is likely to be given skills-based material designed to be communicative in approach. 'Make them talk,' I was instructed all those years ago, and I suppose that remains the case now too. In many schools, 'grammar' tends to be the preserve of the Turkish English teacher and one challenge has always been to encourage students to apply the structures that they have acquired in these lessons to the communicative tasks that I'm implementing in mine. Of course, the results are variable, but Turkey is far more globalised and Turks far better-travelled than 30 years ago, so students have far more exposure to English than they once did. An English derived from Netflix and social media is, though, perhaps a mixed blessing!

Turkey has changed enormously in the 30 years that I've been here. As in most countries, it has undergone a revolution in consumerism. When I arrived, it was sometimes difficult to find anything other than traditional Turkish coffee on sale – the thick, dark beverage that leaves a residue in the bottom of your cup. Now, my flat is probably closer to a branch of Starbucks than anywhere I lived in England would be. Three decades ago, most people drove around in locally-manufactured Renaults – which were almost always white – whereas now you'll find the same range of cars on the roads as in any European country, despite the tax that has to be paid on imported vehicles.

However, some things remain unchanged, especially when you leave the big cities and usual holiday destinations. Instead of gigantic American-style shopping malls, it's still possible to find narrow streets of small artisan shops and lokantas, the restaurants serving traditional Turkish dishes which cater for the local working population. I can say that some of the best meals I've ever eaten in this country have been in these modest-looking eateries. And despite being an old-timer here, another constant is the way in which I'm still treated as a guest. Provided you behave in a courteous manner, this will almost certainly be reciprocated and in some of the less touristy towns and villages, I've been invited to drink

a glass of tea or even share a family meal. Turkish people are often curious to find out about your background, country of origin, as well as your perspective on their country.

One of the principal rewards of living and working in Turkey is the opportunities for travel, and one of the reasons for my preferring Izmir over Istanbul is the relative ease with which you can escape the city for a day or weekend away. Being such a huge country, there's a wide diversity of landscapes to explore, from the alpine pastures of the Black Sea region to the pine-covered shores of the Mediterranean. There are countless historical sites worth seeing too, and you may recognise the names of many from the Bible or classical mythology.

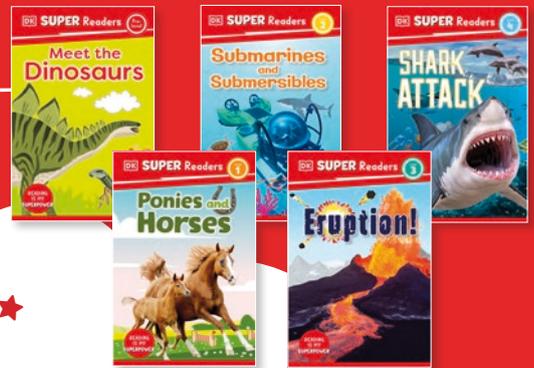
Of course, everyone's experience will vary, but the novice teacher who arrived here 30 years ago with a return ticket just in case is, as of last year, officially a Turkish pensioner!



*Jonathan Smith is a graduate of Cardiff University, who has been an EFL teacher in Turkey since 1993. His students have included both adults and children, although he is currently teaching teens in a high school in Izmir. He has also delivered teacher training sessions in various cities in Turkey.*

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# A chat with...Rose Aylett

*We speak with IATEFL plenary speaker, Rose Aylett.*

**Q:** Have you been to an IATEFL conference before and what are you most looking forward to?

This will actually be the 10th IATEFL conference I've attended in person. I went along to my first ever IATEFL back in 2011 which, coincidentally, was also held in Brighton. At the time I was preparing to take the Delta, and was advised by my tutor during the interview that going to IATEFL would be a great way to prepare for the course. She wasn't wrong... I remember loving every minute of it. Little did I know I'd be standing on that same stage 13 years later!

For me, every year, one of the main conference highlights is the Global Issues SIG Showcase, a whole day of talks dedicated to exploring social justice and global learning in ELT. I am a former GISIG Coordinator and used to have the lucky (but very challenging) task of selecting talks to feature in the GISIG Showcase line-up. With so many current critical issues that need to be brought to the attention of our students, I am sure this year's speakers won't disappoint.

**Q:** How did you first get interested in language?

My mum is a really talented linguist and she shared her passion for foreign languages with me from a young age. She took her Spanish A-Level the year before me... and of course got a better grade than I did! The main reason I wanted to study a language at the time was so that I could use it to go backpacking around South America after leaving school. Back then, I don't think the mechanics of language interested me as much as how it gave me access to different people, communities and new, unfamiliar cultures.

These days, as a language teacher and teacher educator, I'm much more interested in how language works. In particular, how language is used to preserve and maintain, or critique and deconstruct systems of power such as through political rhetoric, the media, advertising, or even how teachers talk to their students. I'll be exploring this in my IATEFL plenary on Friday 19 April.

**Q:** If you could change one thing about the English language what would it be and why?

I'd universalise the plural 'yous' that is a feature of Liverpoolian dialect; it just makes total sense to me! Many other languages distinguish between a singular and plural form of the second person, where English doesn't. I migrated from where I grew up in the South West of England to Liverpool in 2017, where my only other previous visit had been for the



Liverpool has become Rose's self-proclaimed adopted home.

2013 IATEFL conference. Now whenever I hear a Scouse accent outside of Merseyside it makes me happy as it's the sound of my adopted home.

**Q:** If you could change one thing about language teaching and/or language learning what would it be and why?

Writing in the 20th century, Brazilian pedagogue, Paulo Freire described teaching as a political act. He argued that education could never be a completely neutral endeavour, because in trying to be impartial and unbiased – such as by omitting certain topics from school curricula, or avoiding discussions of potentially 'controversial' topics in class – educators are in effect taking a political stance. So, if there was one thing I could change about language education, it would be that language teachers were more critically aware of the potential their pedagogy has to influence our societies.

Everything about the way we teach: from the materials we use, to the way we assess learning, the methodology we adopt, to how we interact with students in class, can contribute to reinforcing or challenging the status quo, both in the classroom, and in the wider world. At a time of unprecedented global challenges (the climate and biodiversity crises, international conflicts, gender equality and gender-based violence, food security and poverty to name just a few...) I think we need teachers who are truly 'global' educators.

**Q:** If you could have three wishes – one professional, one political (with a small p), and one personal – what would they be?

Professional: a successful launch of the brand new online version of my 'Global Citizenship in Language Education' course for NILE this coming autumn.

Political: for those working in the field of ELT – in whatever capacity – to resist the de-professionalisation of English teaching (increasingly low-paid, hourly-paid or temporary teaching contracts; expectations of unpaid labour, native-speakerism in teacher recruitment) and for English language teachers around the world to be properly and fairly compensated for the work that they do.

Personal: that the sea in Brighton won't be too cold for pre-conference morning swims.

*Rose will be speaking at IATEFL on Friday 19 April.*



*Rose Aylett is a freelance training consultant and CELTA tutor, based in Liverpool. She has been working in ELT for almost 20 years, and speaks regularly at national and international conferences about how to teach controversial issues, promoting critical dialogue in the classroom, and the integration of critical perspectives into ELT.*

Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences (2024) (2nd edition)  
MM Textbooks  
By Judit Kormos and Anne Margaret Smith  
ISBN: 978-1-80041-860-8

For most people, language learning comes easily and effortlessly; for many others wishing to acquire an additional language, however, it is a constant struggle. Until quite recently, the latter were politely described as deficient and perhaps as having a disability, while less sensitive terms included ‘educationally sub-normal’. The authors of this enlightening title encourage us to perceive students with specific Learning differences (SpLD) as just, well, ‘different’.

The preface alone is worth reading in detail, as here the authors explain that around 10% of students exhibit learning differences. Considering this statistic, in every group of twenty students we are likely to find at least two learners who have a SpLD. These include autism – with which learners have issues interacting socially – ADHD (attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder), dyslexia (comprehending texts), dyscalculia (comprehending numbers) and dyspraxia (the coordination of movement).

Early chapters cover discourses of disability, particularly in relation to dyslexia, a term coined in the 1880s by Rudolph Berlin, a German ophthalmologist, which comes from the Greek words for ‘difficulty’ and ‘word’. While the medical discourse expresses disability as an abnormality which requires intervention of a medical nature, the legal discourse attempts to improve the rights of disadvantaged individuals. With the current advent of a more inclusive discourse and the acknowledgement of what is now termed ‘neurodiversity’, thankfully, long gone are incidents where learners are likely to receive a smack around the head for inadvertently not keeping up with the lesson.

“There is a wealth of information in this title”

Later chapters are also enlightening as they review the debates around definitions of SpLDs and give an overview of their recent classifications. They then list features that identify ADHD and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), both of which can have a huge impact on the process of L2 learning. If – as a busy language teacher interested in this area but with limited time – I suggest you look at the lists on pages 23 to 26. Reflecting on my own many classes of language learners down the years, I can now more easily identify how some struggled to cope; unfortunately, at the time I did not have the relevant knowledge to deal with their angst.

The section devoted to ASD on page 23 provides illuminating details such as how due to modern-day awareness, one child

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# Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences

2nd Edition

Judit Kormos and Anne Margaret Smith

mm  
textbooks

in every hundred now meets the criteria for the diagnosis of ASD, whereas in 1981 this figure was 1 or 2 in every 1,000. And, according to research, ASD also occurs approximately four times more frequently in males than females and is largely genetic. Learners with ASD tend to exhibit resistance towards changes in daily routine, and demonstrate hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli, such as being often disturbed by even slight noise or mild smells. Previously, such persons would be labelled ‘fussy’, or ‘awkward’, but providing routine activities that encourage quiet cooperation instead of the hustle and bustle of competition are suggested as therapy for language learners with ASD.

There is a wealth of information in this title, one which would surely encourage those

with an interest to pursue research into the area. Readers will come away with a much greater understanding of not only how SpLD may reveal themselves in learners’ behaviour, but also a clearer notion of how they may be managed and, in many cases, overcome. I would recommend tutors on all entry-level courses encourage participants to read at least the first two chapters.



Wayne Trotman is a teacher educator at İzmir Katip Çelebi University, İzmir, Turkey.