

## English Teaching Strategies for Senior Phase Selected English Teaching Strategies for First Additional Language (FAL) Senior Phase Learners

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**KEYWORDS** Memorisation. Scaffolding. Context. Code-switching. Manipulatives. Images

**ABSTRACT** This conceptual paper seeks to expound some useful English teaching strategies for learners in the Senior Phase classrooms. At this level, most learners in South Africa are on the verge of moving to high school where they would be taught all subjects through the medium of English, except for their First Language. It is therefore crucial that teachers, especially English teachers, use strategies that will enhance learners' understanding of English concepts. In most cases teachers are unable to employ relevant teaching strategies due to a lack of knowledge or an inability to utilise these effectively. The selected strategies explicated in this paper are intended to assist teachers not to only focus on one particular teaching method which at times may be ineffective, but to explore a variety of strategies which could be useful for learners. As English language is regarded as of prime importance in South Africa, serving as the country's *lingua franca*, its mastery is beneficial in many respects. Hence, the use of strategies by teachers at Senior Phase.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Ellis (1996), a strategy is a set of steps that guides the approach to a particular task and results in the successful completion of the task. It should be a collection of 'best' ideas or concepts ordered in the most effective sequence, leading to the most appropriate mental and physical actions to perform a task. Teaching is instruction aimed at improving the understanding of learners of what is being taught, in conjunction with the quality of instruction that the teacher normally uses to deliver lessons in a classroom situation. Therefore, the use of appropriate strategies for English Second Language (L2) or First Additional Language (FAL) learners is of, outmost importance because not all of them afford the chance using the target language beyond the classroom or outside the school environment.

Wellington and Osborne (2001) and Akpan and Beard (2016) emphasise that teachers need to give prominence to language teaching by employing a range of strategies and pedagogical devices so that all learners are able to grasp both the language and its attendant concepts. Thus, it may be concluded that poor performance by second language learners is sometimes caused by the inability of teachers to use a variety of teaching devices. Chin (1999) advises that,

although teachers do use particular teaching methods, there is still a need for them to employ a range of effective teaching strategies, as a mixed approach is more profitable than a single strategy. English teachers must have an understanding of how specific teaching strategies affect the conceptual understanding of learners, the enhancement of their vocabulary, and their proficiency levels. For these reasons implementation of effective teaching strategies by teachers is of vital importance. The selected strategies relevant for primary school learners discussed below include: memorisation, connecting the classroom situation with the outside world, code-switching and code mixing, scaffolding, comprehensible input, manipulatives and models, use of images and journal writing.

### OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

#### Memorisation Strategy/Recitation

Most educationists view memorisation in a negative light, but when viewed truthfully and objectively it will be realised that successful scholars, who learned through the target language medium, had to resort in one way or another to memorisation. Also, the processing of new information into a memorable code or trace

thus entails cognitive effort (Espositol 2016). For example, people who recite poetry and preach have to memorise poems and Bible verses. Although memorisation has its flaws, if used responsibly it can be a useful English teaching strategy.

Recitation can be used to bring about the initial instructional encounters for the learning of intellectual skills or cognitive strategies (Gagné 1977). It entails a combination of eliciting performance, providing feedback and assessing performance. English teachers can use mnemonic devices to help learners recall a set of related items of information such as pronunciation, colours, poems, suffixes, synonyms and antonyms (Sahan 2009; Heyden 2011). All six of these aspects are not necessarily present in the background knowledge of FAL learners and, consequently, have to be memorised.

However, Grouws and Cebulla (2000) warned that if learners are initially coached or groomed more than necessary on out of context skills, they will have more difficulty in understanding them later. Taber (2001) maintained that teachers should also be worried about essential learning instead of recall-learning. Even if it is likely to commit to memory a series of isolated of letters and figures and other aspects of English L2, teaching is supposed to yield meaningful learning where newly acquired knowledge is thoroughly internalised and may be applied. On the other hand, there is also a niche for memorisation in order to enrich L2 learning.

### **Connecting the Classroom Situation with the Outside World**

According to Checkering and Gamson (1987), learning should not be an 'onlooker sport'. Learners are unable to acquire considerable amount of knowledge by just being inactive in class and paying attention to teachers, committing to memory prepared tasks, and providing correct responses. Learners have to engage in conversation about what is being taught (*continuous tense*), put it in writing, describe previous occurrences (*past tense*), use it to their everyday lives (*present tense*), and personally relate to what they learn. Fathman (1992) emphasises that this strategy may be useful in teaching all English tenses, because language can be a source of delight if learnt through demonstration of its practical utility. Therefore, learn-

ers should be engaged in authentic opportunities for language use.

When teaching tenses, teachers should ensure that English tenses are relevant to learners by linking what transpires in class with the real world. *Present tense* may, for instance, be related to recipes and commentaries on sports programmes, *past tense* may be related to family history, *continuous tense* to what the family is presently doing at home, and *perfect tense* with their process of growing up. Connecting the outside world with classroom lessons contributes to the scholarly success of ESL and other under-privileged learners, who find it difficult to complex texts (Buchanan and Helman 1993; Chen and Donin 1997).

Connecting with the outside world causes learners to be certain that the work done at school has relevance to their present and long-term wellbeing the learning outcome will be as per learners' expectations (Rahayu 2015). When learners apply tenses to situations outside the classroom, they develop competence in the use of the target language. When the interests and identities of learners are utilised, they will have the best available opportunity to learn successfully (Rosenshine and Stevens 1986; Mcpartl and Braddock 1993; Sturmski 1997). Uys et al. (2005) maintain that contextualised teaching promotes language acquisition and conceptual development. This connection may also be achieved by the language use of learners, where necessary, through the switching and mixing of codes.

### **Code-switching and Code-mixing**

Code-switching may be explained as "the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical sub-systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event" for example: "Makhadzi wawe vho luga his/her aunt is kind." Code-mixing is the inserting of several dialectal elements from a co-operative activity such as affixes, words, expressions and clauses where the speakers deduce what they intend to say, reconciling it with what they hear and what they comprehend (Bokamba 1989). For example: "House three week build?" "Does it take three weeks to build a house?" "Zwidzhia vhege tharu u fhata ndu naa?" Code-switching is a circumstance through which speakers

may express a variety of meanings, occurring regularly in dialogue. The speech preference signals speakers in the conversation to the context and the social aspect within which the dialogue is happening, and it comprises communication between members of a bilingual speech community. Code-mixing, however, means that features from two languages are combined to a determinable form. Hossain and Bar (2015) posit that the process assists both learners and teachers as they switch from one language to another and sometimes mix some words of different languages for the purpose of communication.

Second language teachers should be equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills (intensive English in-service training) for when and how to assist learners understand certain concepts through the use of code-mixing and code-switching. Code-mixing should not be used to compensate for the inadequate or insufficient proficiency of the teacher. However, code-mixing is useful in teaching the ability to listen and to comprehend as well as for the introduction of the new concepts (Lundeen 2009). Learners in FAL classes should also be given the opportunity to switch and mix codes whenever they feel they cannot express themselves adequately. Then in the same way, they should not be allowed to rely too much on the mixing and switching of codes as this will jeopardise their chances of acquiring new vocabulary. Rather, teachers have to simplify difficult words in order to assist learners comprehend (understand).

### Scaffolding

The term “scaffolding” was deduced from Vygotsky’s (1967) concept of proximal development, which emphasises the active participation of learners having greater control over their own learning conditions. He posited that learning happens through active involvement in socially or culturally entrenched practices (Raymond 2000). Learners are unable to acquire language by just observing, but through highly-influenced social connections, which happen within meaningful settings with conversant others (Van der Stuyf 2002). These interactions assist the learner in constructing and understanding the English concept (Bransford et al. 2000). Scaffolding may also be described as a process of communication where the teachers firstly offer and

execute the main aspects of a task, then tone down the assistance, in order to allow the learners to engage gradually to superior accountability for the conclusion of the task. Bruner (1978) also suggested that scaffolding is a form of support through which teachers realise the personal progress and the learners’ style of learning. Therefore, Boche and Henning (2015) suggest that teachers can assist learners with the application of what they have learnt through scaffolding to address progressively difficult texts.

The scaffolding strategy consists largely of questioning, but also includes the body language of the teacher simultaneously encouraging comments and an active listening process. Scaffolding lessons normally entail four stages: entire class conversation, collaborative work, giving feedback and summarising. Learners are constantly encouraged to clarify and defend the answers they suggest. Scaffolding strategies include verbal prompting, provision of language structures, examples of appropriate phrases, vocabulary and the background knowledge required to complete a particular activity (Geneese 1999; Mohan and Beckett 2003; Echevarria et al. 2004). Teacher-learner interactions are taken into account when devising new instructions and offering scaffolding tailored to the specific needs of learners. This may take the form of different roles such as expounding doubts, attracting responses, paying attention to tasks, emphasising significant details, and assessing the work of learners (Lau 2003).

Research findings on scaffolding reveal that it resulted in better direct ‘transferring effects’ than general teaching (Chang et al. 2002). It guides learners to independent and self-regulated competence skills, and engage learners as they do not merely listen passively to the information presented. Prompting by the teacher helps the learner to build on prior knowledge and to form new knowledge; it motivates learners to want to learn as it minimises their levels of frustration. Bradley and Bradley (2004) advise that teachers may assist learners in mastering English concept *alliteration* through rhymes and music. Scaffolding may also be used for teaching tenses, reading, and vocabulary. If it is individualised, it may benefit each and every learner (Murphey 1990; Van der Stuyf 2002) and the benefit of this strategy is that it can be used in overcrowded FAL classrooms.

### Comprehensible Input

Comprehensible input suggests that learners ought to have the ability to comprehend the gist of what is being taught or presented to them, and what is needed in order to acquire language through message-understanding (Krashen 1981). Comprehensible input entails information given to learners simplified by the setting within which it is voiced. The learning of a second language may take place only when learners comprehend messages that are a little above their present level of development: teachers should establish the ability of learners to comprehend by using simpler language and discursive formats. Long (1985) further explains that language is learnt by making adjustments and utilising many conversational strategies. Krashen (2015) further emphasises that if teachers focus on giving interesting input, their task will be lighter and the lesson becomes more interesting for both the teachers and learners. Therefore, speaking to each other creates time for interaction, negotiation, clarification and comprehension checks.

The input hypothesis is based on the principle that there is only one way in which people acquire language: that is, being exposed to comprehensible input. Comprehension occurs when the contribution comprises systems and structures just above the learners' present level of proficiency in the particular language (Krashen 1985). In order to attain comprehensible input, teachers must make conscious effort to draw on the experiences of learners, speak slowly and enunciate clearly, thus simultaneously ensuring, that delivery does not become monotonous and slow. The employment of pauses, simple sentences, simple syntax, and a few *pronouns* and *idioms* is important as there is need to cater for all learner competency levels within the context of a given lesson. This may be done by avoiding the intricate definition of words and, instead, giving appropriate related information and content, clarifying concepts repeatedly, and asking learners for clarification and questions in order to improve their knowledge. The use of visuals, hands-on resources, gestures and graphics evokes greater attention spans (Harklau 1994; Met 1995; Snarki 1997; Klaasen 2002).

In a quest to achieve comprehensible input, teachers should understand that it is the meaning that learners attach to a concept that matters. Consequently, teachers should be open to

feed-back from their learners (their construction of meaning), which entails the monitoring of and focusing on the meaning assigned by learners in response to the messages conveyed by teachers (Murphy 1990). In order to push learners above their present target language proficiency levels and improve higher-order knowledge of English content, teachers should employ the following spiralling strategies, in order to force learners to develop an enhanced Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1979):

- Utilise challenging learning strategies.
- Retain learning logs.
- Research, and write reports or essays.
- Make oral presentations.
- Write notes based on presentations and written sources to translate into words.
- Create a learning strategy for finalising tasks.
- Complete self-assessment.
- Confer occasionally with learners and others to talk about what and how they have learnt.

Teachers in the FAL classroom should consider using the described spiralling strategies, because they assist learners in making connections between newly-acquired knowledge and prior knowledge. Increased input for enhanced output-spiralling helps to improve the understanding of context, reduce text and link it to prior knowledge of target language learners who require to be continuously and progressively assisted to learn content and connect details. This can only be achieved if teachers plan meaningful, relevant learning activities in order to facilitate these connections (Echevarria et al. 2004). On the other hand, the strategies which take into account the use of tangible concrete materials are equally advantageous to FAL learners.

### Manipulatives and Models

According to Scheweyer (2000), the appropriate use of a multiplicity of media enhances the prospect that the learners may learn more, recall better what they have learnt, and improve the performance level of abilities that they are required to develop. Ausubel (1968) also states that younger learners are able to understand difficult ideas (concepts) if they are given relevant resources and tangible experiences pertaining to the phenomena that they are supposed to comprehend. One way of achieving the basic understanding of concepts is to incorporate the



use of manipulatives. Rudnicki (2011) describes manipulatives as objects, large and small, that learners can move around and touch in order to solve problems. Schneider (2011) defines manipulatives as hands-on tools, which include visuals that may assist learners in figuring out simple or complex problems. Sofi (2015) suggests that integrating multimedia is effective because it changes the traditional classrooms to communicative learner-centred classrooms.

Visuals mean teaching materials that learners can visualise. This refers to a multiplicity of materials such as “pictures, lines without shades, water-colours, placards, substances, transparencies, classrooms, charts, signs, videos, models, graphs, books and newspapers”. The importance of visualisation in real communication comprises making the message which is conveyed to learners much clearer. It breaks the monotony of print materials, motivates learners, increases their attention span, makes the printed materials more attractive, and helps learners to recall information better. Research shows that using manipulatives assists learners in converting abstract ideas into concrete models (Lindroth 2005; Burns 2006; Heddens 2007). Heddens (2007) advises that manipulative materials (that can be touched and moved around) should appeal to several senses of learners and that these materials should relate to real world of learners. Burns (2006) says that teachers should afford themselves more time to explore with new materials, as they assist learners in understanding particular concepts. Lindroth (2005) emphasises that the use of manipulatives enhances learning and makes it more effective by providing a hands-on, exciting experience.

Research findings reveal that the use of tangible materials may create significant utilisation of notional structures that increases the concept enhancement of learners. Suydam and Higgins (1977) determines that the use of manipulative materials yields superior achievements than when they are simply ignored or under-utilised. Sowell (1989) also establishes that the continued employment of tangible teaching materials by teachers who are well-experienced in their practical use enhanced the achievements and attitudes of learners towards learning.

The application of concrete materials should also not be confined to demonstrations. It is crucial that learners use these materials in meaningful ways, instead of using them in an inflexi-

ble and prescribed manner that focuses on recall and not on creative thinking. In addition, before learners can utilise tangible materials productively, they first have to acquire a meaningful understanding of the practical use of these materials (Thompson 1992).

The effective use of manipulatives promotes concept development and understanding and should therefore, be highly regarded. The use of manipulative materials with an emphasis upon how learners think offers an opportunity for the teachers to evaluate and fulfil the requirements of primary school learners as they build personal knowledge (Clements and Battista 1990). Manipulatives and models are useful in teaching new vocabulary, reading and comprehension (CDE 2009).

### Use of Images

Dreher et al. (1999) suggests that the use of visual and real objects facilitates the understanding of vocabulary by learners. Pictures and diagrams used in instruction provide concrete visual images to serve an encoding function. In fact, images support and enhance the encoding process. Gagné (1977) also states that the use of visual aids, (such as multiple examples, employing the explanations of learners as much as possible) is a useful technique in assisting learners to grasp unfamiliar concepts. Thus the employment of pictures and diagrams in learning often constitutes an effective part of instructional design, offering cues to be used by the learner in recalling knowledge. Cues that promote the transfer of learning to new tasks, and new situations are incorporated into such instructional designs, providing a variety of learning-task features and environments in which learning takes place. Clearly, the transferability of foreign words and phrases will be increased if they are utilised in a wide variety of contexts. *Suffixes, prefixes, antonyms, synonyms, superlatives* and colours can be taught through the use of flash cards, word play and association-context clues (Willis 1982).

The use of note cards is also recommended as an effective teaching strategy for communicating meaning. Learners should be encouraged to keep note cards, in order to record concepts and/or vocabulary in their own words, sometimes, with the use of their native language. Teachers may also make explicit connections

between English and other subjects, in order to assist establish a real-world reference for a particular concept. Teachers may, from time to time, remind learners to make reference to these note cards and to add to them as their understanding grows. Learners may be given the latitude to explain principal concepts to one another in pairs or small groups, using their first language if they so wish. Thereafter, teachers may review the lesson using the first language of learners. If they do not speak the L1 of learners, revision may do by using simplified language. Additionally, teachers may use an assistant (or learners themselves) to review a lesson with their input when required (Grouws and Cebulla 2000). Then there is also a need to use strategies which simultaneously develop the communication of FAL learners and teachers through regularised writing.

### **Journal Writing**

Journal writing is a written dialogue wherein learners and their teachers communicate on a regular basis. It entails the recording of past and present events and thoughts on the personal life-experiences of learners enhancing their self-awareness, their interests and their learning abilities. In addition journal writing has been widely used to improve reflection. The practice that has been used for decades took many structures particularly in educational contexts (Hashemi and Mirzae 2015). Moreover, it represents an important part of English classes, because learners find meaning in their own thoughts, as well as in concepts learned in class. Writing about these concepts becomes almost like an autobiography (Peyton 1987). It allows shy or learners feeling intimidated to communicate their ideas in non-threatening atmosphere and without concern for grammar or style. Thus, learners are taught to summarise and narrate ideas, simplify concepts and analyse topics by way of journal writing. They may describe strategy-related successes or difficulties, and express positive or negative emotions, which may assist teachers to intervene with appropriate strategies. Learners could also be asked to practise the writing of vocabulary and linguistic structures, and other related language concepts (Bagley and Gallenberger 1992).

Journal writing is useful for learners who view English as a first additional language (FAL), and it may be used to describe concepts which

do not match their everyday experiences. Indeed, successful teachers find ways to make concepts understandable, relevant, and familiar through the use of journal writing. Learners may be encouraged to read out their experiences to the class if they wish to do so, and this facilitates communication which might result in greater language proficiency (Peyton 1987).

Through journal writing, teachers may assist learners to become sensitive to a thematic organisation of the English language, this helps to account for the ideas of schema theory and background knowledge. Learners are able to construct linkages and associations about a given theme, further developing background knowledge and using it to construct meaning (Anderson and Pearson 1984). Explicit emphasis on thematic organisation and the analysis of rhyme (alliteration, onomatopoeia) and theme using their own writings and journal papers, also enable learners to become aware of the thematic deviations which may influence text continuity and coherence (Huang 2009). Thus, influencing learners to read and write more as this would ultimately result in learner proficiency in English as a target language.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although the use of strategies depends much on the choice and preference of teachers, the employment of all these strategies depending on the level of understanding of individual learners, is essential. It is crucial to understand that all these strategies require that teachers are committed, hardworking and willing to give learners all necessary assistance.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

English subject advisors should encourage English teachers to use these strategies in order to improve the learning of English at Senior Phase Level. This may be achieved by either discussing these strategies with teachers and or organising in-service training workshops in different school circuits.

University lecturers in English Teaching Methodology should assist by visiting and sharing knowledge regarding teaching strategies with subject advisors. This may be achieved by approaching advisors with the view of forming

collaborative links, which may culminate in planned regular meetings with teachers.

Interested teachers may also be encouraged to share their experiences regarding the successful use of selected strategies.

Further research should be undertaken on the use of strategies by teachers in FAL Senior Phase classrooms in order to establish and fill possible the gaps.

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**Paper received for publication on March 2015**  
**Paper accepted for publication on November 2016**