



BLOOM



Conference Selections

Edited by

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TESOL-Hungary Conference Selections

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Edited by
Jasmina Sazdovska
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Introduction

TESOL-Hungary Conference Selections: Bloom includes seven papers presented at the TESOL-Hungary Conference held in Siófok in 2025. Two of the papers are peer-reviewed and were edited by Éva Illés, Zsuzsanna Soproni, Árpád Farkas, and Jasmina Sazdovska, whereas five are non-peer-reviewed and were edited by Anna Szegedy-Maszák, Árpád Farkas, Zsuzsanna Soproni and Jasmina Sazdovska. During the editing process, when the need arose, AI tools were used to improve readability.

The first peer-reviewed paper is written by Mai Nelly Kaw and examines the insights of EFL university teachers into the factors that influence their students' willingness to communicate in English in the context of higher education in Hungary. The findings underscore the fact that students' willingness to communicate in English is a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon driven by the interplay of teacher, learner, and situational factors.

The second peer-reviewed paper by Jasmina Sazdovska looks at how teachers can harness liminal, in-between moments in the classroom to develop communicative competence. Strategies include playing with language and using humour, scaffolding learning through careful use of the students' first and other languages, as well as encouraging students to engage in interactional meaning-making.

In the non-peer-reviewed section of the volume, Oksana Chugai's paper looks at how MA students can use peer-assessment to develop their presentation skills. This form of alternative, formative assessment can be an effective tool for providing constructive feedback, increasing perceptions of fairness, and boosting motivation.

Think It, Map It, Learn It by Ivana Devčić discusses how mind maps can be used with lower primary school pupils to help them organise their thoughts in preparation for both written and spoken communication. Compiling mind maps can serve as a foundation for better understanding and expression of ideas while building student confidence and making learning more enjoyable.

The next paper, by Gabriella Kovács, provides support for teacher well-being through showing the importance of continuous professional development. The author argues that teachers can sustain their career and continue to grow by taking into account elements of well-being such as physical and mental health, financial stability, satisfaction in social and professional life, and opportunities to be creative. The paper also highlights that participation in professional development programmes like Erasmus+ enables teachers to rekindle their passion for their practice by networking with peers all over Europe and exchanging ideas and strategies.

Anita Majorszki's paper is a practical guide for teaching grammar with the help of songs offering pre-, while-, and postlistening activities. Through applying these three steps in the English lesson in their preparation, teachers can build lesson plans around songs that promote the development of complex listening, speaking, and writing skills.

The final paper, which is by Vladislava-Mónika Radicević and Tijana Zdravković, looks at how teachers can turn multilingualism into a superpower in the language classroom by relying on the use of English as an intermediary language in the case of teaching French and Hungarian to learners in Vojvodina, where bilingual and even trilingual families are common. This multilingual setting opens the door to using strategies such as code-switching and language transfer in the classroom, building awareness of tactics which multilingual learners may instinctively utilise.

We hope you enjoy reading the volume and look forward to seeing you again at the 2026 *Level Up* Conference. This and previous conference compilations are available at www.tesol-hungary.org.

The TESOL-Hungary Editorial Team

EFL Teachers' Insights Into Students' Willingness to Communicate in Hungarian Higher Education

Mai Nelly Kaw  https://doi.org/10.21862/tesol-hun/2026_1_kaw

In today's globalised world, English proficiency and the willingness to communicate (WTC) have become essential for effective participation in educational, professional, and intercultural contexts (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The ultimate goal of language learning is not only to acquire linguistic knowledge but to seek and engage in meaningful communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Willingness to communicate, defined as the “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547), represents learners' intention and readiness to communicate in a second language (L2). It is both a personal choice and a situational opportunity, shaped by the complex interplay of internal and external factors. WTC reflects learners' motivation, confidence, and readiness to communicate, making it a key indicator of second language learning success (Havwini, 2019; Yashima et al., 2018).

Although communicative competence remains a fundamental goal in language education, achieving it does not necessarily guarantee active participation in communication (Khajavy et al., 2016). Research has shown that learners' WTC is influenced by a range of psychological and contextual factors, including motivation, self-confidence, classroom atmosphere, and affective factors such as anxiety and enjoyment (Dewaele, 2019; Kaw, 2025; Khajavy et al., 2016; Lee & Draijati, 2019). Recent studies have also emphasised the role of

pedagogical factors such as teacher–student interaction, instructional style, and the use of digital learning environments (Bui et al., 2022; Kaw, 2025; Kruk, 2022; Reinders & Wattana, 2015).

Research on WTC has expanded across both Western and non-Western contexts, including Canada and Hungary (Clément et al., 2003; Kasza-Tóth, 2021; Kaw, 2025; MacIntyre et al., 2001, 2003; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021; Nagy & Nikolov, 2007; Qu, 2023), as well as Japan (Hashimoto, 2002; Yashima, 2002), China (Chen et al., 2021; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yu, 2015), Iran (Fallah, 2014; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Khajavy et al., 2016; Riasati, 2018; Sheybani, 2019), Saudi Arabia and Morocco (Bensalem et al., 2023, 2025), Vietnam (Bui et al., 2022), and Turkey (Öz et al., 2015).

The teacher’s role is critical in shaping learners’ communicative behaviour and classroom engagement. Teachers influence learners’ engagement and psychological experiences through their enthusiasm and involvement in classroom interaction. Such teacher engagement may foster learner engagement through processes such as psychological contagion, highlighting the close connection between teacher and learner psychology (Smid & Mercer, 2025). This aligns with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) view that teacher–student interaction serves as a key medium for internalising educational values. In addition, students’ perceptions of their teachers’ attitudes, behaviours, and interpersonal presence can strongly affect their willingness to communicate (Kaw, 2025). Even subtle aspects of teacher presence, such as appearance or manner, may influence learners’ emotional responses and communicative confidence. For example, Effiong (2016) found that Japanese students reported higher anxiety when teachers dressed formally, demonstrating how teacher-related factors can shape classroom participation.

These findings indicate that teachers are important not only because they participate in classroom communication but also because their practices and interactions contribute to the

conditions in which communication occurs. Teachers' perspectives can therefore provide a complementary understanding of students' WTC alongside learners' own perceptions and experiences. Their perspectives can therefore complement learners' own accounts by providing insight into how classroom interaction, teacher-related factors, and pedagogical practices may facilitate or constrain students' communicative engagement.

The educational context in which WTC develops has also undergone substantial change in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic brought substantial changes to higher education, with many learning activities shifting from face-to-face to online formats and with consequent changes to classroom interaction and students' learning experiences (Huang & Wang, 2023; Sato et al., 2023). For EFL learners, this transition changed the conditions under which opportunities for communication occurred. Research has also examined the influence of digital learning environments on WTC (Kruk, 2022; Reinders & Wattana, 2015). The COVID-19 period is therefore relevant to the study of WTC because the move to online education altered the settings in which teachers and students communicated.

The post-COVID period provides a further important context because university students and teachers have experienced changes in modes of instruction and classroom interaction. The participants in the present study experienced English language learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, when instruction was delivered online, and after the pandemic, when face-to-face teaching resumed. Their experiences across these learning environments provide a relevant context for examining how teachers perceive students' communicative behaviour under changing educational conditions (Huang & Wang, 2023; Sato et al., 2023). Attention to teachers' experiences is particularly relevant because teachers encountered these changes directly through their classroom practices and interactions with students.

Within Hungarian higher education, understanding students' WTC requires attention to the educational contexts in which communication takes place. Previous research has examined WTC in Hungary (e.g., Kasza-Tóth, 2021; Kaw, 2025; Nagy & Nikolov, 2007), but less attention has been given to teachers' perspectives on the factors that influence students' WTC. Teachers are particularly relevant because their pedagogical practices and interactions with students can shape classroom communication and students' engagement (Khajavy et al., 2018; Smid & Mercer, 2025).

This issue is particularly relevant in the context of the transition from online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to face-to-face instruction. The participants in the present study experienced both modes of instruction, providing an opportunity to examine teachers' perceptions of students' communicative behaviour across changing educational conditions. Accordingly, this study explores EFL university teachers' perceptions of the factors that influence students' WTC in face-to-face, online, and out-of-class contexts in Hungarian higher education.

Literature Review

Factors Influencing WTC Inside the Classroom

WTC is a key construct in second language acquisition due to its close link with actual language use and communicative competence (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Learners with higher levels of WTC tend to engage more actively in classroom discourse and seek opportunities for authentic interaction, whereas those with lower WTC experience limited communicative practice and reduced language development (Kang, 2005; Shaffer, 2021; Zarei et al., 2019).

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' WTC through their attitudes, behaviour, and pedagogical practices (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Peng, 2014). Research has identified several teacher-related factors, such as

empathy, support, and teaching style, that enhance learners' confidence, reduce anxiety, and promote active participation (Amiryousefi, 2018; Bui et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Kaw, 2025; Lee, 2022). Previous research has suggested that teacher involvement may be reflected in supportive behaviours such as warmth, approachability, responsiveness, and enthusiasm, which can encourage some learners to participate more freely (Kálmán, 2021, 2023; Lamb, 2017). In the Iranian EFL context, pedagogical practices such as providing adequate response time and incorporating interactive tasks have been shown to support students' communicative confidence (Amiryousefi, 2018; Zarrinabadi, 2014).

Teachers who demonstrate care, communicate clear expectations, and promote learner autonomy strengthen students' sense of competence and intrinsic motivation, thereby enhancing their WTC (Delos Reyes & Torio, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Collectively, these findings indicate that teacher-related factors extend beyond instructional techniques; they encompass affective and relational dimensions that are fundamental to learners' communicative readiness.

A positive and supportive classroom climate also plays a vital role in sustaining learners' WTC. Learners are more willing to communicate when they feel confident and motivated, particularly in classrooms characterised by mutual respect, trust, and low anxiety (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021; Khajavy et al., 2018). Studies further highlight that teacher support, group cohesion, and positive peer relations contribute significantly to enhanced WTC (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Kaw, 2025; Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng, 2019). In both face-to-face and online environments, teachers who create emotionally responsive and encouraging atmospheres help students overcome apprehension and engage more confidently in communication (Altunel, 2021; Borasheva, 2024; Hu & Wang, 2023; Kaw, 2025; Yusri & Sulaiman, 2024; Zohrabi & Farshbafan, 2022).

However, these findings need to be interpreted in relation to the specific situations and educational contexts in which WTC occurs. WTC can vary according to group size, topic familiarity, interlocutor type, task characteristics, and interactional arrangement (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005). Cao and Philp (2006), for example, found differences in communicative behaviour across whole-class, group, and dyadic interaction, while Khazaei et al. (2012) showed that class size can affect opportunities for oral participation. Similarly, Khajavy et al. (2016) examined classroom environment, including teacher support, student cohesiveness, and task orientation, among English-major university students in an Iranian EFL context. The findings suggest that the classroom should not be treated as a uniform setting and that practices such as pair work, group interaction, teacher support, and response time need to be considered in relation to the conditions under which they are implemented.

The cultural and educational context also warrants attention. Research across Japan, China, Iran, Vietnam, and other EFL contexts indicates that cultural norms, educational traditions, and local classroom conditions can shape WTC (Bensalem et al., 2023; Bui et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Hashimoto, 2002; Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng, 2014; Riasati, 2018; Yashima, 2002). Thus, findings from one educational or cultural context should not automatically be generalised to another. This contextual perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, which examines teachers' perceptions within Hungarian higher education. Teachers' perspectives can provide insight into how factors associated with WTC are understood within the specific conditions of their teaching context.

Factors Influencing WTC in Online Settings: In-Class Factors

In digital learning environments, learners' WTC is shaped by both technological features and emotional comfort. Supportive teacher–learner relationships enhance motivation and communicative confidence (Zohrabi & Farshbafan, 2022). Pair work and interactive tools such as text chat and voice chat can create psychologically safe spaces for communication.

Text-based interaction often reduces anxiety by removing pronunciation pressure (Kaw, 2025; Satar & Özdener, 2008), while asynchronous communication allows learners extra preparation time, thereby increasing confidence (Buckingham & Alpaslan, 2017). Similarly, pair work—whether conducted online or face-to-face—has been found to lower anxiety and promote engagement (Cao & Philp, 2006; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Vongsila & Reinders, 2016).

Learners' preferences for different communication modes, including camera use, also reflect their emotional comfort and situational needs. Some students feel more relaxed keeping their cameras off, whereas others value visual presence as a means of maintaining focus and connection (Kaw, 2025). This observation aligns with Reinders and Wattana's (2015) findings on the varied effects of digital learning environments. Choices between chat and video communication similarly depend on learners' comfort and task demands (Kaw, 2025). Overall, WTC online depends on how well digital interaction replicates the emotional safety and immediacy of supportive classrooms, with flexibility and personal comfort remaining key to sustained participation (Kruk, 2022).

However, the same contextual caution applies to online environments. Online learning does not constitute a single, uniform communicative setting. Research indicates that topic relevance, interlocutor type, platform design, peer familiarity, emotional connection, and learners' personal preferences can affect WTC in online settings (Altunel, 2021; Kaw, 2025; Kruk, 2022; Lee, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Altunel (2021), for example, found that limited peer familiarity and reduced emotional connection during pandemic-related online learning were associated with lower WTC. These findings suggest that the effects of online learning need to be considered in relation to the particular interactional and emotional conditions it provides rather than being treated as a uniform alternative to face-to-face learning.

Factors Influencing WTC Outside the Classroom

Many studies have focused on factors that influence WTC in the classroom, but learners also use English and demonstrate WTC in real-life contexts. Research indicates that positive classroom experiences and supportive teacher–student relationships can enhance learners’ confidence to use English outside academic settings (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). According to Dewaele (2015), much of second language development occurs through informal, naturalistic interaction.

Within the Hungarian higher education context, opportunities to use English in social settings, friendships with international students, travel experiences, personal habits, and professional environments can contribute to shaping university students’ readiness to communicate in English beyond the classroom (Kaw, 2025). Learners who engage in communication in international or work-related situations generally display higher confidence, while those with limited exposure often remain hesitant to initiate interaction. These findings support Cao and Philp’s (2006) view that contextual factors play a key role in fostering WTC by providing opportunities for real-world communication.

Empirical studies have also demonstrated that learners often exhibit greater WTC outside the classroom than during lessons. Başöz and Erten (2018) found that Turkish tertiary-level EFL learners were more willing to communicate in English in out-of-class situations than in classroom interactions. This observation is consistent with earlier research (e.g., Kostiainen et al., 2018; Nagy & Nikolov, 2007; Peng, 2014), which similarly reported higher levels of out-of-class WTC among English language learners. Such findings suggest that authentic social environments may promote spontaneous language use by reducing performance pressure and enhancing enjoyment. Despite these insights, the out-of-class dimension of WTC has received considerably less attention in research compared with classroom-based communication. Although communicative competence remains a

fundamental goal of language education, possessing the necessary linguistic knowledge and communicative skills does not necessarily ensure that learners are willing to communicate. Consequently, increasing attention has been devoted to the motivational, emotional, and contextual factors that influence learners' willingness to communicate (Khajavy et al., 2016; MacIntyre et al., 1998).

A substantial body of research has examined WTC across both Western and non-Western educational contexts (Bensalem et al., 2023, 2024; Bui et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Clément et al., 2003; Hashimoto, 2002; Kasza-Tóth, 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2001, 2003; Nagy & Nikolov, 2007; Peng, 2014; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002). However, research in the Hungarian tertiary education context remains limited, particularly in the postpandemic period. Moreover, although teachers are widely recognised as playing a crucial role in fostering learners' WTC (Chen et al., 2021; Hu & Wang, 2023), previous research has focused predominantly on students' perspectives, leaving teachers' perceptions comparatively underexplored. This is important because teachers are not only participants in the classroom environment but also those who organise classroom interaction and implement pedagogical practices within particular teaching contexts. Examining teachers' perspectives can therefore complement existing student-centred research and provide insight into how factors associated with WTC are perceived within a specific educational context.

Against this background, the present study investigates EFL university teachers' perceptions on what influences their students' WTC in English within Hungarian higher education. By examining teachers' experiences across both face-to-face and online learning environments, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how pedagogical practices, classroom dynamics, and teacher characteristics influence students' communicative engagement.

Research Methods

Based on the literature review and aligned with the aim of this study, the following research question was developed:

What are EFL university teachers' perceptions about what motivates students to communicate in English inside and outside the classroom in the context of Hungarian higher education?

Qualitative Design

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory design to investigate EFL university teachers' perceptions of what motivates students to communicate in English inside and outside the classroom in Hungarian higher education. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to gain a deep understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences in their natural context (Dörnyei, 2007). One-on-one interviews were selected as the most effective method for collecting data as they provide opportunities for an in-depth examination of individuals' subjective experiences, opinions, and emotions. This approach aligns with Dörnyei's (2007) emphasis on the value of qualitative inquiry in capturing the complexity of language learning and teaching processes. To obtain rich and detailed insights, semistructured interviews were conducted with 11 EFL university teachers.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted with EFL university teachers in Hungary during 2025. The participants were selected through convenience sampling, which, according to Dörnyei (2007), typically results in the recruitment of willing participants who are essential for obtaining rich qualitative data. In terms of educational background, eight participants held PhD degrees, and three were PhD candidates. The group consisted of six female and five male

teachers. The participants were of different nationalities, including a German and a Greek American as well as Hungarians, who comprised the remaining majority. Some participants teach only language practice courses, whereas others teach both language practice and content courses. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants. The participants' background information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The Participants

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Job title	Educational background	Years of teaching English in general	Years of teaching English at the university
Gabi	27	F	Assistant Lecturer	PhD candidate	Approx. 3 years	Approx. 3 years
Jason	31	M	Lecturer	PhD candidate	Approx. 8 years	Approx. 8 years
Ulrich	64	M	Associate Professor	PhD degree holder	Approx. 40 years	Approx. 40 years
Nóra	27	F	Assistant Lecturer	PhD candidate	Approx. 4 years	Approx. 3 years
Mária	65	F	Senior Lecturer	PhD degree holder	Approx. 40 years	Approx. 40 years
András	44	M	Associate Professor	PhD degree holder	Approx. 20 years	Approx. 5 years
Csongor	51	M	Senior Lecturer	PhD degree holder	Approx. 32 years	Approx. 12 years
Anikó	30	F	Senior Lecturer	PhD degree holder	Approx. 6 years	Approx. 6 years
Rebeka	34	F	Senior Lecturer	PhD degree holder	Approx. 15 years	Approx. 10 years
Mónika	39	F	Senior Lecturer	PhD degree holder	Approx. 18 years	Approx. 6 years
Ákos	36	M	Senior Lecturer	PhD degree holder	Approx. 13 years	Approx. 8 years

The Instrument

A semistructured interview guide was designed based on the research question, existing literature, and expert feedback. This format was chosen because it allows flexibility in questioning while encouraging participants to express their thoughts freely without being limited by predefined response categories. Following Dörnyei's (2007) recommendations, the interview guide consisted of four main parts: an introduction, background questions, core

questions, and a closing question. The background section gathered information about participants' age, job title, educational background, and years of teaching experience. The core section focused on teachers' perceptions of what motivates students to communicate in English both inside and outside the classroom within the Hungarian tertiary context.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interview guide was designed with reference to the research question and the relevant literature. Its development involved a systematic validation process, during which the guide was reviewed, piloted, and refined before being used in the main study. Initially, experts examined the interview questions and provided feedback on their clarity, relevance, and organisation. Their suggestions informed revisions to the wording and sequence of several questions. Subsequently, two pilot interviews were carried out to assess whether the questions were clear, comprehensible, and capable of generating rich and relevant data. Insights gained from these pilot interviews led to additional refinements, including rephrasing questions, rearranging their order, introducing new questions, and removing items that were considered redundant. Minor adjustments continued throughout the data collection process until data saturation was achieved. The final interview guide (Appendix) was considered well suited to eliciting comprehensive responses that addressed the aims of the study, and no further revisions were deemed necessary.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Invitation emails outlining the purpose of the study and the ethical considerations were sent to EFL university teachers, and interviews were conducted with those who volunteered to participate. Before each interview, participants provided informed consent and were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Data collection took place in 2025 across eleven individual interviews. Eight interviews were conducted in person, while three were held online via Microsoft Teams, depending on participants' preferences. Participants consented to the recording of interviews and were reminded that they could request the recording to stop at any time. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 35 minutes. The participant group included nine native speakers of Hungarian, one native speaker of German, and one native speaker of English. Due to the researcher's lack of knowledge of the non-English languages above, English was the language used for communication and conducting the interviews. Each recorded interview was carefully reviewed, and the content was examined with attention to two key qualitative features outlined by Dörnyei (2007): the natural flow of conversation and the richness of detail in the participants' accounts. The quotations presented in the findings are verbatim excerpts from the interview transcripts.

After transcription, the interviews were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Initial codes were generated manually by the author through repeated reading of the transcripts. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and refined into overarching themes. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, a second researcher independently reviewed a sample of the coded transcripts. Differences in coding were discussed until consensus was reached, resulting in the refinement of several categories and themes. The overall analytical process was guided by Creswell's (2014) framework for qualitative data analysis.

Results and Discussion

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Students' WTC Inside the Classroom

The interviews with 11 EFL university teachers revealed a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing students' WTC in English within the classroom. Teachers consistently

described WTC as a dynamic, context-dependent construct rather than a stable learner trait. They viewed it as continuously shaped by the interplay of teacher behaviour, learner characteristics, and classroom conditions. A recurring theme across all interviews was the pivotal role of the teacher in creating and sustaining students' communicative engagement. Participants perceived themselves as the main architects in establishing the classroom's communicative climate, which suggests that their attitudes, interactional styles, and pedagogical choices directly affect learners' readiness to speak. Participants also recognised that learners' psychological, cultural, and situational realities interact with pedagogical efforts.

Three major thematic categories emerged from the analysis: (1) teacher-related influences, (2) learner-related characteristics, and (3) contextual factors. Consistent with previous research, the teachers in this study viewed WTC as a fluctuating phenomenon shaped largely by the affective and interpersonal atmosphere of the classroom (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2014). Their reflections further reinforce the notion that the teacher's role is central in fostering supportive communicative environments and sustaining learners' WTC (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Zarrinabadi, 2014).

Teacher-Related Influences

All participants highlighted the teacher's influence as the decisive factor in shaping students' WTC. Teachers' methodology, presence, personality, and emotional expression were repeatedly mentioned as central. As Gabi reflected, "students often read the teacher's energy before they speak—if I seem patient and genuinely interested, they dare to try." Similarly, Ulrich observed that "learners speak more when they feel listened to, not examined." Participants described how an approachable, authentic demeanour and nonjudgmental feedback create an atmosphere of trust where communication can flourish.

Some participants underlined that emotional resonance and positivity are contagious in the classroom. Mária observed that “a joyful teacher produces joyful talk,” while Nóra found that “small human moments—humour, empathy, openness—break the silence faster than any grammar prompt.” Students’ own language-learning histories also played a role. Gabi and Mónika both noted that learners who had encouraging teachers or authentic experiences abroad, for example, through Erasmus mobility programmes, “carry that confidence into every English class” (Gabi), whereas those who had been ridiculed or silenced “often bring invisible hesitation” (Mónika).

Many participants viewed the classroom atmosphere as ultimately sustained by the teacher’s emotional presence. András expressed this succinctly: “Atmosphere is policy in action—the way we respond to mistakes decides who will speak next.” Similarly, Csongor remarked that “when laughter and curiosity fill the room, speaking becomes natural, not forced.” These reflections suggest that WTC begins with the teacher’s emotional and pedagogical choices. As Ákos acknowledged, the teacher’s response to errors can “either freeze or free” students’ WTC. Overall, every participant positioned the teacher as the core catalyst of communicative engagement.

Throughout all interviews, the teacher consistently appeared as the strongest influence on students’ WTC. This finding supports earlier studies that highlight how teacher immediacy, involvement, and empathy nurture learners’ communicative engagement (Amiryousefi, 2018; Bui et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Lee, 2022). Teachers in the present study described how approachability, humour, and nonjudgmental feedback built trust and emotional safety. Comments such as “a joyful teacher produces joyful talk” (Mária) exemplify the emotional contagion discussed in prior work on teacher enthusiasm and classroom climate (Amiryousefi, 2018; Lee, 2022). Likewise, participants’ emphasis on emotional resonance and positive energy resonates with Kálmán’s (2021, 2023) and Lamb’s

(2017) findings that teacher enthusiasm and interpersonal warmth significantly enhance classroom communication. When teachers demonstrate care, patience, and openness, they help fulfil students' needs for relatedness and competence, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation and WTC (Delos Reyes & Torio, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

Learner-Related Characteristics

While teachers viewed themselves as central agents in fostering communication, they also recognised that students bring diverse psychological and experiential factors to the classroom. The most frequently mentioned factor was personality, identified by nine participants. Extroverted and confident learners were described as naturally more vocal, whereas introverted students, though often highly capable, tended to be seen as hesitant. As Jason observed, “some of my best thinkers rarely speak—it’s not their English, it’s their self-comfort.” Eight participants mentioned issues of language proficiency and anxiety. They reported that learners with limited vocabulary or grammar knowledge were perceived as more reluctant to take risks. Ákos remarked that “students who fear mistakes prefer silence to embarrassment.”

Many teachers emphasised that confidence and pronunciation play intertwined roles in WTC. Nóra observed that “students often begin with an apology for their accent,” while Mária noted that “pronunciation is identity—if they feel ‘wrong,’ they withdraw.” Mónika added that “small successes build courage,” illustrating how confidence can be gradually nurtured through positive reinforcement. Three participants highlighted motivation as a powerful psychological driver. As András explained, “when students want to speak for themselves, not for grades, communication becomes genuine.” Participants also identified the influence of students' cultural and educational backgrounds. Six teachers felt that learners from hierarchical or exam-oriented educational systems tended to be less comfortable

expressing opinions. As Ulrich mentioned, “if in their families their voices didn’t count, they bring that silence here.”

Other factors such as age, year of study, language attitude, and educational background were also mentioned as relevant. Jason noted that students in the later years of their university studies, particularly those who had already completed their first year, “speak more willingly because they have accepted imperfection as part of learning,” whereas Nóra observed that first-year students “often need structured encouragement.” Mónika and Rebeka noted that students who are used to open discussions find it easier to take risks when speaking. Perfectionism emerged as another recurring barrier; as Nóra explained, “they want to speak perfectly, so they end up not speaking at all.” These insights suggest that learner-related variables are not fixed traits but dynamic tendencies that evolve through teacher influence and classroom experience.

Overall, the teachers acknowledged that individual learner factors such as personality, proficiency, confidence, and anxiety mediate students’ communicative behaviour. These insights align with previous findings that self-confidence and motivation are key predictors of WTC (Khajavy et al., 2018; Peng, 2019). Participants’ observations that introverted or perfectionist learners may hesitate despite adequate proficiency echo evidence that anxiety and self-perception constrain students’ WTC (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021). The recurring connection between pronunciation and identity also supports Dewaele and Dewaele’s (2018) argument that affective comfort and positive self-image are essential for active participation. Furthermore, teachers’ awareness of cultural and educational backgrounds aligns with studies that emphasise the contextualised nature of communicative behaviour (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2019). Finally, teachers’ emphasis on gradually building confidence through small successes reinforces the view that WTC is developmental and responsive to teacher mediation (Amiryousefi, 2018; MacIntyre et al., 2001).

Contextual Factors

Beyond teacher and learner dimensions, the participants discussed how contextual factors can influence learners' WTC at different stages during classroom interaction. Many agreed that communicative behaviour depends on course type, topic, and task design. Gabi observed that "in translation classes, Hungarian is a necessary tool, but in skills courses, we build an English-only environment." Many participants noted that when topics were personally meaningful or creative, students spoke more readily. As Rebeka remarked, "when they care about the topic, the silence disappears."

Group dynamics and positive peer relationships also emerged as key situational themes, mentioned by six participants. Gabi observed that "if the students are very close to each other and know each other well, they get into very heated classroom discussions, and they tend to enjoy that a lot." Teachers agreed that when students know and trust one another, they are more willing to participate in classroom discussions. The general classroom atmosphere, described by five teachers, was viewed as both a product and a condition of communication. As Mária summarised, "a calm, encouraging atmosphere opens mouths; tension closes them." A relaxed and accepting atmosphere was seen as essential for fostering students' WTC.

Environmental factors such as time of day, weather, and even room temperature were also mentioned as subtle yet real influences. Jason remarked humorously, "eight in the morning or five in the evening on a winter day is not the best time for spontaneous English." In addition, five teachers referred to students' emotional and personal states as situational determinants. Anikó explained that "when students are weighed down by personal worries, their mental space for communication shrinks." These reflections highlight that WTC is fluid and context-dependent, varying not only across learners and teachers but also across time, topics, and emotional circumstances.

Participants' views reinforce the understanding that WTC fluctuates depending on task design, topic relevance, and group dynamics. This finding corresponds with earlier research showing that interactive and personally meaningful tasks enhance engagement and communicative confidence (Peng, 2007; Zarrinabadi, 2014). Teachers' remarks that emotionally safe and cohesive groups encourage participation align with previous evidence that group cohesion and positive peer relationships are important facilitators of classroom communication (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng, 2019). Moreover, participants' awareness of institutional and environmental factors—such as class size, assessment methods, and time of day—supports Hu and Wang's (2023) conclusion that WTC is not purely psychological but also situationally dynamic, responding to immediate contextual cues. Finally, teachers' observations that emotional strain or daily stress can reduce students' communicative readiness echo findings linking affective states and anxiety to moment-to-moment variations in WTC (Borasheva, 2024; Darasawang & Reinders, 2021). Table 2 summarises the major teacher-related, learner-related, and contextual factors identified through the thematic analysis.

Table 2

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Students' Willingness to Communicate Inside the Classroom

Themes	Factors
Teacher-related influences	Teaching methodology
	Teacher presence
	Teacher's personality

	Teacher's emotional expression
	Classroom atmosphere
Learner-related characteristics	Personality
	Confidence
	Language proficiency
	Motivation
	Influence of students' cultural and educational backgrounds
	Age
	Year of study
	Language attitude
	Educational background
	Pronunciation
	Language anxiety
Contextual conditions	Course type
	Topic relevance
	Task design
	Group dynamics
	Interpersonal safety
	Environmental factors such as time of day, weather, and even room temperature

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Students' WTC in an Online Setting

The findings indicate that students' WTC in online settings is influenced by both technological design and the teacher's role in creating an interactive and supportive learning atmosphere. While most participants found face-to-face classrooms more engaging and emotionally dynamic, they acknowledged that well-organised online lessons could also achieve communicative outcomes. The analysis identified three overarching themes: engagement in online versus in-person classes, the impact of camera use on communication, and the role of digital tools in shaping online interaction during online teaching. Although the teachers' views varied depending on their experience, they consistently emphasised that effective organisation and strong teacher presence were the key factors sustaining learners' WTC in virtual environments.

Engagement in Online Versus In-Person Communication

All participants except Ulrich and Mónica believed that students tend to be more communicative in face-to-face settings. They described learners as more lively, spontaneous, and emotionally present when physically in the same room. As Mária observed, “in person, you can sense energy—students laugh, respond to each other, and build on ideas. That rhythm is often lost online.” Similarly, Jason commented that “face-to-face classes bring out the natural flow of conversation; online interaction can feel delayed or restrained.” Participants attributed this difference to the lack of immediate social feedback in virtual environments. Anikó explained that “students are more cautious online as they don’t see others’ facial reactions clearly,” while Csongor added that “the classroom atmosphere is harder to recreate through a screen.”

However, not all teachers viewed online learning negatively. Ulrich described the virtual environment as “safer” for some students, particularly those who are shy or anxious in physical classrooms: “A few students found their voice online—they could type first or speak in smaller breakout rooms without fear of judgement.” Some participants suggested that communication quality depends less on the mode of delivery and more on the teacher’s organisation. As Mónica argued, “the way I structure the lesson matters most. I design it so students can’t hide in silence. With the right tasks, a teacher can make them talk—online or offline.”

Teachers emphasised that while face-to-face classrooms remain more naturally engaging, well-structured online lessons can also sustain meaningful interaction. This finding supports Zohrabi and Farshbafan’s (2022) claim that friendly, supportive teacher–learner relationships play a decisive role in fostering motivation and communicative confidence in digital environments.

The Impact of Camera Use on Communication

Camera use emerged as a recurring and divisive topic among teachers. Six participants preferred students to keep their cameras on, arguing that visual contact fosters accountability, connection, and immediacy. Jason explained, “I always ask students to keep their cameras on; otherwise, it feels like speaking into the void.” Similarly, Nóra remarked, “it’s not about control; it’s about creating a sense of community. Seeing each other’s faces makes interaction human again.” Mária noted that cameras help her “read students’ reactions,” while Csongor observed that “students seem more focused when they know they are visible.”

However, other teachers, including Ulrich, András, and Mónika, believed that camera use does not automatically determine participation. Ulrich reflected that “some students talk more freely when they are off camera; it gives them a sense of privacy and reduces anxiety.” Mónika also added, “whether cameras are on or off, what matters is how the task is structured and how the teacher maintains interaction.” These differing perspectives suggest that while visibility can enhance connection and immediacy, it may also increase self-consciousness for some learners.

For some participants, flexibility works best. Allowing students to decide when to use their cameras encourages both comfort and responsibility. Teachers who supported flexible camera policies, for example, Csongor, acknowledged that visibility strengthens social connection but can also heighten anxiety—an observation consistent with research indicating that psychological safety in online environments significantly affects learner participation (Buckingham & Alpaslan, 2017).

The Role of Digital Tools in Shaping Online Interaction

Teachers discussed how various communication tools, particularly video-based speaking and text-based chat, shape interaction in online settings. Participants agreed that

these tools serve complementary purposes. Seven teachers emphasised that the choice of medium should match the task objective. For short responses or collective brainstorming, the chat function was considered highly effective. Jason described it as “a quick, democratic way to collect every student’s input,” while Ulrich valued it for “giving equal voice to shy students who might not speak up aloud.” When tasks required longer and more spontaneous communication, teachers preferred video discussions or breakout rooms. As Mónika explained, “if I want them to elaborate or react to each other, I send them into breakout rooms—those conversations can be just as rich as in-person.” Teachers also observed that students’ personality and preparedness often influence their preferred communication mode. Reflecting on their classroom experiences, Csongor noted that “confident students prefer speaking, while cautious ones start with typing,” and Anikó added that students become more active during synchronous online classes once they feel psychologically safe.

Teachers’ reflections on communication modes echo earlier research on affective safety in digital contexts. Participants noted that written communication through the online chat function allowed shy or anxious students to contribute more freely, supporting Kaw's (2025) and Satar and Özdener's (2008) findings that written communication reduces pronunciation pressure and anxiety. Kaw (2025) also observed that learners’ preference for communicating through the online chat function or speaking during synchronous online classes varies according to their comfort level and the nature of the task. Participants further emphasised that technology alone does not determine students’ WTC; its effectiveness depends on how teachers design, scaffold, and humanise the learning experience (see Figure 1). Collectively, these insights reinforce the view that WTC in online environments is influenced by the extent to which digital interaction recreates the emotional safety, immediacy, and social connectedness characteristic of supportive physical classrooms (Zohrabi & Farshbafan, 2022).

Figure 1

Mind Map Illustrating EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Students' Willingness to Communicate in an Online Learning Setting



EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Students' WTC Outside the Classroom

The interviews with EFL university teachers revealed interrelated factors that influence students' WTC in English beyond the classroom. Ten key influences were identified: friend group and environment, work, hobbies, proficiency, pronunciation anxiety, travel, limited opportunities for use, awareness of importance, courage and personal engagement, and situations requiring English. These can be grouped into two main themes: the social and environmental context and individual and psychological factors.

The Social and Environmental Context

Teachers perceived that students' WTC outside the classroom was strongly influenced by their social surroundings and the availability of authentic opportunities to use English. Based on their interactions with students and classroom discussions, teachers believed that learners who socialised with international friends or Erasmus students were more likely to use English in everyday situations, whereas those whose social networks consisted mainly of Hungarian peers had fewer opportunities to communicate in English. As Jason explained, English often remained "academic rather than lived" when students lacked real-life exposure.

Workplaces were described as important settings where students have regular opportunities to use English. Students employed in multinational companies or hospitality

sectors use English regularly, which enhances both fluency and confidence. Teachers observed that for many young adults, the workplace becomes their real English classroom. As Csongor mentioned, “if they have a job alongside university where they have to use English, they will obviously use it a lot.” Similarly, travel, studying abroad, and online gaming were also mentioned as valuable means of using English outside the classroom.

Individual and Psychological Factors

Beyond social context, teachers highlighted the crucial role of individual traits in shaping students’ WTC in English outside the classroom. Language proficiency was seen as a necessary foundation for spontaneous communication, yet pronunciation anxiety often undermined it. Teachers observed that some learners tend to avoid speaking English because they worry that their pronunciation or accent may be judged negatively, even though many of their out-of-class interactions are likely to involve speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This perceived fear of negative evaluation may discourage learners from communicating in English even when their linguistic competence is sufficient.

Teachers also identified courage, confidence, and self-engagement as key psychological factors influencing WTC. Teachers noted that students often recognise their communicative potential only when placed in situations where Hungarian is not an option. Recognising English as a living skill rather than a school subject was also considered essential. Csongor noted that when learners understand that English “opens doors—not just exam results,” they are more willing and confident to use it beyond academic settings.

Teachers also mentioned that students’ exposure to English outside the classroom largely depends on their personal engagement with the language. Many learners stay connected to English through watching films on Netflix, reading books in English, and using various forms of digital media. Although these activities are mainly receptive, they were

viewed as valuable sources of linguistic input that familiarise students with English as it is used in a range of real-life communicative contexts. However, teachers questioned how far such engagement extends to productive skills, particularly speaking. As Ulrich remarked:

“when it comes to productive use, especially speaking, in Budapest there are some opportunities—like conversation clubs or English-language cultural events—but I am not confident that Hungarian students actively seek them out. Some might, but I doubt it is widespread.”

The teachers’ reflections indicate that students’ WTC beyond the classroom depends strongly on both their social context and personal readiness to use English. This finding supports those of Kaw’s (2025) study, in which it was shown that students use English in various real-life contexts—such as workplaces, travel, and social interactions—demonstrating its value as a versatile and essential communication tool. It also aligns with Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak’s (2007) argument that positive classroom experiences and teacher–student relationships can extend to out-of-class communication when authentic opportunities exist. Furthermore, it corresponds with Dewaele’s (2015) finding that informal, natural interactions play an important role in developing communicative confidence. Table 3 summarises the EFL teachers’ perceptions of the key social, psychological, and environmental factors that influence students’ WTC outside the classroom.

Table 3

EFL Teachers’ Perceptions of Factors Influencing Students’ Willingness to Communicate Outside the Classroom

Themes	Factors
The social and environmental context	Social surroundings such as friend group and environment Workplaces Travel Studying abroad
Individual and psychological factors	Language proficiency Pronunciation anxiety Courage Confidence Personal engagement or hobby such as online games Awareness of importance of the language Students' exposure to English such as watching films on Netflix, reading English books, and using various forms of digital media

Conclusion, Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

This study explored EFL university teachers' perceptions of the factors influencing students' WTC in English across face-to-face classroom, online learning, and out-of-class contexts in Hungarian higher education. The findings contribute to understanding WTC beyond formal classroom interaction by highlighting teachers' perceptions of the factors that may influence students' willingness to communicate outside the classroom. They also provide insight into teachers' experiences of students' communication in face-to-face and online learning environments and the practices they use to encourage communication across these contexts.

The findings revealed that in classroom settings, WTC is a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by the interaction of teacher, learner, and situational factors. Beyond the classroom, students' readiness to use English was closely linked to learners' individual differences and social environments that encouraged communication. Teachers also emphasised that effective online engagement depends on replicating the immediacy and warmth of supportive classrooms through thoughtful task design and emotional connection.

The findings highlight the decisive role teachers play in shaping students' WTC across both physical and virtual settings. Beyond the classroom, teachers also described encouraging students to engage with English through everyday activities such as watching English-language media, interacting with international speakers, travelling, and seeking opportunities to use English in real-life situations. These practices were viewed as extending opportunities for language use beyond formal classroom instruction. To enhance students' WTC, teachers should focus on building rapport and fostering positive, engaging classroom environments where learners feel safe and valued. Demonstrating empathy, maintaining emotional warmth, and responding supportively to mistakes can reduce anxiety and promote active participation. Establishing clear goals and providing constructive feedback helps align learners' efforts with their long-term language aspirations. At the institutional level, language programmes should offer professional development that helps teachers balance structure with spontaneity and cultivate immediacy in both face-to-face and digital contexts. Training in digital relational pedagogy can further support teacher presence and sustain learner engagement online.

However, these implications should be understood in relation to the specific context of the study. The findings arise from teachers working in Hungarian higher education and should not be assumed to apply in the same way across different educational settings. As the literature review has shown, WTC is sensitive to situational and contextual conditions, including interactional arrangements, interlocutors, tasks, and the broader educational environment. The practical relevance of particular approaches to fostering WTC may therefore depend on the conditions in which teachers and learners interact.

Although this study was conducted within the Hungarian higher education context, its implications extend to similar EFL university settings globally. The findings could offer valuable insights for language pedagogy, particularly in promoting learners' WTC through supportive and interactive learning environments. Moreover, the research may contribute to

language pedagogy by enriching the understanding of EFL learners' WTC across classroom, digital, and real-world contexts. The results may have practical relevance for educators and learners alike, informing more effective communicative teaching approaches and addressing existing gaps in language education.

As with any qualitative study, the findings should be interpreted in the light of certain limitations. Firstly, the study was based on a relatively small sample of 11 EFL university teachers from two Hungarian universities. Although the participants provided rich insights drawn from their professional experience, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific rather than statistically representative of all EFL teachers in Hungarian higher education. Secondly, the study explored teachers' perceptions of the factors influencing students' WTC and did not include students' own perspectives. Although teachers provided valuable insights based on their professional experience, their perceptions may not fully reflect students' own experiences, especially in out-of-class contexts. Thirdly, the study examined WTC across face-to-face, online, and out-of-class contexts through teachers' accounts, but it did not directly observe students' communicative behaviour across these contexts. The findings therefore reflect teachers' perceptions of students' WTC rather than direct measures of students' willingness or actual communication. Finally, the qualitative design was intended to provide an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions rather than to produce findings that can be generalised to other settings. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting and transferring the findings beyond the context of this study.

Future research could address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples of teachers from a wider range of higher education institutions. In addition, studies conducted in different educational and cultural contexts would help determine the extent to which the present findings are transferable beyond Hungarian higher education. Comparative research across educational settings could also examine whether factors identified in the

present study operate similarly under different institutional and interactional conditions. Such research would help clarify the extent to which findings from one educational context can be applied to another.

Future research could also examine how EFL university teachers foster their students' willingness to communicate in English. It could complement the interview data with questionnaire-based evidence to strengthen the robustness and generalisability of the findings. Adopting longitudinal or mixed-methods designs would allow researchers to trace how WTC evolves over time and to triangulate results across different sources (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007). Comparing institutional contexts and including larger and more diverse samples could further validate the emerging themes. Additionally, future research could examine university EFL students' reported WTC alongside EFL teachers' perceptions of students' WTC and compare the two perspectives. Such research could provide deeper insights into students' experiences and teachers' perceptions and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape students' willingness to communicate.

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Appendix

The Final Version of the Interview Guide for EFL University Teachers

Dear,

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the interview and helping me with this research. The aim of this research is to explore EFL teachers' perceptions about what motivates students to communicate in English inside and outside the classroom in the context of Hungarian tertiary education. This interview will be used for research purposes only, and the analysis will be based on a summary of the collected data. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and full anonymity is guaranteed; no personal details will be disclosed. I am interested in hearing about your personal experiences and opinions, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your unique insights and perspectives are extremely valuable for this study. The interview is expected to take approximately 30-50 minutes, and with your permission, I would like to record our conversation. If, at any point during the interview, you feel uncomfortable, please let me know, and we can temporarily or permanently stop the recording. We can begin whenever you are ready.

Introductory questions:

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself, including your teaching experience and the levels of students you teach?
2. Could you please tell me about your position at this university?
3. How long have you been teaching English?
4. What is your educational background?
5. What is your nationality?
6. How old are you?

EFL Teachers' Perceptions about What Motivates Students to Communicate in English Inside and Outside the Classroom in the Context of Hungarian Higher Education

1. In your opinion, what influences how much your students use English inside the classroom?
2. Based on your experience, what influences your students' willingness to communicate in English during class?

- 2.1 Do aspects like age, gender, program, classroom activities, discussion topics, classroom environment, or personality traits play a role?
- 2.2 Do they enjoy participating, or do they find it challenging? Do they speak up voluntarily, or do they need encouragement?
3. In your experience, which interaction style do students seem most comfortable with: pair work, small groups, or whole-class discussions with the teacher? Why might that be?
 4. Have you observed any cultural or individual factors that influence students' willingness to communicate in English?
 5. In your experience, are students more willing to communicate in English during in-person classes or online classes? Why do you think that is?
 6. In your experience, do students participate more actively in English when they turn their videos on or off during online classes? What factors might influence this?
 7. In your experience, which format encourages students to communicate more in online lessons: video chat or text chat (chat box)? What explains this preference?
 8. In your opinion, what or who makes your students reluctant to speak English in the classroom?
 9. How do you balance error correction with maintaining students' confidence in speaking?
 10. How do you address students' fear of making mistakes when speaking English?
 11. In your opinion, what influences how much your students use English outside the classroom?

The Communicative Value of In-Between Moments

Jasmina Sazdovska  https://doi.org/10.21862/tesol-hun/2026_2_sazdovska

What is meant by “in-between moments” in the title of this paper are those times in our classrooms that teachers and students do not typically associate with learning per se. These liminal moments might include the teacher greeting and saying goodbye to the students, taking roll call, switching from one activity to another, or informal conversations during the lesson which are not directly connected to the pedagogical tasks at hand. They are frequently thought of as neglected crevices, not part of the lesson proper (Victoria, 2019, p. 186).

The notion of liminality in architecture is “a state of in-between, where the doorsteps and thresholds” serve as areas of transit connecting spaces of different usage (Ng & Lim, 2018, p. 81). Examples of such transitional spaces between two functional zones include corridors, lobbies, stairwells, or passages. Empty, bleak liminal spaces often evoke feelings of unease, nostalgia, or a sense of dislocation and isolation as the mind struggles to place them within a clear context. The presence of the mythical online Slender Man (Asimos, 2020) lurking in the background intensifies that discomfort, blending the eeriness of place with psychological disquiet (see Figure 1).

By synthesising ideas from theoretical and empirical research, this paper will argue that the neglected in-between moments can be turned into meaningful opportunities for learning. Everyday, dreary transitions can be transformed into colourful, creative, and fertile ground for building communicative competence in the language classroom (see contrast

between Figure 1 and Figure 2). The argument will be made by first looking at the various definitions of in-between moments, then outlining what takes place in these instances focusing particularly on the use of students' first language (L1) and the presence of humour. The paper will make the case that these liminal instances of L1 and humour can indeed be used to develop communicative competence. The article will end with practical implications for lesson planning.

Figure 1

Dreary Transition: Desolate Corridor With Slender Man (Perchance, n.d.)



Figure 2

Colourful Transition: Creative Language Classroom (Perchance, n.d.)



Definition of In-Between Moments

Defining in-between moments requires analysing how instructional time fluctuates. It is difficult to quantify exactly how much time is spent off-task during a lesson as off-task behaviour can vary depending on factors such as the classroom setting, the types of activities and their design, the gender of the pupils, and even the time of the school year, with on-task activity decreasing towards its end (Godwin et al., 2016). Research in elementary schools has found that learners spend between 10% and 50% of their time off-task (Godwin et al., 2016). Interestingly, in an English language classroom study conducted in Japan, Santos (2023) found that in some cases up to 71% of a pair work activity was spent in off-topic conversation in the students' L1 (Figure 3). The latter number, though perhaps not generalisable to other contexts, still makes one not only want to examine the notion of off-task liminal moments, but might also necessitate rethinking how teachers use pair work activities and what role the first language plays.

Figure 3

Percentage of Time Students Spent Communicating Off-Task in L1 During a Pair-Work Activity in an English Lesson in Japan.



Note. Based on data from Santos (2023).

The first step in investigating the concept of liminal, in-between moments in the classroom is to formally define what we mean by it. Many terms can be used to describe these instances of communication including but not limited to *liminal moments*, *off-task talk* (OTT), *off-task behaviour*, *off-topic conversations*, *transitional phases*, *threshold experiences*, *shifts in engagement*, *turning points*, *side-tracking*, and *pedagogical shifts*. This multitude of terminology points to the complexity of the notion and the difficulties in pinning down a clear definition. In determining the specific meaning of the concept, this paper will approach the matter from several different aspects, namely:

1. the mode of interaction (pedagogic vs. natural),
2. the setting (institutional vs. informal),
3. the goal (learning vs. socialising),
4. the task (on-task vs. off-task),
5. the topic (on-topic vs. off-topic), and
6. the structure (initiation–response–feedback vs. spontaneous, unstructured talk).

In the following sections, each of the above points will be discussed separately, though it is important to note that these are simply different perspectives of looking at the same phenomenon. There are naturally overlaps between the different angles of the definition of in-between moments. The number of the heading corresponds to the number of the points.

1. Modes of Interaction in the Language Classroom

Gil (2002), citing in her arguments Krashen and Terrell (1983) as well as Widdowson (1978), claimed that communicative language teaching “considers the classroom a place where students learn to communicate through communication” (p. 273) making exposure to and use of the target language (L2) a key factor in successful language learning. In line with this, Ellis (2005) emphasised the importance of maximising L2 input. Accordingly, Gil (2002)

asserted that the language in the classroom should emulate as much as possible the language used outside the classroom.

This interpretation of communicative language teaching sets up a false opposition between the natural mode of communication taking place outside the classroom and the pedagogic mode of communication within the classroom. The natural mode focuses on the meaning with language serving as the means of communication. In this mode, we are teaching *through* the language. Conversely, the pedagogic mode focuses on form with language being the object of communication, hence we are teaching *about* the language. Yet, this static dichotomy fails to capture the “dynamics of foreign language classroom discourse” (Gil, 2002, p. 274) where language is not only the content and the object of communication, but also the means and medium of communication. The language classroom offers a unique opportunity to fuse the two modes demonstrating their overlap (Figure 4) with language learning and language use taking place simultaneously (Illés & Akcan, 2017).

Figure 4

The Overlap Between the Pedagogic and the Natural Modes



Note. Adapted from Gil (2002, p. 276).

To demonstrate the bridging of the two modes, Gil (2002, p. 276) provided the following example of an exchange between a teacher and a student taking place while the topic of phrases with the verbs “do” and “make” was covered:

Line and Speaker	Discourse Outcome	Mode
1 T:	Give an example please	Pedagogic
2 S1:	I did my homework	Pedagogic/Natural
3 Ss:	Ohhhh	Natural

Here we can see that the teacher starts the exchange in the pedagogic mode focusing on the verb “do” and asking the student to provide an example. The student in turn provides an example which not only accomplishes the task set by the teacher (pedagogic mode) but simultaneously engages the student’s own reality by providing a genuine answer (natural mode). This switch in mode is recognised by the rest of the students, who interpret the answer of Student 1 as an attempt to show off, and they in turn react in the natural mode by teasing her with “Ohhhh”. This seemingly simple exchange illustrates the underlying complexities of the communication in the language classroom and the inability of the reductionist pedagogic–natural dichotomy to capture the multitude of fluid conversational goals.

Returning to the definition of in-between moments, in terms of modes, the liminal instances occur when modes mingle, that is, when there is a natural utterance within a pedagogic exchange as in the example above, or vice versa when there is pedagogic talk during a natural conversation. Indeed, liminal spaces could provide opportunities for “incidental focus-on-form ... as when a teacher overtly draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (Long, 1991, as cited in Hawkes, 2023, p. 38). When viewed in this light, liminal moments gain a special significance through their power to bridge the divide between the two modes and their ability to encapsulate multiple goals in a single exchange. In-between moments underscore the fact that the two modes are complementary (Gil, 2002).

2. Ramifications of the Institutional Setting of the Language Classroom

Language instruction mostly takes place in an institutional setting, be it a school, university, or language centre. Consequently, the institution endows the teacher with certain rights including directing the flow of conversation and controlling who speaks when, but also what to talk about and in what language. Even in private one-on-one language lessons, during which the learner may have more opportunities to speak up, there is still an innate power imbalance between the instructor and the learner.

Yet, the unique context of the language classroom, where the language is both the medium and content of instruction and where the students' ability to communicate is key, means that a more symmetrical relationship where students have more talking rights may result in a better environment for learning (Gil, 2002, pp. 277–278). This puts teachers in a situation where they have a dual role as both an authority and a facilitator (O'Dwyer, 2006): They have the speaking rights but need to relinquish some of these rights to enable the learning of the students and enhance their autonomy. In this student-centred approach, teachers play both the role of “actor and stage-manager” (Gil, 2002, p. 278), simultaneously participating in the conversation and directing it. Due to this complexity, some teachers may opt out of the actor role retaining the authority to limit students' contributions (Gil, 2002).

Additionally, the institutional setting dictates that in communicative language learning the teacher not only controls the flow of conversation and speaking rights but serves as an intellectual authority conveying knowledge and modelling language to provide L2 input (O'Dwyer, 2006). Teachers need to have a unique skill to communicate English as ‘comprehensible input’ to students, using language that is understandable yet challenging, effectively tuning the complexity to the students' levels (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Teachers' input gains in significance in contexts where the students' exposure to the L2 out of the

classroom may be limited or hard to come by, although this may be rare in the age of the internet.

However, O'Dwyer (2006) argued that teachers need to not only serve as a model of linguistic practice, but they also need to support the students' learning process by providing instructions, corrections, and evaluations of the students' progress towards their learning goals. This ability "to refer to and articulate such standards" (O'Dwyer, 2006, p. 10) of evaluation and supervision of progress reinforces the teachers' authority, putting them and the students in a master-apprentice relation. As a result, the teachers' role in a cooperative, communicative language learning process is further complicated as they navigate the balancing of their authority with the students' autonomy.

This is where the opportunities for balance that in-between moments provide come into play. In terms of the institutional setting, liminal communication is when teachers allow informal conversation to take place in a formal context. Such conversations with students offer teachers a chance to engage with learners in genuine informal communication while retaining the right to steer the flow of conversation towards learning goals. Thus, in in-between moments teachers can provide not only comprehensible input through informal communication (focus on meaning, relinquishing authority), but also input on correctness (focus on form, retaining authority).

3. Implications of Multiple Goals in the Language Classroom

Students can pursue various goals in the language learning process. As previously mentioned, in the natural mode of communication in the classroom their goals tend to be social, not educational, whereas in the pedagogic mode their goals are more steered towards learning itself (Gil, 2002). Nevertheless, these goals are complementary and can overlap. Indeed, L2 learners are "capable of orienting to multiple speech exchange systems and

agendas at the same time” (Barkaoui et.al., 2008, p. 34), and dealing with varied “discursive activity allows learners to become proficient learners of the foreign language” (Gil, 2002, p. 278). In in-between moments, in addition to achievement goals, students bring into the classroom goals from their everyday lives like having fun, socialising, or making friends. At any given time, students pursue several goals simultaneously. Students come to school seeking knowledge, social belonging, and personal connections that support both learning and friendships (Hofer, 2007; Kilian et al., 2010). In-between moments provide an intersection of the pedagogic and natural modes where students can multitask and multigoal, allowing learners to focus on academic aims in a convivial atmosphere and vice versa; they can practise real-world interaction within the confines of the classroom. This form of multiple intentionality is a key feature of genuine communication which students need to master in order to grow into accomplished L2 users, as seen in the above example by Gil (2002, p. 276).

In an interesting small-scale study, Serra de Lemos and Gonçalves (2004) conceptualised goals not just as attributes of individuals, but as projects between people and their environment emphasising the mutual influences and relationships of individuals and situations. They claimed that “within the real classroom context, as students encounter situations implying new demands and new opportunities, diverse and multiple goals are potentially elicited” (Serra de Lemos & Gonçalves, 2004, p. 198). The results of the study indicate that students can have multiple goals simultaneously and that goal management is dynamic (emergent, shifting) rather than static. Serra de Lemos and Gonçalves concluded, among other things, that teachers need to design classroom practices that support students’ capacity to manage multiple goals. In the light of this, the significance of liminal moments grows as they offer an opportunity for the coexistence of multiple goals, including academic ones in the pedagogic mode and social ones in the natural mode.

4. In-Between Moments as a Reflection of Focus on Task

Off-task talk (OTT) is increasingly recognised as a meaningful resource that facilitates language acquisition and meaning negotiation (Stone, 2019), highlighting the importance of investigating in-between moments through the prism of OTT. In order to fully analyse OTT, it is first necessary to define a task. One often cited definition within the scope of ELT is that put forward by Ellis (2003):

A task is a work-plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. (p. 16).

In terms of what constitutes OTT, Barkaoui et al. (2008) defined “OTT as ‘off-topic talk’ ... not exclusively and directly related to the overall topic and purposes of ... the task at hand” (p. 36). To avoid the circularity of this definition, it might help to look at OTT as part of wider off-task behaviour linking it to attention and time devoted to the task itself.

Kilian et al. (2010) and Hofer (2007) claimed that off-task behaviour is comprised of activities not aimed at learning, which links this type of conduct to the natural mode of communication. As discussed above, students bring into class many different goals, and when they pursue the ones which are not directly related to the task at hand, it constitutes off-task behaviour (Kilian et al., 2010, p. 501). Additionally, off-task behaviour occurs when there is a switch in activity during the lesson, that is, when the students’ focus turns from one goal to another giving rise to liminal episodes. This switch happens when there are two or more goals competing for the students’ attention, when the temptation of the competing goal is high, or when the students come across a problem during the task. According to Barkaoui et al. (2008)

and Markee (2005), off-task episodes can happen when the teacher redirects the students' attention from one topic or task to a new one but has not yet fully started the new task. This creates an interactional gap where off-task behaviour can take place and the learners can not only engage in OTT, but they can usurp the teacher-typical role of initiator in communication. There will be further details on this in the section below, which discusses the initiation–response–feedback structure.

Given the fact that OTT occurs in the switch between tasks and may be student initiated, some teachers view it as a discipline problem and discourage it. Nevertheless, it could be the case that some students engage in OTT not because they want to disturb the lesson but because the competing off-task, noncurricular goal is of higher importance to them (Kilian et al., 2010; Hofer, 2007). Indeed, OTT in liminal moments might not necessarily result in misbehaviour because even though “the content of off-task episodes may not be related to the task, the act or action of going off-task itself is necessary for sustaining the activity” (Barkaoui et al., 2008, p. 48). Paradoxically, OTT in some instances may be an integral part the task itself. By allowing students the opportunity to attend to the social and affective needs of their group, OTT can build group cohesion in collaborative learning, thereby serving as a social lubricant leading to and supporting task achievement.

That being said, there is evidence that if OTT is frequent and initiated by one particular student, it can disturb the lesson and detract from the learning outcomes (Sharma, 2015) by decreasing the actual time spent on the academic task. This time devoted to the completion of the task is part of the academic learning time (ALT) which is defined as the “proportion of instructional time allocated to a content area during which students are actively and productively engaged in learning” (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002, p. 774). It follows that excessive OTT for extended amounts of time may have a negative impact on achieving the

desired learning outcomes of the lesson and can be counterproductive to students' progress (Sharma, 2015).

On the other hand, Stone (2019) challenged the traditional view that OTT hinders learning, highlighting that such interactions offer valuable learning moments because they are initiated by learners themselves, hold personal significance, involve genuine negotiation of meaning, and promote reflection on language use. Furthermore, Barkaoui et al. (2008) argued that narrowly defining OTT by the content of what the students are saying is misleading because the functions of their utterances may in fact support the overall aim of the task by strengthening the students' relationships in the service of the task. These perspectives suggest that rather than being disruptive, OTT in liminal moments can play a constructive role in facilitating engagement, collaboration, and deeper understanding within the learning process.

5. Topic as an Indicator of In-Between Moments

The notions of topic and task within the language classroom context are very closely related. Many authors employ the terms off-topic and off-task talk interchangeably. Markee (2005), for example, even used the term 'off-task topic talk' (p. 204). This blurring of the boundaries of terminology underscores the fact that the definition sections of this paper are merely different angles of looking at the same phenomenon, and there are bound to be overlaps. Still, it can be argued that there is a slight, though meaningful difference in the definitions of off-topic and off-task talk and their determination of what constitutes an in-between moment in language teaching and learning. The key lies in the difference between pragmatics and semantics. In Ellis's (2003) definition of task previously cited, we saw that a task "requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome" (p. 16). This entails that when defining a task, we are interested in the function, goal, and pragmatic meaning of what is being said. On the other hand, in this paper, the term topic is

defined in terms of its semantic meaning or content “vis-à-vis other topics” (Markee, 2005, p. 198) in the sequence of the exchange. This is based on Schegloff’s (1979) use of the term topic to refer to “what is talked about through some series of turns” (p. 270) and Markee’s (2005) use to refer to “whatever members understand the current conversation to be about” (p. 198).

Consequently, in-between moments are off-topic in the sense that they diverge from the flow of the conversation. Liminal instances break conversational coherence and semantic relevance, meaning that the talk is detached from the topic that immediately precedes or follows it. However, the pragmatic goals of such exchanges could support the overall aim of the pedagogic task by building rapport between learners so that they can more efficiently attend to the task and even more importantly by bringing real-life conversation into the classroom. For example, when a learner asks a peer during a task which of them will take notes, technically the utterance is semantically off-topic (breaking the conversational flow of topics), but pragmatically on task (serving to aim of the activity). Equally, if a student invites a peer to a party during a pedagogic task in L2, the exchange is both off-topic and off-task. Yet, even in this latter instance the learners’ private, natural exchange during a pedagogic task could be viewed as serving the general aim of the task because it turns the classroom into a venue for authentic, real-world interaction, which is the ultimate goal of communicative language teaching.

6. Stepping Outside of the I–R–F Structure

According to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), the initiation–response–feedback (I–R–F) structure is the basic pattern of communication in the English language classroom, where a teacher initiates interaction (frequently with a question), a pupil responds, and the teacher follows with feedback (typically evaluative in nature). In terms of the mode of interaction,

this type of exchange is pedagogic with a learning goal. In in-between moments, however, students can take on the teacher's role of initiator in communication to engage in off-task or off-topic talk that has a natural, meaningful aim. As has already been said, in such liminal talk, learners step "outside the potentially constraining role of 'student,' whose classroom participation may often be limited to providing the response component of the initiation-response-feedback sequence" (Reddington, 2015, p. 33) in order to engage in ordinary conversation in the classroom (Waring, 2013). By exiting the preplanned I–R–F cycle (Illés & Akcan, 2017) and taking unsolicited turns, students "display their interactional competence and understanding of the interactional routine" (Jawhar, 2018, p. 307). Achieving interactional competence is one of the main aims of language teaching (Kramsch, 1986), and if engaging in liminal, natural, out-of-turn conversation helps to achieve this aim, students should be encouraged to do so.

Characteristics of In-Between Moments

Following the discussion of the various definitions of in-between moments and the analysis of liminal instances from several different angles, it is time to take a look at what teachers actually do during these intervals and what the features of these natural exchanges in the classroom are. This section will deal with two characteristics of in-between moments, namely the use of the students' first language (L1) and the use of humour.

The Use of the Students' L1 During In-Between Moments

As noted above, Santos (2023) found that students in a Japanese context spent up to 71% of the time talking off-topic in their first language necessitating a deeper analysis of why exactly students felt the need to use their first language so extensively and what the functions that the first language fulfils are. In the study, Santos concluded that students used their L1 in order to clarify vocabulary, to manage the task, and for off-task talk (p. 185). Additionally,

the teacher also used the L1 to start the lesson, for the roll call, and to end the lesson. In another study in the Japanese context, Stone (2019) found that students used their L1 to scaffold the learning of L2 through strategies such as translation of an unknown word, a placeholder for words they did not know, to ask for help, and to confirm understanding. Thus, the students used their L1 to repair communication breakdown, thereby facilitating learning and enabling them to return to the use of the L2. In other words, careful and limited use of the L1 can support, rather than obstruct, L2 acquisition.

The fact that judicious use of the L1 can be supportive of L2 learning was also reinforced by Alegría de la Colina and del Pilar García Mayo (2009), who claimed that “the use of the L1 provides learners with cognitive support that allows them to analyse language and perform tasks at a higher level than they would be able to in the L2” (p. 327). Since students may lack the linguistic tools to reflect higher level reasoning, they resort to the use of their L1 to verbalise complex cognitive processes. Alegría de la Colina and del Pilar García Mayo’s findings indicate that there are three broad categories of L1 use in the language classroom, which include the following:

1. Metacognitive talk – in which the students talked about the procedure or the instructions of the task, the management of the task, as well as about planning and monitoring the work.
2. Metatalk – whereby the learners used the L1 to discuss lexical and grammatical aspects of the L2.
3. Off-task talk – when the students engaged in casual conversation unrelated to the task.

In the study, one pair of student participants, during a text reconstruction task, spent 86% of the time engaging in L1 conversation, though this was almost exclusively on-task metacognitive and metatalk, contrary to Santos’s (2023) high percentage of off-task L1 talk.

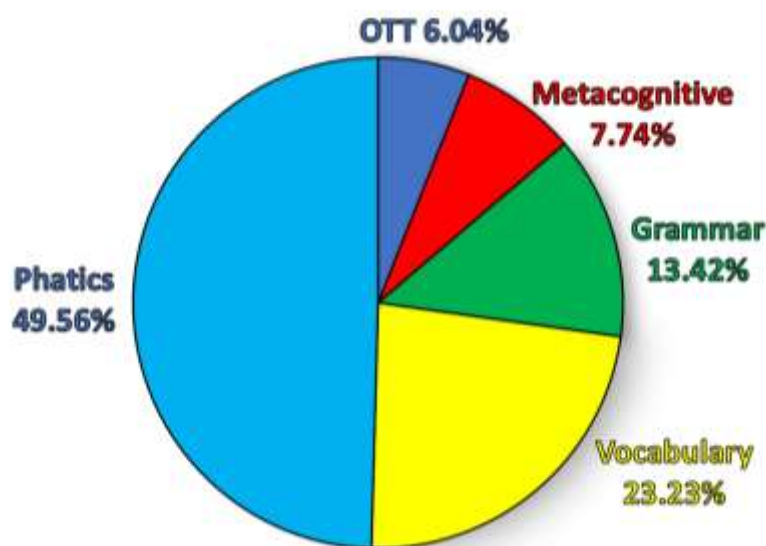
Other L1 functions in the language classroom have been identified although there is a large overlap with the three mentioned above. For example, Copland and Neokleous (2011) recognised 11 functions of L1, which, using the categorisation above, would be:

- logistics/organising, instructions (metacognitive);
- explaining/revising language skills and systems, question and answer, reprimands, praise, translating, providing hints (metatalk); and
- jokes, markers, giving opinions (off-task talk).

Similarly, Azkarai and del Pilar García Mayo (2015) found five categories of L1 functions: metacognitive talk, grammar talk, vocabulary talk, off-task talk, and phatics pertaining to expressions such as “ok” and “well” serving as social lubricants to create and maintain rapport. These phatics could also be seen as off-task talk because they serve a similar affective function to much of natural mode off-task talk. The overall distribution of L1 functions in Azkarai and del Pilar García Mayo’s study is illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5

The Overall Distribution of L1 Functions



Note. Based on data from Azkarai and del Pilar García Mayo (2015, p. 559).

If the phatics can be pooled together with the off-task talk due to their affective nature, it means that the L1 was used in the natural mode for over 55% of the time and in pedagogic mode 45% of the time—underscoring the social and emotional role that the L1 plays in liminal interaction, a finding that is also highlighted in Tsoi and Aubrey’s (2024) study on task engagement. They found that in pair work tasks, self-selected student pairs with a close bond were much more likely to switch to their L1 than teacher-assigned pairs. The learners used their L1 to signal solidarity, but also as a cognitive tool to discuss grammar and vocabulary, thereby “increasing the amount and quality of [language-related episodes]” (Tsoi & Aubrey, 2024, p. 47). This emphasises the important role that the students’ L1 plays within liminal moments. In fact, Hawkes (2023) argued that L1 off-task talk can be actually right on task since students use it for a wide range of task-oriented purposes like signalling the end of a topic and suggesting moving onto the next topic, discussing the sequence and topic of question-and-answer exchanges, and debating on how to proceed with the task.

Despite the affective and cognitive advantages of using the L1 in in-between moments, there can be some drawbacks to excessive use of the L1 in the language classroom. For instance, if we bear in mind that in order for successful L2 acquisition to occur, L2 “input should be supplied in sufficient quantity” (Krashen, 1982, p. 70), then it follows that overreliance on the L1 can hinder student achievement and progress. On the other hand, if the L1 is used predominantly in liminal moments and not as the main vehicle of learning, then it can open up the door to translanguaging, which is a dynamic multilingual practice that goes beyond traditional language boundaries (García & Wei, 2015). The process of translanguaging entails the flexible, fluid, and adaptive use of several languages by multilingual speakers. It is “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 283). For instance, rather than

cleanly code-switching between distinct systems, a student might fluidly fuse a Hungarian word root with an English suffix, creating a hybrid utterance like “I’m tanulósing for the exam” or “I’m jövökking”. In these spontaneous moments, the learner ceases to treat Hungarian and English as separate languages, instead utilising them as a single, unified cognitive resource to optimise expression. Such translanguaging practice has the opportunity to thrive in liminal instances of communication in the language classroom where students pursue social communicative goals, freely initiating conversations in a natural mode outside pedagogic, institutional, national, and structural (I–R–F) constraints.

The Use of Humour During In-Between Moments

Apart from the use of the full linguistic repertoire, another characteristic of in-between moments is the frequent presence of humour. Humour can function both as an abrasive, divisive tactic and as a social lubricant and bonding strategy (Martineau, 1972). Within the collaborative language classroom, it tends to have the latter role providing a rich resource for both teachers and students and improving the overall learning atmosphere (Dewaele et al., 2018). Teachers’ measured use of humour can increase student engagement and interaction (Jawhar, 2018), simultaneously reducing learner anxiety (Tarone, 2000). In opposition to the notion of language classroom anxiety, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) introduced the term foreign language enjoyment, which is the “complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks” (p. 242). By reducing anxiety and increasing foreign language enjoyment, humour can serve as a safe house, loosening the restrictions of the institutional norms and equalising the status of teachers and students resulting in increased trust and understanding (Pomerantz & Bell, 2011). In such a safe, enjoyable, and egalitarian space, student mistakes need not result in a loss of face (van Dam, 2002).

The use of humour in the language classroom can have many benefits (Neff & Dewaele, 2023). One of these benefits is that humour is “affectively charged” causing “emotional excitement” (Reddington, 2015, p. 32) in students, which can improve their memory of form and function as well as reinforce their retention of information (Schmidt & Williams, 2001; Victoria, 2019). Closely connected to the benefit of improved memory is the advantage in test preparation with the teachers’ sense of humour being positively related to the students’ test scores (Swanson, 2013). The affective nature of humour also means that it can have a positive impact on motivation (Dörnyei, 1994 as cited in Reddington, 2015) by establishing rapport, building group cohesion, and creating a playful engaging atmosphere where students are free to experiment. All of these benefits of humour mean that it provides a genuine learning opportunity for students where the “ha-ha can lead to aha!” (Garner, 2006, p. 177).

Additionally, humour mostly occurs spontaneously, outside the preplanned I–R–F structure, with students initiating exchanges. This means that humorous exchanges in the classroom mirror authentic, often creative, and natural interaction that takes place outside the walls of the language classroom (Illés & Akcan, 2017). By engaging in such spontaneous communication, students develop the ability to take unsolicited turns which are relevant to the interaction, thereby improving “their interactional competence and understanding of the interactional routine” (Jawhar, 2018, p. 307). Furthermore, the use of humour can help to build students’ sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence (Victoria, 2019) by raising their awareness of how language operates in authentic social contexts. Irony, wordplay, implied meaning, and the flouting of norms sharpen learners’ ability to interpret and produce socially and contextually appropriate language.

This is closely linked to the claim that the meaning-making as well as the multiple levels of construction and interpretation of humour can help to build students’ symbolic

competence (Pomerantz & Bell, 2011). Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) defined symbolic competence as “the ability to shape the multilingual game in which one invests—the ability to manipulate the conventional categories and societal norms of truthfulness, legitimacy, seriousness, originality—and to reframe human thought and action” (p. 664). Furthermore, according to Reddington (2015), Vega (1990) even suggested that humour could be considered a fifth component of communicative competence.

Nevertheless, there are some disadvantages to the excessive use of humour in the language classroom ranging from discipline problems to the teacher not being taken seriously with learners preferring their teacher to be spontaneous, but not a comedian (Neff & Dewaele, 2023). Also, lower-level students or younger learners may face difficulties in understanding more advanced and nuanced language play, which may make them feel left out (Neff & Dewaele, 2023). Likewise, Reddington (2015) pointed out that due to its spontaneous nature, humour can be difficult to transport to and implement in the classroom.

Let us turn now to how humour works as well as the types, levels, strategies, and examples of humour found in the language classroom. Humour works by playing with predictability and resolving incongruity (Reddington, 2015). It is interactionally achieved by setting up expectations and defeating them. This “pattern re-forming play disrupts familiar conventions, using recognisable sequences in novel ways” (Bell, 2012, p. 191). Clearly, there can be many types of humour in language teaching, for instance, anecdotes, one-liners, irony, puns, hyperbole, jokes, teasing, mocking, and language play (Bell, 2011; Jawhar, 2018; Reddington, 2015). Language play itself can function on many levels, moving from the smallest or narrowest to the largest or broadest; the levels include: phonological, morphological, lexical or semantic, syntactic or grammatical, textual, pragmatic, and cultural or social (Bell, 2012; Reddington, 2015). As far as the strategies are concerned, Bell (2012) distinguished between *play with* and *play in* the L2, “where the former deals with cases in

which the language itself is manipulated for play, and the latter with instances in which the language is used to engage in play” (p. 191). These two strategies reflect the dual nature of the L2 in the language classroom (discussed in the definition sections above) where it is both the object of learning (*play with*) and the medium of learning (*play in*). Some examples will help to illustrate the levels and strategies of humour.

Example 1: In order to raise phonological awareness, the teacher deliberately mispronounces the word “bottle” as “bottom” contrasting a target phoneme with an absurd or taboo alternative to comic effect (Reddington, 2015, p. 29). This is an example of the *play with* language strategy as it manipulates the language itself. It takes place on several levels: The mispronunciation is on the phonological level, the meaning shift on the lexical and semantic level, and the inappropriateness of the word “bottom” on a cultural level. Humour here is used to boost the students’ memory of the correct pronunciation through the use of affective tactics.

Example 2: A beginner-level English student twisted the formulaic greeting “What’s up?” by asking “What’s down?”, making the question “sufficiently right to be acceptable but sufficiently wrong to cause amusement” (Bell, 2012, p. 199). Again, this is the *play with* language strategy, and it is at the lexical level.

Example 3: When introducing a new word, the teacher asks, “What do people do when they suffocate?” only for a student to retort “They suffer!” (Illés & Akcan, 2017, p. 7). In this fascinating example, the student is simultaneously *playing with* the language (because the two words on the lexical level sound close enough to be confused) and *playing in* the language (because on the pragmatic level the meaning of the answer is right on the dot).

Example 4: The teacher is explaining the custom of trick-or-treating when children on Halloween go from door to door asking for treats and playing a trick on people if they do not

get any sweets. At this point, a student remarks that this is the same practice as the Mafia extorting protection money and threatening to burn down the business or break your legs if they do not get it (Victoria, 2019, p. 193). This is an example of *play in* the language at the sociocultural level with the student's comment illustrating a real understanding of the situation. In this case, although the comment might seem to be off-task or off-topic, it is in fact right on task.

Harnessing In-between Moments to Build Communicative Competence

We have seen that communication in in-between moments in the language classroom is naturalistic; it is spontaneous by its very definition and nature; it helps to build symbolic competence; it is a form of genuine, authentic communication where students attend to everyday goals in addition to pedagogic ones; it offers opportunities for true-to-life humorous exchanges; it allows students to engage in the process of translanguaging where they can use all their linguistic resources; it provides students room to engage in individual and mutual meaning-making; it makes it possible for learners to exploit language, often creatively, as a multilingual resource. Given all this, it can be postulated that communication in in-between moments in language teaching and learning helps to build communicative competence. As previously mentioned, humour, in particular, has been viewed by Vega (1990, as cited in Reddington, 2015) as the fifth element of communicative competence. She adopted the model developed by Canale and Swain (1980), building upon their four subcompetencies illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Subcompetencies of Communicative Competence



Note. Based on Canale and Swain (1980).

Canale and Swain (1980) built on the notion of communicative competence, which can be traced back to Hymes's (1972) original formulation. While Canale and Swain viewed the concept of communicative competence through the lens of language learning, Hymes's broader perspective focuses on language use by people in social contexts. According to him, communicative competence needs to account for:

Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible. Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available.

Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. (Hymes, 1972, p. 281)

What this means for the current discussion of in-between moments is that by engaging in naturalistic and spontaneous communication, language learners gain and develop the skills to form sentences and utterances that are:

1. formally possible – which could be practised by <i>playing with</i> the language;
2. feasible in terms of the available means at the learners’ disposal – which could be scaffolded by judicious L1 use and translanguaging, allowing learners to use all their linguistic resources;
3. appropriate to the social situation – which could be fostered by stepping outside purely pedagogical exchanges;
4. actually performed – which could be brought to life by learners engaging in genuine interactional meaning-making and attending to naturalistic goals.

Genuine, authentic communication in in-between moments in the classroom allows learners to acquire the skill of exploiting the L2 as a resource. By partaking in real-life exchanges within the pedagogic context, students can gain and practise the “competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (Hymes, 1972, p. 277). Such a bridging of pedagogic and natural aims helps students to develop a familiarity with what is formally possible with language while building an understanding of the social norms, roles, and expectations that govern communication in everyday situations. Learners “are capable of orienting to multiple speech exchange systems and agendas at the same time”, which makes it possible for teachers to provide them with “hybrid contexts of talk” where ordinary conversations and institutional settings coexist (Markee, 2005, p. 211).

Implications for the Language Classroom

Given that liminal moments can provide opportunities for the classroom to become a venue for genuine communication, what are the implications for teaching? If “off-task interaction [is] just as valuable as on-task interaction” and “if the goal of task-based instruction is to engage learners in meaning-focused talk, does it matter whether what they

actually talk about is on- or off-task?” (Markee, 2005, p. 212). When taken to the extreme, would this mean that we should dispense with the lesson plan altogether and just engage our students in ordinary conversation throughout our teaching? Such an idea might seem unreasonable, but in Hungary it happens frequently as general practice in some schools where native English speakers are charged with holding conversational classes while nonnative speaker language teachers are responsible for the teaching of grammar and form (Medgyes, 2017). This might not mean that the conversational classes have no lesson plan, but it does go against the main tenet of this paper that everyday communicative aims can go hand-in-hand with pedagogic ones with both taking place simultaneously in the language classroom. At the other extreme, we have teachers who over-plan, cramming every minute of the lesson with some activity, desperately trying to cover the material, finish the book, or prepare for the test leaving very little time if any for spontaneity. This is where informed lesson planning can help us achieve a balance between the two extremes through the intentional incorporation of liminality. Informed lesson planning means we should aim to:

- **Plan purposely** – This means we can take the authenticity of in-between moments and deliberately incorporate it into the main aims of the lesson. For this, teachers would have to know their students well. We saw that two characteristics of spontaneous natural communication in the language classroom are humour and the use of the L1. There is no reason why we should not intentionally capitalise on these two resources. There are countless internet and print materials on humour in the classroom. Two that can be highly recommended are Medgyes’s (2002) exquisite and outstanding *Laughing matters: Humour in the language classroom* and *New ways in teaching with humour* edited by Rucynski (2017). On the L1 front, we can encourage students to engage in translanguaging by using all the languages they know as linguistic resources. Lesson plans can include

communicative translation activities similar to those in Duff's (1989) *Translation: A resource book for teachers* or Albrecht's (2026) *Pedagogical Translation for Language Teaching*. An interesting method of combining translanguaging and humour is to build in exaggeratedly literal or unidiomatic mock translation tasks. Heward (2023), for example, discussed the use of mock translation of menus, a potentially fun and funny activity that activates both L1 and L2 language systems while focusing on the link between form and meaning (e.g., substituting "turkey breast" with "Turkish breast"). It is worth emphasising that humour and translanguaging activities should be carefully and deliberately selected and incorporated to support the learning aims and outcomes of the particular lesson at hand.

- **Plan loose** – This means not cramming every single minute of the lesson with an organised task. Teachers often feel compelled to have backup activities on the go, just in case students finish earlier than planned (Markee, 2005). Although this might not be a bad idea, allowing students who have completed their task to engage in real-life conversation and attend to their social and affective needs could instead serve to strengthen bonds. Additionally, we can leave more space for administrative duties during the lesson such as greetings, roll call, setting homework, and switching from task to task. By chatting freely with students and showing genuine interest in what they are saying, teachers can make these moments conducive to social interaction serving as a platform for the intermingling of pedagogic and natural aims.
- **Plan for the unplanned** – It is obviously paradoxical to plan for spontaneity, but what is possible is to incorporate into future teaching elements of what has already occurred naturally in past lessons. This means having pen and paper ready to jot

down topics, grammatical constructions, and vocabulary that have arisen naturally in liminal moments and then processing those valuable notes as resources for future lesson plans. If there is a lexical or grammatical unit coming up, teachers can refer back to the notes on unplanned interaction to see which of those resources can be recycled back into the planned lessons. Additionally, cross-referencing can also be an important scaffolding tool. When students use previously learned language elements during social interactions, highlighting those instances can help them bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication.

Through informed lesson planning and the bridging of the divide between pedagogic and natural communication, the often neglected, fleeting in-between moments could be transformed into colourful learning opportunities that build communicative competence.

Note: AI tools were employed in a limited capacity for image generation (Figures 1 and 2), identification of potential research sources, and minor text revisions.

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Peer Assessment in English for Specific Purposes Lessons: An Effective Tool for Master's Students to Develop Their Presentation Skills

Oksana Chugai  https://doi.org/10.21862/tesol-hun/2026_3_chugai

Alternative assessment encompasses a variety of nontraditional methods for evaluating student language learning, often emphasising practical skills, critical thinking, and creativity over the linguistic focus of standard exams. Examples for alternative assessment include portfolios, project work, and presentations (Stiggins, 1991). It aims to provide more comprehensive insights into student understanding beyond conventional tests. Unlike traditional methods of assessment, alternative assessment focuses on real-life language use, emphasising students' performance and the development of skills necessary for their professional growth. It requires a high-quality product, involves problem-solving, and combines various skills in different ways (Rousseau, 2018, p. 3). It helps students improve their current performance by using learning-oriented criteria to evaluate their work (Dellar & Walkley, 2017, p. 121). University educators often believe that alternative assessment methods align with modern trends, making English learning more interactive, personalised, and engaging. They emphasise that these approaches promote student independence, confidence, and creativity, offering more tailored evaluations. However, they also recognise that successful implementation depends on careful planning and awareness to ensure maximum effectiveness (Chugai & Kukharets, 2025, p. 847).

Peer Assessment

A form of alternative assessment that fosters student engagement is peer assessment. It has emerged as a significant pedagogical strategy in higher education. It develops critical thinking skills and promotes self-regulated learning (Topping, 2009). In the context of Master's programmes, where autonomous learning and advanced analytical skills are essential, peer assessment offers students an opportunity to assess their peers' work while reflecting on their own learning process (Liu & Carless, 2006). Peer assessment is the evaluation of each other's work or performance using rubrics (Chin, 2007, p. 13). It involves students assigning grades to enhance learning through critical evaluation and reflection (Topping, 2009). Despite its benefits, peer assessment remains inconsistent in postgraduate education, often hindered by concerns about reliability, fairness, and students' willingness to participate (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). This paper aims to explore the effectiveness of peer assessment among Master's students at a technical university in Ukraine, examining its impact on academic performance and perceptions of fairness and motivation.

Research indicates that peer assessment can enhance learning outcomes by encouraging active engagement and deeper understanding of course content (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Topping (2009) highlighted that when effectively structured, peer assessment promotes critical evaluation skills and fosters collaborative learning. In the context of Master's education, Liu and Carless (2006) found that peer assessment facilitates reflective practice, which is vital at advanced levels of study. However, concerns about the reliability of peer evaluation persist, with some studies suggesting that students may lack the necessary skills to assess their peers accurately or may be influenced by personal biases (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). Furthermore, students' perceptions of fairness and their motivation to participate actively are critical factors influencing the success of peer-assessment initiatives (De Grez et al., 2012). Understanding these dynamics is essential for

designing effective peer-assessment systems that maximise educational benefits for postgraduate students.

Constructive Feedback and Formative Assessment

Research findings (Hattie & Clarke, 2019; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Liu & Carless, 2006) confirm the importance of offering constructive feedback. When instructors and peers give constructive feedback to students, it may encourage students to reflect on their performance. When students offer feedback on the course, it provides teachers with insight into students' attitudes towards the instruction they received (Chugai, 2023, p. 24). Feedback from instructors and peers can significantly enhance the student learning process and offer many educational benefits. For instance, nongraded narrative descriptive feedback provided by instructors consists of qualitative comments that describe strengths and suggestions for further development, without assigning a grade (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It aims to guide student learning and foster self-regulation. This can be contrasted with graded assessment, which refers to evaluative procedures that assign a score or grade to a student's performance, contributing to their overall course grade or academic record (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003). It is primarily used to measure achievement against predefined learning objectives. Importantly, feedback should not be mistaken for marking or grading; its primary purpose is to guide students towards improved outcomes (Hattie & Clarke, 2019).

Formative assessment is an ongoing process of providing feedback during learning to improve students' understanding and performance (Black & Wiliam, 2010). Summative assessment, on the other hand, evaluates learning at the end of an instructional period, often through exams or final projects, to determine overall achievement (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003). Getting points for preparing and delivering a presentation counts as summative assessment, whereas nongraded, narrative, descriptive feedback falls under formative assessment.

Peer Assessment Example: ESP Presentations

In what follows, an example will be described of how peer assessment was used to provide feedback on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) presentations. A presentation on a research project is an obligatory assignment required for the module Practical English Course for Scientific Communication at a university in Ukraine. Master's students specialising in various applied sciences are aware of this requirement as one of the goals of the Practical English Course is to develop and demonstrate their ability to deliver individual presentations on a wide range of scientific and professional topics.

However, using a traditional assessment approach whereby an ESP teacher evaluates each student's presentation can be time-consuming and subjective as students often complain that they deserve a better grade. Such lessons involve mostly the teacher and the student presenter, leaving other students isolated and disengaged. While one student presents, the others remain passive observers and are not involved in the evaluation process. They just wait for their turn to present, and their grade fully depends on their teacher's decision. This kind of pressure can be demotivating for both teachers and students, potentially impacting academic performance and attendance.

Using peer assessment in ESP lessons turns the tables, with students being responsible for evaluating their peers' work. At first, it may take time, especially for students with no experience of peer assessment, but it is worthwhile. The teacher becomes an observer and facilitator, intervening only when necessary, monitoring the process, and making sure students are respectful and constructive.

In the Practical English Course, peer assessment was used in both a summative and a formative way. For the former (i.e., summative assessment), students awarded points for their

peers' presentations using a set of clearly defined criteria. For the latter (i.e., formative assessment), peers provided nongraded, narrative, descriptive feedback, adding comments to justify the number of points they assigned to each presentation.

The requirements for the presentation are clearly outlined for the students. They should present a research project and include the topic of their research, its relevance and aims, the methods they used, as well as the potential difficulties and outcomes of the project. Providing the students with the criteria for peer assessment also helps them to become aware of the expectations for a presentation before creating it. Five criteria (i.e., Content, Structure, Visuals, Accuracy, and Body Language) are provided to the students with feedback descriptors of the points awarded. Each criterion will be discussed separately below, and the descriptors will be shown in tables.

First, the criterion Content is used to assess the extent to which Master's students' presentations address the topic of their research and cover all the necessary information in a given area. The feedback descriptors for Content are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptors for the Content Criterion

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Content	5	Content is comprehensive, insightful, and well-developed
	4	Content is accurate, detailed, and relevant
	3	Content is partially accurate or relevant
	2	Content covers some basic points but lacks depth or relevance
	1	Content is incomplete, inaccurate, or irrelevant

Second, a presentation should be well-structured and have the following five sections: a topic outline, an introduction, a main part, a conclusion, and references. These elements are reflected in the Structure criterion, which students use to assess how well the presentation is

organised. Table 2 shows the descriptors for providing feedback on the structure of a presentation.

Table 2

Descriptors for the Structure Criterion

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Structure	5	All five sections are well-developed
	4	One section is missing or inadequate
	3	Two sections are missing or inadequate
	2	The organisation is minimal
	1	The presentation is unclear and disorganised

Third, the audience is more likely to understand the material when diagrams, pictures, graphs, or short videos are included. In PowerPoint presentations, each slide should have an amount of information which is easily visible and readable. Master's students use the descriptors in Table 3 to assess the Visuals criterion of a presentation.

Table 3

Descriptors for the Visuals Criterion

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Visuals	5	Highly effective, relevant, and visually appealing
	4	Clear, relevant, and well-integrated into the content
	3	Visuals could be clearer or more engaging
	2	Somewhat relevant but lack clarity or quality
	1	Visuals are absent or irrelevant

Next, the presentation should be in English at B2 level, ideally with no linguistic mistakes on the slides or in the speech. The criterion Accuracy seen in Table 4 encompasses correctness, fluency, intonation, and related aspects of the language of the presentation.

Table 4*Descriptors for the Accuracy Criterion*

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Accuracy	5	Completely accurate, no mistakes
	4	Occasional minor grammatical mistakes
	3	Frequent minor grammatical mistakes
	2	Significant mistakes affect the overall understanding
	1	Largely inaccurate, mistakes impede understanding

Finally, various body language techniques are important for the effective delivery of public speech. Using a range of body gestures such as hand and arm movements is essential for different types of talk. Factors such as facial expressions, voice projection, and eye contact also significantly impact the success of a speech (Kilag et al., 2023, p. 404). Master's students apply the descriptors shown in Table 5 to assess the Body Language criterion of a presentation.

Table 5*Descriptors for the Body Language Criterion*

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Body Language	5	Highly engaging, natural, and purposeful
	4	Confident, supportive, enhances communication
	3	Generally appropriate but needs improvement
	2	Awkward, ineffective, or minimal
	1	Distracting, inconsistent, or dismissive

Procedure

Before assessing their peers' presentations, Master's students need to use the descriptors to evaluate a sample presentation provided by the teacher so as to develop the skills to assess accurately and avoid personal biases (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). Besides assigning points, Master's students also provide nongraded descriptive feedback, which includes recommendations for improving the presentation. Some comments may relate to the

content (e.g., “a narrow topic that not everyone can understand”, “some implementation details are missing”), structure (e.g., “no references at the end”), visuals (e.g., “different fonts on the slides”, “problems with colour choice”), or accuracy (e.g., “mispronunciation of ‘queries’”).

After using the criteria to assess a sample presentation, students assess their peers’ presentations. They take turns presenting and conducting peer assessment based on the descriptors. They take notes and share their constructive feedback. Creating a Google Document for students to use allows all participants to keep track of comments and maintain interaction between presenters and assessors. It also solves the problem of equal participation as those who cannot attend a lesson can still present online asynchronously. Those who are absent or experience technical issues may watch an online presentation recording, complete the peer assessment, and provide feedback via a Google Document.

Feedback on Feedback

It is important for students to reflect on the feedback they received after delivering their presentation. They may share what they enjoyed about their performance, what could be better, and what comments they expected. They also provide feedback on their peers’ comments after their presentations. Finally, the ESP teacher shares feedback on the entire procedure, encouraging students and highlighting the positive aspects of peer assessment. It is true that some students do not provide critical comments to avoid damaging their relationships with groupmates. However, through practice and the guidance of a teacher, they can see how constructive feedback can help them become better presenters and how transparent assessment and constructive feedback strengthen their relationships.

Conclusion

In closing, peer assessment as a form of alternative, formative assessment can be an motivating pedagogical tool when used regularly and consistently for ESP presentations in higher education, as my observations in a Master's programme at a technical university showed. In my experience, Master's students appreciate constructive peer feedback because the peers are experts in the same field, whereas an ESP teacher may focus mostly on language aspects. Peer assessment has had a positive impact on my Master's students' presentation performance, perceptions of fairness, and motivation. Master's students will be required to work in teams and present the results of their work at their future workplaces, which makes peer assessment attractive and beneficial for them and a valid and authentic form of assessment for the tutor.

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Think It, Map It, Learn It

Ivana Devčić  https://doi.org/10.21862/tesol-hun/2026_4_devcic

During my teaching years, I often struggled to encourage my students to speak more and feel confident, whether they needed to retell a text, talk about themselves, or organise their thoughts effectively when writing an essay. I found that the most effective approach was using mind maps. They helped students structure their ideas visually and provided small reminders that boosted their confidence when speaking or writing. In this paper, I will outline three ways in which mind maps can be used with lower primary school students with an A1 or A2 level of English. The three examples of mind map activities include talking about a topic (Figure 1), writing an essay (Figure 2), and retelling a story (Figures 3 and 4).

What Are Mind Maps?

Mind maps are made up of words, colours, lines, and pictures. They are very easy to create and can help our students remember information more effectively, generate novel ideas, save time and make the most of it, organise thinking, achieve better grades, and even enjoy studying. According to Buzan (2003), a mind map is an effective method for getting information into and out of our brains. It offers a way of studying and revising that is quick, engaging, and reliable. Mind maps make note-taking more interesting and are one of the best tools for generating new ideas and planning projects.

How Does Our Brain Work?

There is some evidence that the two brain hemispheres have somewhat different biases in how they interact with one another. It is thought that functions such as language and motor abilities may show a greater bias to the left-brain hemisphere, whereas visuospatial attention

could be a more right-lateralised function (Gotts et al., 2013). However, both hemispheres need to work together for learning to be effective. In school, teaching activities often emphasise linear and verbal methods such as writing in continuous text, following logical sequences, and organising information in lists. Visual tools such as mind maps can complement these approaches by presenting information spatially and visually as well as by using colour, layout, imagery, and organisation. Dual-coding theory research in cognitive psychology suggests that verbal and visual information are processed through distinct but interconnected cognitive systems. Therefore, providing both verbal and visual representation may improve learning outcomes such as comprehension and memory when compared to single-mode presentation (Paivio & Csapo, 1969). By encouraging learners to actively process both words and images, mind mapping could support the meaningful organisation of information, which can make learning more engaging and effective.

People often think in colours and pictures. For example, if someone says, “think about your family”, the first thing that comes to mind might be an image of our family (with all the colours and details), not the word “family” written on a piece of paper. Our brains can think and remember visually. That is why drawing is such a useful tool for memory. When we want to remember something, an effective approach might be to sketch it, even if only in a simple form. This works especially well with very young pupils who struggle to remember English vocabulary: By drawing a picture of a word quickly, they support their memory, making learning easier and more enjoyable.

How Do You Create a Mind Map?

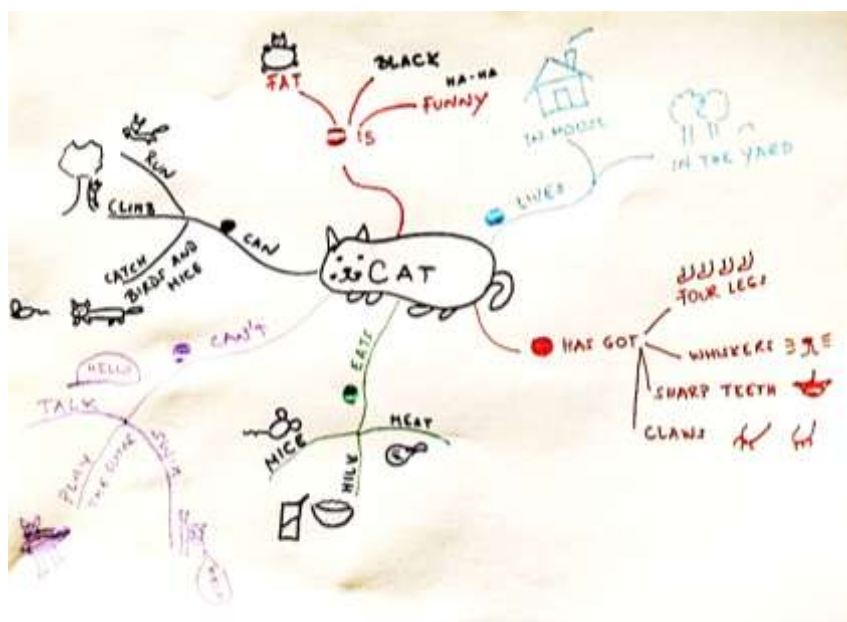
In order to help young learners draw a mind map, the following simplified instructions can be useful: To create a mind map, you will need a blank sheet of paper and some coloured pens. Start by drawing a picture that represents your main topic in the centre of the page.

From this central image, draw several curved, connected lines reaching outwards. These are your main branches. Label each branch with a key idea and add a small picture to support it. From each main branch, you can draw additional, smaller branches that explore related ideas. These branches spread out like the limbs of a tree, helping you organise information in a clear, visual, and creative way.

Mind maps can help young learners organise the ideas they want to talk about. For example, if they want to give a short presentation on an animal, they can start by creating a mind map. In the centre of the page, they draw the animal they want to talk about. From this image, they draw several lines, each labelled with a key prompt such as “It is...”, “It lives...”, “It has got...”, “It eats...”, “It can...”, and “It can’t...”. From each of these main branches, students can draw smaller branches with additional details. They can add pictures, colours, numbers, and words. In doing so, they can be creative. This way, they prepare everything they need to say in a visual, organised, and engaging way. Figure 1 below illustrates an example of a mind map for the word “cat”.

Figure 1

Mind Map of the Word “Cat”

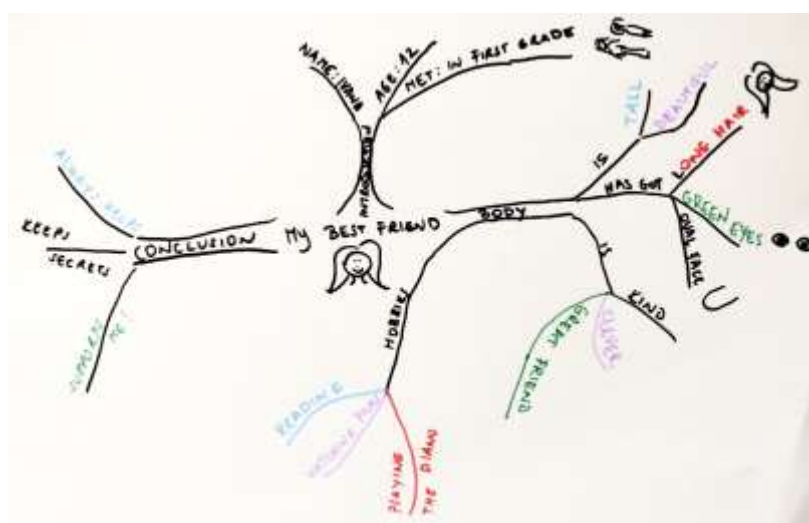


When the students have their mind maps, it is much easier for them to talk about a certain topic such as a cat. In this example, the following simple description might be given based on the mind map in Figure 1: *The cat is fat and black. It is very funny. Sometimes, it lives in a house, and sometimes it lives outside, in the yard. It has got four legs with claws, whiskers, and sharp teeth in its mouth. The cat eats meat and mice and drinks milk. It can run, climb, and catch birds and mice, but it can't talk, swim, or play the guitar.*

Mind maps can also help young students write essays more easily and quickly. A successful essay needs a strong introduction, interesting and imaginative content, and a clear conclusion. For example, if the essay title is “My Best Friend”, children can begin by drawing a picture of their friend in the centre of the page. On one of the main branches, they can plan their **introduction**, perhaps noting their friend’s name, age, and how they met. Additional branches can represent the **body paragraphs**, such as appearance, personality, hobbies, or shared experiences. Finally, another branch can help them plan the **conclusion**, summarising why this friend is special to them. The mind map for an essay with the title “My Best Friend” is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Mind Map for an Essay on “My Best Friend”



By organising ideas visually before writing, students gain clarity, confidence, and a logical structure for their essay. For example, the essay could start like this: *My best friend's name is Ivana. She is 12 years old. We met 5 years ago, on our first day of school. Ivana is tall and beautiful. She has got long hair, green eyes, and an oval face.* Naturally, students will add more details according to their age and knowledge, but also according to the essay questions they are to answer.

Students can also use mind maps when they need to retell a text from their coursebook. Figure 3 is an example of a text from the coursebook *New Building Blocks 4* (Čajo Anđel et al., 2021, p. 11) meant for children in lower-primary school at A1 or A2 level of English.

Figure 3

Text for Retelling

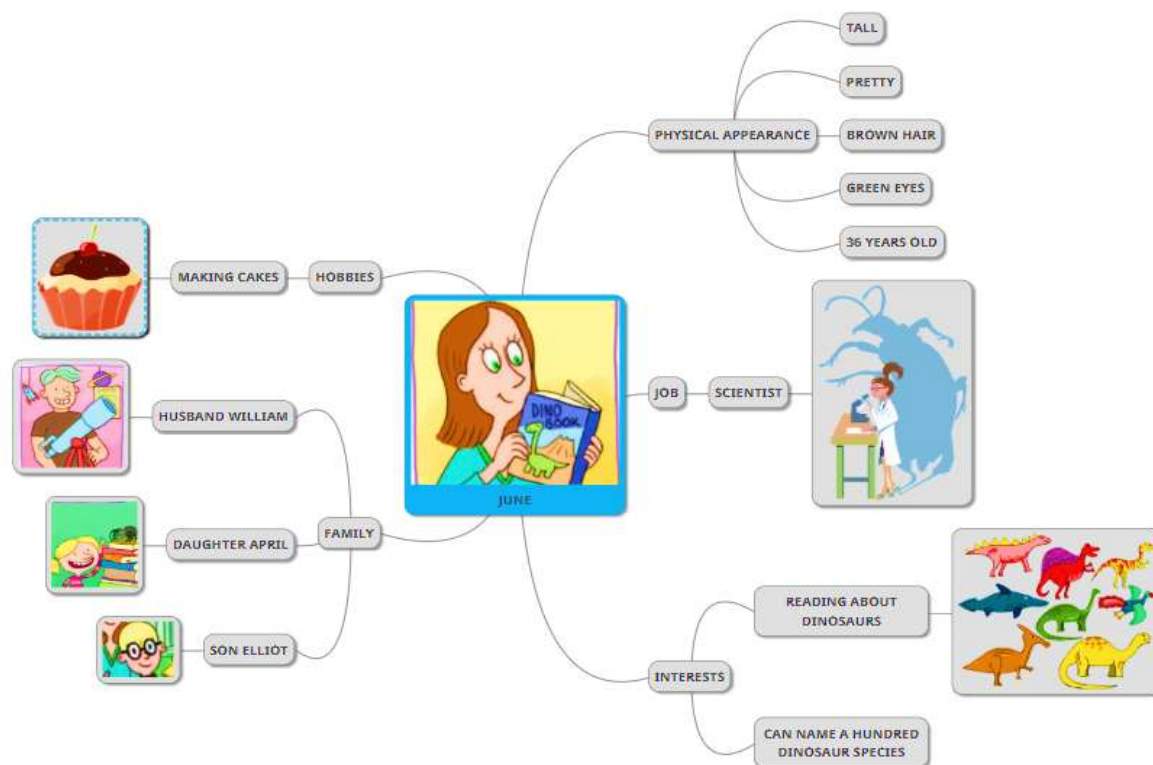


This is my mum. Her name is June. She is 36. She has got brown hair and green eyes. She is tall and pretty. Her job is very interesting. She is a scientist. She has got a lot of books. She likes reading about dinosaurs. She can tell you everything about T- Rex. She can also name a hundred dinosaur species! Her hobby is making cakes. She can make the best cakes in the world!

A mind map for this text could be organised as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Mind Map for the Text in Figure 3



As students create their mind maps of the text, they need to read carefully and truly understand what they have read. For many of my young learners, the most challenging part of retelling a text is identifying what is important. When they build a mind map, they are required to simplify the content, which helps them focus on the key ideas to extract.

Using mind maps for a presentation also means that students do not have to memorise the information by heart. They can easily follow the facts laid out on the map. This visual support is especially helpful for young pupils with learning difficulties as it allows them to see the structure more clearly and understand the material more easily.

Conclusion

Mind maps allowed my lower-primary school pupils to find their voice, both in speaking and writing. They helped the children transform anxiety into confidence, confusion into clarity, and ideas into meaningful communication. When students are given the tools to organise their thoughts creatively, learning becomes not only easier but also more enjoyable. Mind maps truly opened the door to better expression and to better understanding. My teaching also became easier because I managed to engage all my students in building mind maps, irrespective of their age and level of English.

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Ready to Bloom? A Guide to Professional Development for Teacher Well-Being

Gabriella Kovács  https://doi.org/10.21862/tesol-hun/2026_5_kovacs

We, educators, are like the most precious flowers in a professional garden, destined to flourish across many seasons, but only under the right conditions. Too often, teachers face relentless demands to “bloom” continuously, despite depleted inner resources and often substandard teaching/learning environments.

Drawing on my interactive workshop at the Bloom TESOL-Hungary Conference (3–5 October 2025), this article expands the topic to offer a comprehensive guide to teacher well-being support through targeted continuous professional development (CPD). My aim is to offer self-assessment tools, evidence-based strategies, personal anecdotes from my CPD journey, and actionable steps for growth. I will also touch upon how opportunities like Erasmus+ courses can truly transform the thinking and approaches to language teaching.

Teacher Well-Being Foundations

Well-being is more than the mere absence of illness, nor is it a way to identify *feeling good*; it is “a positive state that encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being... [where one’s] life is meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling” (Seligman, 2002, p. 66). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) identifies teacher well-being as coping with everyday stress, realising abilities, productive work, and community contribution. Ask yourself how many of these four aspects are met on a daily basis for you.

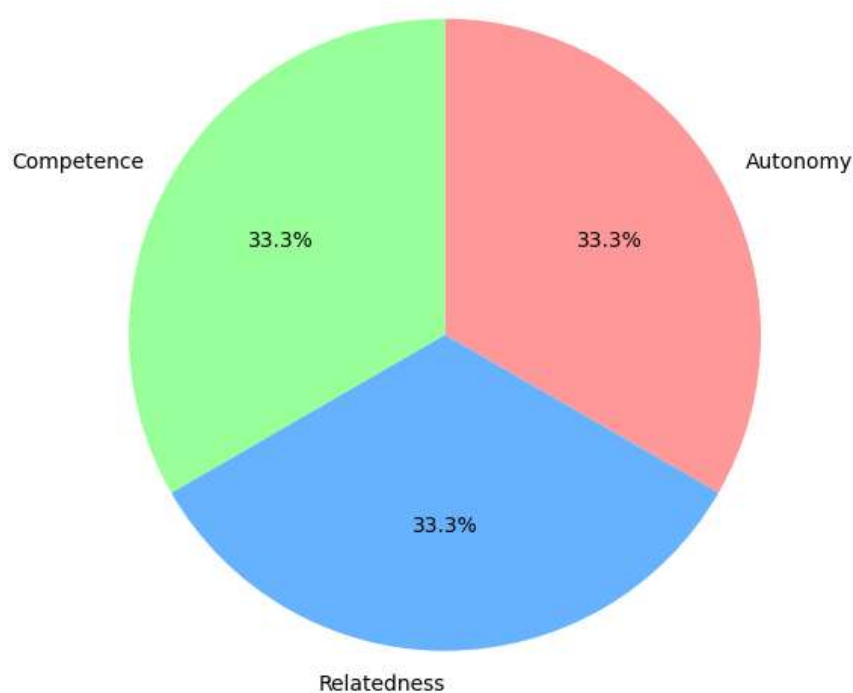
In this context, Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, pp. 72–73) provides the following additional core needs (spelling the acronym ARC):

- Autonomy (feeling in control of one’s actions),
- Relatedness (feeling connected and belonging with others), and
- Competence (feeling effective and capable in one’s activities).

Ask yourself how important these core needs are for you and if they are equally important as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1

Ryan and Deci’s (2000) ARC Needs: Autonomy, Relatedness, Competence



Teacher well-being manifests as a complex, dynamic state with mental–physical balance, growth orientation, focused awareness, joy in work, and supportive environments.

These aspects are incorporated into the PERMA Model. It was developed by Seligman (2011), who originally conceptualised well-being through five pillars. Later adaptations formally expanded the framework into six pillars to explicitly incorporate physical health (leading, e.g., to Butler & Kern, 2016). Table 1 shows the six pillars of the PERMAH Model.

Table 1

Six Pillars of the PERMAH Model

Pillar	Description	Application to Teaching (Big Scope & Tiny Milestones)
Positive Emotions (P)	Cultivating joy and optimism	Big Scope: Celebrate major student achievements like graduation or winning competitions. Tiny Milestones: Notice small wins daily, like a student finally mastering a tricky grammar point.
Engagement (E)	Flow states in tasks	Big Scope: Design immersive projects where students and teachers are deeply involved (e.g., multi-week debate series). Tiny Milestones: Get lost in grading a single creative assignment or cocreating posters with students while building on their curiosity.
Relationships (R)	Strong social bonds	Big Scope: Build a mentoring network with colleagues and alumni for long-term collaboration. Tiny Milestones: Share a coffee or quick encouragement with a student or colleague to strengthen daily trust.
Meaning (M)	Purpose beyond self	Big Scope: Inspire societal impact through teaching (e.g., developing cross-cultural understanding or language empowerment initiatives). Tiny Milestones: Help a student communicate effectively in a real-world situation.
Accomplishment (A)	Mastery and goal pursuit	Big Scope: Earn advanced certifications, lead a workshop, or implement a school-wide program. Tiny Milestones: Complete a short online professional development module or finish grading an assignment (aka just getting through the day).
Health (H)	Physical and mental vitality	Big Scope: Lead school-wide wellness initiatives like walking meetings or mindfulness programmes for staff. Tiny Milestones: Take a 5-minute stretch break between classes or swap one coffee for water to stay energised.

(Cocreated with ChatGPT)

Table 1 describes the six pillars of the PERMAH Model and provides ways each can be developed. Both ambitious, long-term goals and small, achievable daily actions contribute to sustainable teacher wellbeing. On a daily basis, this means having the ability to zoom out and relate our actions to our longer-term goals and identify how each action may lead to a more sustainable, growth-oriented career, which will, in turn, create a more flourishing work environment.

Ripple Effects

We often position teacher well-being as being optional when in reality it is foundational. It supports teacher retention and increases teaching quality and effectiveness. What it also does is directly impact student achievement, and it helps manage diverse learner needs. Empirical evidence is stark: Teachers' emotional exhaustion negatively correlates with student performance (Klusmann et al., 2016), whereas teacher well-being elevates student well-being through supportive mediation (Bilz et al., 2022). From a number of perspectives, it is essential to tend to teacher well-being so that overall school environments, classroom environments, and teacher–student self-confidence may thrive.

In Hungary and globally, neglected well-being exacerbates burnout, with stressors like administrative loads and emotional demands amplifying risks. Yet, proactive cultivation does offer exponential returns. With teachers juggling multiple roles such as supporters, innovators, facilitators, critical thinkers, global connectors, technology integrators, curators, mentors, coaches, collaborators, communication strategists, and linguists, their wellbeing plays a prominent role in ensuring professional sustainability, stability, and long-term growth.

Do you regularly get the feeling that teacher stress is *your* problem to fix alone? Instead of seeing burnout as a personal failing (“You should just do more self-care!”), view it as a sign that the whole system needs uprooting. The many shifts in responsibilities,

workloads inside and outside classrooms, and the growing usage of Artificial Intelligence all put well-being high on the priority list for schools, leaders, and even policymakers. Gkonou's (2025) TTedSIG webinar outlined a multilevel framework: Government policies/funding, leadership (workload management, peer time), and personal practices (mindfulness, boundaries). Identifying responsibilities and actions to take at each level is essential.

Your Well-Being Toolkit

Now that we have an overview of what well-being is and how it can impact our work and environment, let us check the practical steps we can take as educators to preserve our own well-being. Start with self-awareness: Reflect on personality traits, strengths, weaknesses, and the positive impacts of teaching. You can now begin to broaden positive emotions via student–colleague–parent relationships, block out time for a mentor consultation, and build your professional networks.

Key questions should include:

- How do you prioritise your own well-being as a teacher?
- What are your boundaries, and how do you communicate them to students and colleagues?
- Do you have specific stress triggers? How can you identify and manage them?
- Are you kind and understanding towards yourself, especially when things are challenging?
- What are your personal and professional development goals?
- How can you incorporate these goals and make time for them?

Practical “little helpers” form a holistic routine:

- Basics: Sleep, nutrition, hydration, stretching, task breakdown (1–2–3 focus technique).

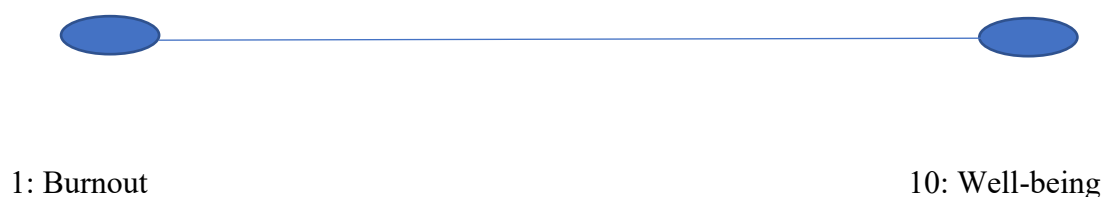
- Senses and Flow: Meditation, music, scents, a short walk, new routes/tools, reduced screen time.
- Boundaries and Rest: Say “no”, limit work emails, build work/rest rituals.
- Social and Creative: Purposeful contact, DIY projects, exhibitions, community joins, photography.

Proactive and responsive measures work together to support well-being. Proactive strategies focus on prevention through intentional habits such as self-care routines, ergonomics, exercise, nutrition, sleep, and nature time, while responsive strategies involve adapting to challenges through mindful communication, reflection, feedback, and support networks. My pro tip is: Ask others in your network what works for them. Better still, involve your classes by having them brainstorm effective ways to approach the topic of wellbeing.

We need to understand where we are and where we wish to be. A simple scale as seen in Figure 2 can help.

Figure 2

Well-Being Scale



Well-Being Ownership

If your aim is not merely to survive, take a close look at what is pulling you back, what gives you energy, and consider ways to address your key pain points. The chart of the Well-Being Wheel in Figure 3 can help you reimagine your future self.

Figure 3

Well-Being Wheel



(by Kovács, using Canva)

Figure 4 below illustrates the options in greater detail for those of you willing to commit to a more thorough review of habits and routines that influence your own personal well-being.

Figure 4

Well-Being Measures and Strategies



Note. First presented by Kovács using Canva at 4th International Language Coaching Conference, Málaga, June 2024.

Professional Development as a Catalyst for Blooming

Professional development (PD) is not just another box to tick—it is the sunlight your career needs to truly bloom. Participating in professional development programmes builds lasting habits, sharpens your teaching toolkit, deepens insights into student learning, boosts your credibility as an educator dedicated to your profession, and helps you to deliver real value while transforming challenges into growth opportunities.

Certainly, possible hurdles connected to such professional development programmes like tackling red tape, stepping out of your comfort zone, encountering language barriers, or experiencing mindset blocks can feel daunting. However, programmes like Erasmus+ cut through these challenges with immersive real-world practice, available funding, Europe-wide

networks, ready-to-use strategies, the opportunity to reconnect with your passion, and genuine renewal.

Take my own story: an Erasmus+ course in Tenerife was pure “sunlight”. Diving into real-world immersion accelerated my shift from teaching to coaching, giving me strategies I can now share. Empowering my experiences to form new, applicable ideas has helped me “shine” brighter and pass those insights on to colleagues.

Since then, I joined another course in Florence, Italy, exploring outdoor and urban learning. Working in parks, botanical gardens, and open squares showed me how stepping outside the classroom boosts student engagement, well-being, and inclusion. It reframed learning in fresh, exciting ways—perfect for any ELT context.

Assess your professional garden: Where do you need more sunlight? Start small: Book a professional development programme, set one boundary to improve your well-being, connect purposefully with a professional. As educators, we are all brilliant and precious; let’s cultivate conditions to thrive collectively.

So, are you ready to bloom?

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Teaching Grammar Through Songs: A Step-by-Step Practical Approach

Anita Majorszki  https://doi.org/10.21862/tesol-hun/2026_6_majorszki

The application of songs in the EFL Classroom has been widely advocated by teachers and researchers worldwide (Adnyani & Dewi, 2020; Murphey, 1992). Given their advantages and repetitive nature, songs are well-suited to a range of English language teaching (ELT) objectives, including grammar instruction. This article aims to provide a step-by-step practical guide for teachers intending to compile song-based grammar lessons.

Theoretical Background

The Rationale Behind Using Songs to Practise Grammar

The question arises: What makes songs an appropriate tool for teaching grammar? Researchers have highlighted the theoretical potentials of integrating songs into grammar instruction (Eken, 1996; Jadhav, 2015). Many students hold negative feelings or preconceived attitudes towards grammar learning (Díaz, 2003); as a result, acquiring grammatical structures can be a challenging or even monotonous process for learners. Díaz (2003) referred to this phenomenon as “just go over grammar”. Nevertheless, songs could create a nonthreatening, relaxed atmosphere in which students engage with grammatical structures in an enjoyable way (Jadhav, 2015). Another important advantage of songs lies in their appealing features, including rhymes, rhythm, repetition, and melody (Kumar et al., 2022), which can facilitate memorisation and enhance language retention. Furthermore, learning is often more effective when it is embedded in meaningful contexts. Songs frequently tell stories, enabling students

to associate grammatical structures with specific themes and situations. Taken together, songs could function as authentic, real-life resources (Belaid & Murray, 2015), providing meaningful context for grammar instruction (Kumar et al., 2022).

Context

The following practical ideas were introduced at the 35th TESOL-Hungary International Conference (Bloom) as part of the workshop entitled Let Grammar Bloom With Songs. The workshop focused on the use of songs as a tool for enhancing grammar teaching. During the session, the participants had the opportunity to engage with a sample worksheet specifically designed for the conference workshop (the complete worksheet is in the Appendix) and practise a concrete grammar point: the “wish” structure for present and future. The activity sequence was intended to demonstrate how a 45-minute grammar lesson in which songs serve as both the thematic framework and the source of grammatical input can be implemented through the use of worksheets. Firstly, the participants of the session worked through the activities with the author facilitating, which was followed by the presentation of additional activity ideas. Finally, the participants were asked to brainstorm how the activities could be integrated into a lesson.

Step-by-Step Procedure

The following section outlines a step-by-step practical procedure for integrating songs into grammar teaching using well-established methodological listening activity stages: pre-, while-, and postlistening activities. Each step begins with the introduction of the activity implemented during the workshop, followed by suggestions for alternative or supplementary tasks that teachers may adapt to their own instructional contexts and to the specific characteristics of the selected song.

Step 1: Prelistening Activities

Prelistening activities serve as an initial stage, preparing students for the listening passage, arousing their curiosity, and clarifying the purpose of the listening task (Movva et al., 2022). As part of the workshop, a mingling activity was introduced based on the film *Aladdin* (Figure 1), in which the main character is granted three wishes by the Genie. To add a grammatical focus, the author emphasised that only the correct wishes would come true. Teachers were asked to think of their biggest wish at the time and then move around the room to ask two colleagues about theirs. Finally, the participants reported back using the target structure, for example: “He wishes he had a Ferrari”.

Figure 1

Prelistening Activity Covered in the Workshop



This activity anticipates the upcoming topic and grammar focus of the lesson by linking a familiar cultural reference to the concept of wishes. Nevertheless, there are numerous other ideas educators can employ in order to warm students up for the forthcoming

song, spark interest in the lesson, and introduce grammar-related tasks in a light, accessible way. Some suggestions are as follows:

- 🎵 The topic to be raised: Building on the lesson and song topic can help learners associate structures with a specific theme. For instance, based on the topic, students can be encouraged to predict the upcoming themes, subtopics, or the singer's intentions, thereby practising, for example, modal verbs for speculation and prediction.
- 🎵 Background information about the singer/band: Tasks based on biographical information about the singer or band can be used to foster cultural awareness while practising past tenses, including past simple and past perfect. Additionally, presenting a picture of the singer or band and asking learners to describe it could provide an opportunity to practise the present continuous tense.

Genre: Introducing the musical genre (especially when it is unfamiliar to learners) can serve as meaningful context for practice. Learners may compare the genre with others using comparative adjectives or explore its historical background to reinforce past-tense structures.

Step 2: While-Listening Activities

While-listening activities aim at keeping students engaged during the playback of the audio recording (Movva et al., 2022). This stage marks the introduction of the song, and it is of utmost importance to select a song that contains the target grammatical structures as frequently as possible. It is suggested that the song be played at least twice to ensure that structural patterns become familiar and memorable, allowing them to “stick” in students' ears while listening to the recording. For the purpose of the workshop, a song by Twenty One Pilots was chosen as it includes numerous examples of “wish” structures. Teachers were provided with a Misheard Lyrics type of exercise, in which they were encouraged to listen to the song while following its lyrics and correct errors based on what they heard. These errors involved phonological misinterpretations; however, they could also include

grammatical/morphological inaccuracies, or teachers can even erase or add words to the lyrics. Furthermore, it is worth considering other types of activities to further reinforce the grammatical relevance of the lyrics:

- 🎵 **Gap-filling exercises:** These are probably the most popular and widely used activities when songs are used in ELT. Beyond adopting the traditional approach of having students fill in the gaps while listening, teachers can implement grammar-focused variations as well. For example, students can be asked to predict the missing verbs and their forms or structures before listening based on contextual clues. Alternatively, the missing verbs can be provided in brackets with students required to transform them into the correct grammatical form prior to listening. Then, while listening, students can check and correct their guesses. Discussing the correct answers helps raise grammatical awareness and promotes conscious reflection on form and meaning.
- 🎵 **Note-taking exercises:** Taking notes while listening with guiding tasks or instructions can strengthen students' ability to listen for the general idea (gist) of the song. When activities are designed with a focus on grammar, teachers can also use listening to reinforce grammatical structures. For example, students may be asked to list wishes expressed by the singer in the song (e.g., in the Twenty One Pilots song, the singer wishes he had a better voice). There is a myriad of possible variations that can be adapted to practise other structures such as "like/love doing", reported speech, past tenses, and so forth.
- 🎵 **Music video:** It is easy to overlook a crucial component that accompanies most songs, namely the music video. However, the video can serve as an excellent resource for practising grammar: Ideally, it can be used with beginner learners to make them describe what is happening at the moment (using the present continuous tense) or to

narrate events that have already occurred by practising past tenses such as the past simple, the past continuous, or the past perfect.

Step 3: Postlistening Activities

Postlistening activities can help students go beyond the listening material by further exploring its topic and language (Movva et al., 2022). During the workshop, the singer's wishes expressed in a corresponding verse were highlighted, and the participants were asked to rewrite the wishes as if they were in the role of either a student before an exam or a prisoner (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Postlistening Activity Covered in the Workshop

The singer expresses his wishes in the song. Rewrite the lyrics in a way that they reflect wishes from others.

"I wish I found some better sounds no one's ever heard
I wish I had a better voice that sang some better words
I wish I found some chords in an order that is new
I wish I didn't have to rhyme every time I sang"

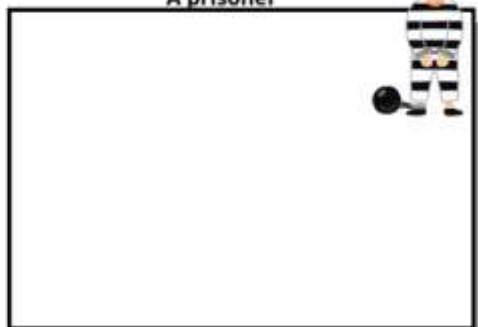


A student before the exam





A prisoner



This type of lyric-rewriting exercise can be useful in encouraging learners to use their creativity while applying targeted grammar structures. Another variation can serve as follow-up grammar practice to compare and analyse structures. Beyond having students rewrite the lyrics, teachers can also aim to personalise the topic and grammatical focus by relating it to students' own lives while, at the same time, exploiting the complexity of these lessons. The following section introduces some postlistening, grammar-related activities:

🎵 Grammar transformation: Consider the following verse by the Beatles – For No One:

“She wakes up, she makes up

She takes her time

And doesn’t feel she has to hurry

She no longer needs you.”

In this case, a grammar transformation activity can be carried out by asking students to focus on the verbs and change their tense from present to past. Extending this activity, teachers may ask students to transform verses or even the entire song by changing their grammar structures, that is, from active to passive; from first person to third person; from affirmative to negative and vice versa. Comparing and contrasting the original lyrics with the transformed versions can foster a deeper understanding of how grammatical choices affect meaning.

🎵 Discussion questions: In order for students to practise the grammar structures in oral communication, personalised questions can be included that exploit the song’s topic, themes, and vocabulary, eliciting responses that require the use of the target structures.

🎵 Message to the singer: To develop their writing skills, students can write letters or messages in response to the song’s dilemma, practising modal verbs (e.g., would, should) and the second conditional in particular. This activity can feel even more lifelike if students actually send their messages to the singer. Another idea would be to ask students to continue the story presented in the song, extending its narrative with the same grammar structures.

Conclusion

Utilising the three main steps of building a song-based grammar lesson discussed in this paper, teachers can design a 45-minute activity sequence that promotes the development

of complex skills, focusing not only on listening, but also on speaking and writing skills.

Although selecting the appropriate songs and designing effective song-based activities can be time-consuming, the use of this step-by-step, adaptable framework may reduce preparation time. At the same time, teachers can draw inspiration from and build upon the wide range of already existing resources.

Useful Websites

ESL Songs website

<https://www.eslsongs.com/>

Sandra Heyer's website

<https://sandraheyersongs.com/grammar-songs/>

Learn English with Beats YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/@LearnEnglishwithBeats/videos>

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Appendix

The Worksheet

35th TESOL-Hungary Conference - BLOOM

Workshop by Anita Majorszki

LET GRAMMAR BLOOM WITH SONGS

Practicing WISH structures

PRE-LISTENING ACTIVITY

Think about your biggest wish for one minute, then ask two group members about theirs.

LIST OF WISHES

MY WISH:

TWO OTHER WISHES:



OTHER IDEAS

for pre-listening activities

WHILE-LISTENING ACTIVITY

Listen to the song by Twenty One Pilots and correct its lyrics!

I wish I found some better mounds no one's ever heard
 I wish I had a better voice that rang like birds
 I wish I found some chords in an order that is new
 I wish I didn't have to climb every time I rang
 I was told when I get older, all my fears would shrink
 But now I'm on schedule, and I care what people think
 My name's Blurryface, and I care what you think
 My name's Blurryface, and I care what you think
 Wish we could earn back rhyme to the good old days
 When our mama sang us to sleep, but now we're stressed out
 (oh)
 2x
 Sometimes a certain smell will take me back to when I was
 young
 How come I'm never able to identify where it's coming from?
 I'd make a sandal out of it if I ever found it
 Try to sell it, never sell, out of it, I'd probably only sell one
 It'd be to my brother, 'cause we have the same nose
 Same clothes, homegrown, a stone's throw from a creek we
 used to ford
 But it would remind us of when nothing really mattered
 Out of student tones and tree house homes, we all would take
 the latter

CHORUS

Used to play pretend, give each other different games
 We would build a pocket ship, and then we'd fly it far away
 Used to dream of outer space, but now they're laughin' at
 our pace
 Sayin', "Wake up, you need to make money," yeah
 2x

CHORUS

We used to play pretend, used to play pretend, money
 We used to play pretend, wake up, you need the money
 Used to play pretend, used to play pretend, money
 We used to play pretend, wake up, you need the money
 Used to play pretend, give each other different games
 We would build a pocket ship, and then we'd fly it far away
 Used to dream of outer space, but now they're laughin' at
 our pace
 Saying, "Wake up, you need to make money," yeah

OTHER IDEAS *for while-listening activities*

POST-LISTENING ACTIVITY

The singer expresses his wishes in the song. Rewrite the lyrics in a way that they reflect wishes from others.

"I wish I found some better sounds no one's ever heard
I wish I had a better voice that sang some better words
I wish I found some chords in an order that is new
I wish I didn't have to rhyme every time I sang"



A student before the exam



A prisoner

OTHER IDEAS *for post-listening activities*

LET GRAMMAR BLOOM WITH SONGS!

A Blooming Mind Speaks Many Languages: Turning Multilingualism Into a Superpower in the EFL Classroom

Vladislava-Mónika Radicević  and Tijana Zdravković 

https://doi.org/10.21862/tesol-hun/2026_7_radicevic_zdravkovic

Introduction

Over many years of studying and teaching foreign languages (in this case, specifically French and Hungarian to Serbian L1 students in bilingual Vojvodina), we have observed that language learning is most effective when it is not approached in isolation, but rather within a broader cultural and social framework. Our experience has shown that linguistic competence develops more fully when learners are exposed to the cultural contexts in which a language functions. In this regard, English, as a global language, provides broad access to international educational resources and intercultural communication, thereby supporting learners' understanding of diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

The starting point for our reflection was the idea that English can be viewed as a “bridge” between languages as it is spoken worldwide and functions as a universally accepted, tacit agreement. English is commonly used as a *lingua franca*, which is defined as “a language adopted by speakers whose native languages are different” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015, as cited in Barančicová & Zerzová, 2015, p. 31).

This perspective inspired us to reflect on our own classroom practice. We became aware that, on numerous occasions, we had unconsciously used interlinguistic connections—that is, learners' knowledge of one language to support the learning of another—to facilitate language acquisition among learners from diverse social backgrounds and age groups. From primary and secondary school students to adult learners, this approach proved to be effective in supporting the learning process.

English as an Intermediary Language

We explored two ways in which English can be used as an intermediary language in foreign language classes (French and Hungarian, in this case): **code-switching** and **language transfer**.

In linguistics, it is widely acknowledged that **code-switching**, or language alternation, occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages or language varieties within a single conversation or communicative situation. In the classroom context, code-switching often occurs when the teacher aims to clarify meaning and provide explanations more efficiently, or to ensure that learners have fully understood the content. This practice is particularly common at lower proficiency levels, where students' knowledge of the target language is still limited. In such cases, code-switching serves a clear pedagogical purpose, especially in the explanation of grammatical concepts (Rengur et al., 2023).

Language transfer, on the other hand, refers to the process by which learners apply previously acquired linguistic knowledge and skills from one language to another. Transfer can occur from a learner's first language (L1) to a second language (L2), or even between two additional languages. There are two types of language transfer: **positive** and **negative**, both of which are natural and expected phenomena in the language learning process and may occur within the same classroom (Odlin, 1989).

Negative transfer occurs when a learner applies a structure from their mother tongue or from a more familiar foreign language, resulting in an error. For example, in English, age is expressed using the verb “to be” (e.g., “*I’m 34 years old*”). Transferring this structure directly into French leads to an incorrect form as French uses the verb “avoir” (e.g., “*J’ai 34 ans*”).

Positive transfer, however, occurs when similarities between languages facilitate learning. This can be observed, for instance, in word order. English and French share a similar subject–verb–object sentence structure, which can support learners in forming correct sentences. This is not the case in Hungarian, whose syntactic structure differs significantly, making transfer less straightforward.

English–Hungarian Positive Transfer

Hungarian may be regarded as a challenging language to learn, a view sometimes shared even by native speakers. Learners frequently encounter difficulties when grappling with Hungarian grammatical rules, which can initially result in confusion and cognitive overload. However, our classroom observations indicate that learners of Hungarian tend to experience greater clarity and relief when certain grammatical constructions are explained not through the framework of their first language, but by drawing on structures from English.

One contributing factor to this is that many adult learners do not possess explicit or well-developed knowledge of the grammar of their native languages. This may be the result of extended periods away from the schooling system. When English is used as a reference language, it often creates a sense of familiarity and shared knowledge. This, in turn, can reduce anxiety and support more efficient grammatical processing and acquisition.

This comparative approach appears to be particularly effective in cases where Hungarian grammatical structures lack clear equivalents in the learners’ native languages.

The following examples highlight grammatical phenomena for which explanations based on English constructions can facilitate understanding and accelerate learning. Some of the most frequently used grammatical constructions that can be explained more effectively through reference to English include the following examples:

- **possessive constructions** (e.g., “az enyém” – “mine”), where possession is more transparently explained through possessive pronouns in English;
- the use of “**(nem) túl**”, which closely corresponds to the English adverb “too”;
- the verbs “**van**”/“**nincs**” in descriptive sentences, which can be clarified through comparison with the English “there is”/“there isn’t” structure;
- the future markers “**majd**” and “**fog**”, which align well with the distinction between “going to” (intention) and “will” (predictions) in English;
- the use of **definite and indefinite articles**, where English provides a clear and familiar reference system for learners.

These examples illustrate how English can serve as an effective mediating language when introducing Hungarian grammatical concepts that lack direct equivalents in the learners’ native languages.

English–French Positive Transfer

In terms of good classroom practice, English may support the process of learning French. Many of the similarities between the two languages exist due to their shared history. We believe that this comparative approach can be particularly helpful in several areas such as:

- **Dates** – “le 5 octobre” = “the 5th of October”. In both languages, we use a definite article (i.e., “le”/“the”) before the date.

- ***Futur proche versus futur simple*** – Futur proche often corresponds to “going to”, while futur simple corresponds to “will”.
- **Modal and phrasal verbs** – The modal + infinitive structure works similarly in both languages. For example: “I can sing”. = “Je peux chanter”. This similarity can facilitate the learning process.
- **Definite and indefinite articles** – The usage and differentiation of articles are largely similar in both languages.
- **Cognates** – Cognates are words in different languages that share a similar form and meaning, for example: “nation” = “nation”, “information” = “information”.
- **Grammar comparisons (SVO order)** – As mentioned previously, both languages use a similar Subject–Verb–Object word order. For example: “I visited France last year”. = “J’ai visité la France l’année dernière”. This similarity can be used to learners’ advantage.

English–French Negative Transfer

However, there are some pitfalls to avoid when comparing French and English. Their similarities can sometimes be misleading and may result in misunderstandings or embarrassing situations. We find that it is important to highlight a few potential dangers:

- **False friends** – Many words look and sound similar but have different meanings. These are called false friends. For example, “actually” in English means “in fact”, whereas “actuellement” in French means “at the moment”. We strongly recommend checking the meaning of false friends, no matter how similar they appear.
- **Relying too heavily on English** – In our experience, some students who are native English speakers or have a very high level of English (C1–C2) tend to

depend too much on English when learning French. While it can be encouraging to see English support learning, relying solely on one language creates a one-way street and may limit true mastery of French.

- **Assuming similarity equals ease** – Sometimes, when students feel that learning is going smoothly, it may actually indicate potential pitfalls. There are many exceptions in French and even exceptions to these exceptions. We advise double-checking structures before internalising them. Similarity does not necessarily mean simplicity; learning something incorrectly can lead to fossilised errors that are difficult to correct later.
- **Ignoring French sounds** – French phonology includes sounds that do not exist in Serbian, Hungarian, or English. Our speech apparatus is not naturally adapted to these sounds, so consistent practice is essential. Ignoring them will result in pronunciation that sounds “off” to native speakers.
- **Underestimating cultural context** – Language learning always comes with cultural context. It is crucial to understand the norms, gestures, and nonverbal communication patterns of French culture. Differences between French and English in this regard are significant and should not be overlooked.

While overcoming these comparative challenges requires careful attention, the broader cognitive and cultural benefits of early multilingual exposure can be enriching, outweighing the risks of temporary confusion.

Conclusion

Building on the discussion of cultural interconnectedness between the languages taught, it is important to note that the historical relationship between Hungarian and English is minimal. However, the broader sociolinguistic context plays a far more significant role in

the teaching of these two languages. We work in Vojvodina, which—as part of the former Yugoslavia and the wider Balkan region—represents one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse areas in Europe. In such an environment, bilingual and even trilingual families are a natural and long-established phenomenon.

Growing up in a multilingual setting fosters an early and almost intuitive openness to language learning. Within this context, English has emerged as a universal means of communication, and its acquisition is rarely perceived as a cultural or psychological barrier. Rather, it is approached as a familiar and accessible linguistic resource.

All this having been said, multilingualism—which we try to foster both in our classrooms and in our private lives—matters more today than ever before. It should be seen as an asset rather than an interference. No one can speak too many languages, and as the saying goes, “we live a new life for every language we speak”. Viewed from this perspective, multilingualism becomes a powerful tool: It opens doors, creates opportunities, and enriches our lives. It encourages empowerment, connection, and, most importantly, the personal growth of individuals—a topic that was also highlighted at the 2025 TESOL-Hungary Conference in Siófok, Hungary.

Multilingualism can foster academic and professional growth as knowledge of foreign languages can facilitate working abroad, changing careers, or improving overall quality of life. This, in turn, leads to social and cultural enrichment: We gain new experiences and meet interesting and inspiring people whom we might never have encountered otherwise. Finally, multilingualism also benefits cognitive health. Research shows that bilingualism might even delay the onset of dementia (Alladi et al., 2013).

In our classrooms, we strive to impart the multilingualism mindset and perspective, and we strongly encourage educators to adopt this goal with their own students as well.

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Bloom is a selection of papers presented at the 35th TESOL-Hungary International Annual Conference held in Siófok from 3rd to 5th October 2025. It has two peer-reviewed papers and five non-peer-reviewed ones. Topics range from students' willingness to communicate, multilingualism and communicative competence to teacher well-being, using songs and mind maps in class as well as implementing peer-assessment to develop presentation skills. We hope you enjoy reading the volume and look forward to seeing you again at the 2026 Level Up Conference.

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