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Mirror Neurons and their effects on the Language Teaching-Learning Process
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Johana Janeth Ortiz Castillo, English Teacher with more than 17 years of experience in the state of Coahuila. Founder and Principal of My English Place, English Academy in Francisco I. Madero, Coahuila. She has worked for different private and public institutions in La Laguna Region in Coahuila. She is an English teachers' trainer and capacitor in several disciplines.
Passionate, active and innovative teacher who is always for improving her personal and professional skills in order to impact and influence on her learners meaningfully, she has also been certified in educative coaching, academic plans designing, business training, leadership, public speaking, among others.

Have you ever felt like scratching your nose, or even sneezing or yawning just because you are watching somebody else doing so? Well, according to recent research, there is a scientific reason for that to happen.

My dear readers, if you are reading this article now, let me tell you that this was the topic for my first national conference at MEXTESOL National Convention in Leon, Guanajuato. It has been one of the most wonderful experiences of all my life.

Presenting this topic in the 49th MEXTESOL National Convention was really satisfying due to the fact that -

it took me a lot of time of dedication, study and preparation; furthermore, it is a topic that has helped me a lot to change my way of preparing activities at the time of teaching. So, in this article I will share what I found out.

Nowadays, a topic from neuropsychology and neuroscience that has been being studied is the Mirror Neurons; they are also known as specular neurons, "Gandhi" neurons or Cubelli neurons, (Rizzolatti y Fogassi, 2014) discovered by the neurophysicist Giacomo Rizzolati at the beginning of the 90's (Iacoboni, M., 2009).

According to psychologist Marija Pavkov, 2021, being aware of -

how they work, allows us to have higher knowledge over strategies and processes necessary to foster learners' skills and strengths through the teaching-learning process. (Daniel Mara, University of Sibiu, 2012)

These mirror neurons are a type of nerve cells, which are responsible for learning, and they are found in the premotor cortex, the supplementary motor area, the primary somatosensory cortex, and the inferior parietal cortex (Campbell et al., 2018).

Their main location is the broca's area, which is a part of the brain involved in production of language. It is located in the 3rd frontal convolution of the left hemisphere, between -

(area 44) par opercularis and (area 45) par triangularis (Brodmann area) in the dominant hemisphere of the language connecting with area of Wernicke, which has been directly associated to speech production. (*National Library of Medicine*)

MN accomplish cognitive, motor and sensory functions of the human brain, one of which is language learning and acquisition, being responsible mainly of the surrogate learning or learning by observation, imitation, and repetition: *e.g. when a baby learns how to eat by him/herself as s/he sees you hold a spoon.*

Therefore, mirror neurons have recently become an essential part of the teaching learning process as well as in the communication process necessary for social interactions, providing that it is activated due to the interactions with the limbic system which is linked to other aspects of social cognition.

They also provide significant elements that lead us to empathize -
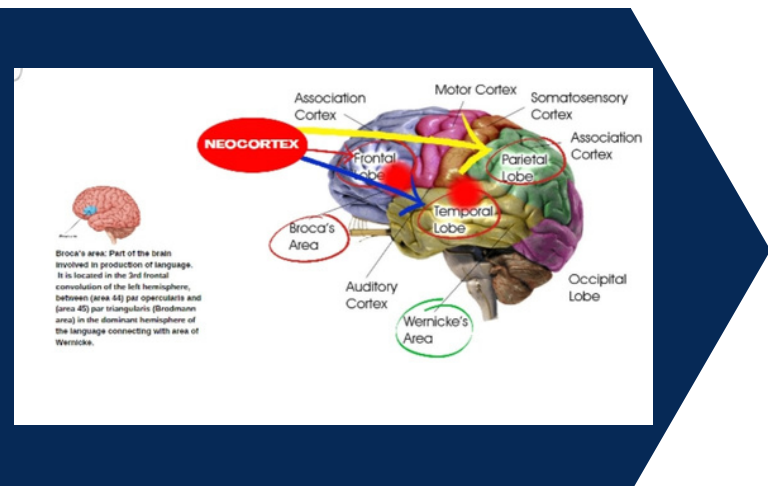
with people's emotions in order to understand their emotional states better, making our teaching more efficient and considerate.

Besides, the MNS plays an important role in the production and interpretation of the language, in the way we understand or predict the intentions of others, speech and language evolution and our emotional intelligence.

However, it is imperative that we realize that there are several factors that will lead us to make a correct management of the information we are acquiring now. So, the first aspect we must remember is that an active brain has to be active and healthy in order to have good functioning and learning.

I will share with you some key tips to keep our brain safe;

1 First of all, get enough and continuous mental stimulation: Doing brainy activities such as solving mathematical problems, solving puzzles, reading, doing origami, painting, writing, -

and socializing with other people, will inevitably lead you to stimulate new connections between nerve cells in order to generate new ones (neurological plasticity).

2 Get physical exercise: using your muscles helps your mind, motivates the development of new nerve cells, increases the connections between brain cells, decreases the effects of stress on the body, improves mental health and mood, and enhances memory and cognition.

3 Improve your diet: Eating the correct food will maintain your brain healthy and in "good shape"; so, try to eat a good amount of water, fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts, unsaturated oils (olive oil) and proteins.

4   Reduce your blood pressure, glucose levels and cholesterol levels: Do exercise, reduce alcohol and other substances consumption, get enough sleep and meditation, etc. Change your lifestyle to be as healthy as possible.

5 Always protect your head: Not only by preventing any brain disease within medicines, but also avoiding severe head injuries; e.g. wear a helmet while you ride a motorbike, play football or any risking sport or activity.

Last, but not least, remember to take care of your emotions. As they play an important role of our brain's health, it is essential that you follow some advice:

- Firstly, you have to make time for things you enjoy; it will make you feel happy.
- Focus on positive things in your life; that will help you to connect with others positively and build sane and productive social networks
- Take care of your physical health, remember a healthy body will keep you in a good mood.

- Find purpose and meaning; that will teach you to spend your time doing what feels meaningful to you.
- Be aware of your emotions and reactions; developing emotional intelligence plays an important role in our relations with other people, especially our learners.
- Express your feelings in appropriate ways; it is always okay to feel what I feel, but do not forget to avoid keeping feelings of sadness or anger in order to stay positive.
- Manage stress through relaxation, breathing, meditation, and exercise.
- Strive for balance.

An educator who works in his/her mental health will always build a healthy and enjoyable teaching-learning environment. So, do not forget to look after your brain health and teach your learners to do it as well.

So, let's talk about the impact that all we now know about MN can have in the language teaching – learning process, once we make the -

following commitments:

1. Being aware of MN role in cognition.
2. Being aware of MN contribution in development of speech in humans.
3. Increase our knowledge over strategies and processes necessary to foster learners' skills and strengths.
4. Find out the role of the mirror neuron's sphere of influence in the teaching-learning process.
5. Lead learners gain new knowledge and master new skills.
6. Create a more positive teaching-learning environment for learners by applying brain-based teaching methods supposed to activate mirror neurons.
7. Being aware of MN influence on interpersonal relations.
8. Find new ways to invoke the learner's emotions and interests.
9. Facilitate in-class communication and improve student-teacher relationships.

In conclusion, educators, and specially, English Language teachers must go deeper on this topic so that our learner's learning performances can result in a higher benefit of -

learning and, above all, the development and improvement of the language skills can be highly and truly acquired.

I really invite you to do more research and develop new methods and practices that can benefit not only your learners, but also other educators who could learn from you and replicate this in their classrooms. I am sure that if we continue sharing our knowledge and work, it will turn to Mexico's learners' advantage at the time of learning the language.

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Error Correction and Feedback Mextesol 42nd Convention

Jorge Torres Almazán

Jorge Torres Almazán has taught EFL for more than 20 years. He is a member of TESOL Affiliate Network Professional Council 2023, and in 2022 was part of TESOL Nominating Committee. In MexTESOL he served as MexTESOL Press Editor, National Secretary, and Tampico Chapter president. Jorge has been a presenter at TESOL, IATEFL, BBELT, MexTESOL & IP International Conferences. He is member of U. S. Alumni Global Community and founder of TESOL Tampico Talks

It was November 7, 2025, my first time presenting at MEXTESOL International Convention. I could not think of any other place better than Cancun, Mexico for this awesome experience.
The TESOL Symposium was held in the same venue just before the Convention, the perfect framework.

Earlier that year I completed the Training the Trainer workshop with amazing facilitators; Mary Scholl, Dawn Wink, and Roger. During the workshop we went through different topics and theories aimed to develop our skills to present.
For my final task I put together the information to present about error correction. The facilitators and peers gave me valuable feedback, which I accepted as a gift.

With my topic ready, I prepared my proposal for the convention. I revised my inbox every day for two or three weeks. Finally the letter of acceptance was there. I was given all the information about the venue, room, time, and equipment available. I saved my presentation on a USB, on my mail, and printed it, just in case.

I arrived at my room long in advance, I checked the equipment, my notes, and walked around the room. I was happy, anxious, and nervous all at the same time.
The audience started to show up. there were 70 -80 teachers there. Two to three minutes were enough to feel welcome and comfortable, I was with my colleagues.

We went together through the presentation, interacting, showing, and sharing. It was amazing.

Here I share a summary of my presentation.

"*This is a workshop for new in-service or in service teachers who want to refresh and improve error correction and feedback techniques. Teachers are aware that one size does not fit all and that learners may need a unique or different correction technique for their language learning development.*

Research has shown there are different types of correction and feedback.

It has also shown that there are different factors that may influence its effectiveness. Some techniques seem to be effective correcting grammar; some others would seem to be better at correcting productive and receptive skills.

This workshop presents Thaine, Thornbury, and Spratt´s suggestions for error correction and part of the conclusions Lyster and Ranta came up with in a research conducted in EFL classes.

We will discuss what feedback is, why teachers give feedback, when, how, and why to correct errors. Participants will be guided through different activities in order to reflect on their own strategies, the way they may include the ones suggested in this workshop and the impact they may have in learners, and to gain a deeper understanding of what correction and feedback involve.

The workshop will culminate with a debate/discussion of the role of feedback in the language classroom and what corrective techniques are the best for our own national and local context."

At the end we reviewed Tedick & De Gortari (2014) suggestions.

-Practice a variety of feedback techniques. Good teachers understand that one size does not fit all.

-Focus on the learner. It is important to let the learner self-correct. Remember that your students may well be more capable than you think.

-Feedback which is particularly personal or sensitive should be given to learners in individual meetings and not in front of the whole class.

-The least effective technique for correcting students ´ incorrect language use is giving them the answer

After the presentation a couple of teachers approached me to say hi and congratulate me. I felt proud!
It was a memorable convention for me. I was able to expand my network and reconnect with friends I get to see every convention.

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The 2020 MEXTESOL Convention: A Memorable Experience

Ghada Abu El Hassan

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Many people will identify with me when I say that there were many frustrations in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, many projects that I had been working hard on had to come to a halt. All my travel plans were shattered, yet my canceled trip to Mexico was one that really broke my heart. I had been invited to attend the annual MEXTESOL Convention, which was scheduled in October 2020 by the Organizing Committee to present as a featured speaker and also as a panelist at the closing event of the convention, dedicated to "Brilliant Women" with "Wonderful Ideas". How could things get more exciting! To make things even more motivating, I was to travel with the support and funding of the Regional English Language Office (RELO) -

of the American Embassy with two amazing colleagues: Dr. Muhammad Khalil, NileTESOL Past President; and Mr. Samir Omara, President-Elect. We would all represent NileTESOL and participate in the 47th MEXTESOL Convention in the beautiful city of Zacatecas.

Now with the national lockdown in Egypt and Mexico, it was a dream that would never come true. Yet, the Organizing Committee of the MEXTESOL Convention was determined to get the Convention to see the light. I started to receive e-mails from Mr. Jorge Torres, the Academic Committee Chair, to encourage me and my dear colleagues to prepare our presentations, for they would hold the Convention in October -

as scheduled. I sent my abstract and biography, and later recorded my presentation and sent it, too, that it would be another "online" conference to attend. One week before the convention, I received an e-mail that urged me to register on the VIrBELA Platform and create an account to be able to attend and present at the convention. I had never expected the experience that followed; a memory that I will always cherish and an inspiring venture indeed.

The MEXTESOL Convention turned out to be not only an educational hub and opportunity to develop professionally but also a lot of fun! As I signed up for the event, I was asked to create my Avatar (the way you do with video games) and to start taking a tour around the Convention rooms, auditoriums, and exhibition halls. While doing that, I found myself getting so completely absorbed in the experience that I forgot I was sitting at my desk in Cairo, and I started to imagine I was there in Zacatecas. All the publishers and exhibitors were represented by avatars standing at their booths. I (My avatar, I mean) could go to them, ask -

> **"I sent my abstract and biography, and later recorded my presentation and sent it, too, thinking that it would be another "online" conference to attend."**

questions, interact with the representatives, and have a look at their presentations. was a big welcome area where all the participants could meet, wave at each other, and get to chat together. I discovered that my avatar could clap, jump, and dance! The best surprise of all was that they had a beach where you could go to relax, take a boat trip or swim.

On the 23rd of October, 2020, the Convention kicked off with the opening speech of the MEXTESOL President, Jesus Felipe Florido, followed by the sessions of the featured speakers, then the plenary session by the amazing Stephen Krashen. In his session, Dr. Krashen discussed how -

self-selected pleasure reading is the way we get better in language. He explained that this is where we get vocabulary, and that "most of our vocabulary - beyond basic vocabulary from comes from self-selected pleasure reading". He also introduced that through research, it was found that free reading (which he describes as "fabulous reading") provides people with "habits of mind", for people who read lots of fiction have "a greater capacity for empathy, a greater capacity to understand what other people might be thinking, and have sympathy with what they're thinking". In addition, Dr. Krashen posed the question: Are some people just good at languages? He spoke about his hypothesis which is that "we're all gifted in language." However, he believes "it's a question of knowing how to do it and finding the right kind of input". To him, the best input is fiction that we decide and choose for ourselves. Krashen also believes "the perfect accent is inside you". His theory is that the quality of anyone's accent depends on how much this person feels he/she belongs to the target culture, so -

the deeper the connection with that target culture, the better the person's accent.

On the first day, I also presented as a featured speaker. My talk was entitled: **Feedback as a driving force for improved student performance.** The session discussed how feedback can be a driver towards better student outcomes or a threat to the whole process of learning. My argument was that with the growing diversity of 21st-century classrooms, educators need to work hard on their 'feedback-giving' skills if they really want to impact student learning and motivation. I tried to introduce some key principles that affect the quality of feedback in addition to some practical tips on how to provide learners with effective oral, written, and online feedback.

The second day was no less exciting, as the schedule was packed with enticing sessions for speakers from all over the world.

The final event was a panel discussion in which I took part among other 3 wonderful women: Dr. Ruth Petzold, RELO Mexico Officer and previous RELO Egypt Officer; Brenda Bernaldez, Leadership Program Director at Teach for Mexico; and Dr. Chesla Lenkaitis, a professor in the Languages department at Binghamton University. The panel was moderated by the lovely Gloria Montiel from the MEXTESOL Convention Organizing Staff. We discussed the topic of inclusion, its core concepts, and their implications in English teachers' practices. Some of the main questions that we tackled on this panel were:

- **What do teacher education programs need to consider to better prepare future teachers for inclusive classrooms?**
- **How can inclusive practices be incorporated in early childhood settings, and how can parents become involved?**
- **What strategies should be implemented to foster a learner's sense of belonging?**

The 47th MEXTESOL Convention was attended by a total of 1256 educators who enjoyed the sessions of 205 speakers and left with up-to-date knowledge and practices to apply in their classrooms as well as a memorable experience of a unique virtual adventure. As for me, I was inspired by the perseverance and professionalism of the MEXTESOL team, and I fell in love with online conferences!

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An Unforgettable Experience: My Journey as a Speaker at Mextesol.
Ofelia Mendoza

Ofelia Mendoza is an English Instructor at Excellence Learning Center. She has participated in several national and international conferences. She holds a Bachelor's degree in ELT, a Translation Theories Diploma, an International Leadership Diploma, and a Games Specialist Certificate, awarded by the US Embassy. excellencelearningcentermexico@gmail.com

Stepping onto the stage of the Mextesol León Conference, was a moment that had been a culmination of years of dedication, and passion, to make a difference in the world of education. As I stood in front of a diverse audience of educators, policymakers, and fellow enthusiasts, the electrifying energy in the air was palpable, fueling my excitement for the journey ahead. The conference was a melting pot of ideas, perspectives, and experiences from around the world. The beauty of this event lay in its ability to unite individuals with a shared goal – to revolutionize education.

As a speaker, I was so blessed to be chosen to contribute my insights alongside thought leaders, educators, and innovators from diverse fields. Engaging with these brilliant minds was an opportunity to broaden -

horizons, challenge existing notions, and exchange invaluable knowledge. Taking the stage, I shared my insights on the integration of games and songs in classrooms to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. As we went along the workshop, the audience's engaged expressions and nodding heads affirmed the happiness and excitement I had when preparing my topic. The resonance I felt with my listeners was indescribable; it was as if our shared passion for transforming education had formed an unspoken connection. It has been by far one of the most awe-inspiring experiences I have ever had.

Networking Beyond the Stage

While my time on stage was unforgettable, a different kind of magic of the conference -

happened offstage. During networking breaks and social events, I had the privilege of engaging in conversations that transcended cultural and professional boundaries. Exchanging business cards, connecting on social media, and promising to stay in touch were tangible reminders that this conference was a catalyst for lasting relationships.

Bringing our journey to an end.

As the conference drew to a close, I left with a renewed sense of purpose and determination. The connections forged and the insights gained fueled my desire to continue advocating for innovative education practices. The experience not only enriched my professional journey but also reminded me that the path to change is created by those who dare to share their ideas and experiences.

My participation as a speaker at Mextesol León Conference was nothing short of awe-inspiring. The conference not only allowed me to share my passion but also exposed me to a global community of like-minded colleagues who are shaping the -

future of education. The memories of the electrifying atmosphere, the wonderful colleagues, meaningful conversations, and shared aspirations will forever be etched in my heart, serving as a driving force for my continued commitment to transforming education.

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Presenting at the 45th MEXTESOL Convention in 2018: A Groundbreaking Dawn in ELT
Laura E. Mendoza

Dr. Laura E. Mendoza works as faculty at the University of Texas at El Paso. She has worked as an ESOL/Spanish instructor for the last decade. In 2012, Mendoza obtained her MA in Applied Linguistics. In 2020, she graduated with a Ph.D. in Education focusing on Literacy/Biliteracy. Her research interests include Technology in the Classroom and Culturally Responsive Teaching.
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Five years ago, I presented at the 45th MEXTESOL Convention in 2018: A Groundbreaking Dawn in ELT. It occurred from October 25th to October 28th, 2018, in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. I presented on Sunday, October 28th, promptly at 10:30 AM in the Majahuites Room; it was a room with a capacity of 120 individuals and was to its fullest. It has been one of the most exciting moments in my academic journey. My topic was Merging Language and Digital Literacy in the ESL Classroom.

During the session, I shared a qualitative study presenting information on merging language and digital literacies, particularly videos. For the study, I examined how beneficial the integration is and, more importantly, the creation - of videos for language learners. By conducting observations and analyzing various artifacts (students' assignments), I was able to provide different suggestions for language educators who want to innovate their classrooms. The study context included university-level ESL (English as a Second Language) reading classrooms. I concluded that by integrating and creating videos in the ESL classroom, class time could be used more efficiently, students could be able to provide more thoughtful answers as they are working towards a project, students could learn and polish 21st-century skills, and educators could promote the usage of a more inclusive curriculum.

Methodology

Participants

The participants considered for the present study were all Mexican-descendent between the ages of 18-21, except for two additional non-traditional students; one was in her early 40s, and the other was in his early 70s. All participants attended high school in Mexico and took English as a Second Language during the study. Participants included males and females. These participants were enrolled in a (50/50) hybrid, also known as a blended ESL program, where they only meet face-to-face once a week for 70 minutes; the instructor and students perform the rest of the class online.

Artifacts

The analyzed artifacts included regular classroom assignments that were submitted electronically. Participants were asked to submit their regular reading classroom assignments using the Blackboard platform. Blackboard is an educational technology company that offers its services as a learning management system where educators and students can work individually or collaboratively. The collected assignments came from two different sections -

(same level) of ESLreading classes; those sections were low-advanced in proficiency level. All e-assignments collected created an electronic academic corpus, which was later used for analyses.

Procedures

Participants were given a consent form, which explained the goals and expectations of the project. After signing the consent form and the semester had ended, the assignments from those students who had agreed to participate were downloaded from the Blackboard platform. No coercion problems were attributed to the study at any given point. Writing field notes and reflective memos were recurrent activities during the semester. The analyses took place during the following semesters.

Following a 15-week schema, participants were asked to create three videos at three crucial semester points. Students were instructed that by making such videos, they could combine, implement, and polish their 21st-century skills with their linguistic skills. The videos were assigned during week 1 (beginning of the semester), week 6 (around midterm exams), and week 13 (immediately before final exams); hereafter, the videos will be referred to as *video 1, video 2, and video 3,* respectively. Altogether, videos represented 20% of their total grade. It is worth mentioning that although the three assignments –the creation of those three videos- represented their formal speaking activities for the semester, all of them included the four skills of language teaching/learning: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In terms of reading, students were asked to carefully read instructions for the videos' pre-production, production, and post-production. For video 1, students were given plenty of details regarding logistics, planning, and using different video platforms.

For *videos 2* and *3,* more emphasis was given to the actual content of the assignment. For the first video, students were directed to create a 1-2-minute-long introduction video; for *video 2*, students were instructed to create a 3-5 minute long video talking about education; and, for *video 3,* students provided a summary of a multicultural novel for young adults (5-7 minutes long). In terms of writing, students were required to provide a script, annotations, and a written report summarizing their thoughts. Students engaged in listening activities by continuously listening to themselves as they were recording themselves, selecting the best recording, and streaming others' videos. The students shared their assignments via Blackboard.

Observations

Online and face-to-face observations occurred concurrently for four months. As previously stated, two different ESL reading sections were included in the study. Based on Mullhall (2002), these observations helped to: "(1) provide inside into interactions between dyads and groups, and (2) illustrate the whole picture" (p.307).

Data Analysis

I conducted online observations by streaming the videos several times to get familiarized with them; while streaming the videos, notes about the style, features, linguistic skills, etc., were taken. After face-to-face observations, I wrote journals that also contributed to the analysis by providing additional details about the challenges faced by the students (technologically and linguistically), their experiences in general, their expectations, and the content presented in each video. Informal conversations also occurred sometimes outside the classroom.

Results

It was concluded that making videos in the ESL classroom contributed positively to students for several reasons. First of all, time in the classroom could be used more efficiently. For instance, for *video 1*, instead of using class time for each of the students to introduce themselves, the students had the opportunity to perform other activities during the first class.

Creating such a video allowed them to provide thoughtful and meaningful information about themselves to their classmates, promoting connections among themselves. Additionally, as suggested by Huang et al. (2011), making these videos allowed the participants to enhance their vocabulary, fluency, and confidence. By creating these videos, the students were allowed to engage in multi-modal learning approaches that mirror their heavy use of electronic devices as part of their daily routine (Ganapathy, 2016).

Suggestions for ESL Educators

For students to create such types of projects, educators should be aware and clear of their expectations; for this reason, it is imperative for educators to clearly explain the *how* –provide detailed, well-written instructions- to the students. If students, particularly language learners, are not provided with guidance and parameters, they cannot perform to their fullest potential.

Providing instructions, preferably a rubric alongside the actual assignment, can ease the work of both the educator and the language learners.

When educators request the students to create videos, educators should provide detailed instructions (verbal or written) for the pre-production, production, and post-production of such videos.

As part of those instructions, educators should provide the materials needed, estimated time, and possible encountered problems before/during/after recording a video. Besides, as stated earlier, educators should provide a rubric with the desired expectations. Understanding and working with different platforms (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo) can undoubtedly diminish the stress from both parts; on the one hand, educators will find themselves well-equipped to answer the questions and concerns of the students, and on the other hand, students will feel open to ask for help if in need.

Conclusions

By integrating the creation of videos in the ESL classroom, class time can be used more efficiently, students can provide more thoughtful answers as they are working towards a project, students learn and polish 21st-century skills and educators promote and use a more inclusive curriculum.

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Differentiated Instruction and Differentiated Assessment
Samir Omara

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There are different students who have different learning needs, profiles and interests in English language classrooms. English language teachers need to design and deliver differentiated instruction and differentiated assessment to meet their students' learning needs and interests. There are different strategies of differentiated instruction to differentiate content, process, product and learning environment. There are different types and techniques of differentiated assessment.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction refers to how to use different instructional - or teaching strategies to teach language to different students taking into consideration their levels, interests, backgrounds, learning styles, intelligences and potentials. There are some principles of differentiated instruction. Nobody could learn everything. All students have basic needs while there are learning differences to be accommodated. Some students exceed the group norms. Differentiated instruction is beneficial for students, teachers, educational leaders and parents as it develops students' potentials. It helps different students learn, communicate and develop. It helps teachers design, deliver and assess their English language teaching. It helps educational leaders and supervisors assess English language teaching and learning.

It helps parents recognize their children's potential and successes. Scigliano and Hipsky (2010) think that differentiated instruction helps develop students' understanding of curriculum content, self-efficacy and academic achievement. It helps develop personalized learning of each and every student. Heacox (2012) thinks that students' interests, cognitive abilities, backgrounds, learning preferences, readiness, and needs make the classroom diverse. Tomlinson (1999) thinks that differentiated instruction helps teachers tailor instruction to meet individual needs. Students are different; they have different readiness, interests and learning profiles. To assess students' readiness, teachers check students' academic reports, records and portfolios. Interests refer to topics, skills and learning activities that challenge and inspire students. To assess students' interests, teachers ask students to discuss and/or write about their own interests. Learning profiles refer to students' preferred methods of learning new materials.

> ¨**Readiness refers to students' knowledge and skill regarding certain content**.¨

To assess students' learning profiles, teachers use learning styles and multiple intelligence questionnaires. They check students' reports and portfolios. They observe students in the classroom and school.

Differentiated instruction helps to meet different students' learning styles as every student learns differently. According to Fleming and Baume (2006), VARK is an acronym for Visual, Auditory, Read/write and Kinesthetic. There are four main learning styles. Visual learners learn by seeing. They prefer pictures, maps and graphs to understand new learning materials. Auditory learners learn by hearing. They prefer listening, -

speaking and discussions to understand new learning materials. Read/Write learners learn by reading and writing. They prefer stories, novels, essays and note-taking. Kinesthetic learners learn by doing and moving. They prefer hands-on activities such as games and role-plays. Gardner (1983) defines multiple intelligences; they are verbal / linguistic, logical / mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. Students with verbal/linguistic intelligence are good at oral and written language; they prefer storytelling and journal writing. Students with logical/mathematical intelligence are good at numbers and critical thinking; they prefer problem-solving, story problems, comparisons and contrasts. Students with spatial intelligence are good at using pictures and images; they prefer posters, maps and diagrams. Students with bodily-kinesthetic intelligence are good at physical activities; they prefer demos and hands-on activities. Students with musical intelligence are good at melodies and rhythm; they prefer poems and songs. Students with -

interpersonal intelligence are good at empathy and leadership; they prefer games, role-plays and social activities. Students with intrapersonal intelligence are good at understanding their own potentials; they prefer journal writing and reflective activities. Students with naturalist intelligence are good at exploring nature; they prefer classifying and categorizing natural things.

> **"Gardner (1983) defines multiple intelligences; they are verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist."**

Language teachers differentiate instruction through content, process, product and learning environment. To differentiate content or what students learn, teachers define students' readiness through pre-assessment. They provide students with different learning materials -

like texts, audios and videos on different topics and levels to move from lower-thinking to higher-thinking skills. They create study units to help different students develop learning outcomes at their own pace. To differentiate the process or how students learn, teachers use different ways to present different written, oral, visual and auditory learning materials to meet different learning styles.

They design a variety of individual, pair-work and group-work activities for different students to do. They use flexible forms of grouping for different students to learn and communicate based on understanding of their students' readiness, interests and learning profiles. They design and implement individual activities such as quizzes and exams, pair-work -

¨**To differentiate the learning environment or where students learn, teachers use different ways to set a differentiated learning environment physically and psychologically.** ¨

activities such as games and role-plays and group work activities such as discussions and projects.To differentiate products or how students show what they learn, teachers use different ways to assess students' learning before, during and after learning through quizzes, exams, role-plays, presentations and projects. They provide students with a variety of opportunities to show what they have learned; they help students opt to present what they have learned individually through exams and presentations, in pairs through dialogues and games or in groups through role-plays and projects. To differentiate the learning environment or where students learn, teachers use different ways to set a differentiated learning environment physically and psychologically. They make use of classroom space and furniture to make students feel safe. They use classroom spaces and online platforms to help students present their learning and recognize their successes. They help students respect each other. They help them -

work in different pairs and groups. They provide students with a variety of language learning materials and resources; they help them explore more language learning materials and resources, monitor their communication and scaffold their learning.

Differentiated Assessment

Differentiated assessment refers to how English language teachers use different assessment types, strategies and techniques to assess students' learning before, during and after teaching and learning. Hattie & Temperley (2007) think that assessment helps students achieve learning goals. Differentiated assessment is beneficial for students and teachers. It helps teachers meet students' different learning styles, respond to students' diverse needs and provide students with different opportunities to show what they have learned. Marzano (2000) thinks that instruction should reflect how learning occurs and assessment should focus on students' use of knowledge.

Diagnostic assessment refers to defining students' knowledge and skills before teaching in order to design teaching and learning. There are different techniques for diagnostic assessment; pre-tests, self-assessment, peer assessment, discussions and interviews. Pre-tests have different types of questions; they help teachers know what students already know. Self-assessment helps students answer questions about their own learning by themselves to define their knowledge gaps and skills challenges. Peer assessment helps pairs of students to ask and answer questions about their peers' learning to define their knowledge gaps and skills challenges. Self-assessment and peer assessment help develop assessment as learning, students' critical thinking, reflection, responsibility and autonomy. Discussions help students think of, articulate and share their thoughts about learning materials and processes.ormative assessment refers to defining students' learning progress during teaching and learning.

Assessment for learning and assessment as learning are formative assessments. Assessment for learning helps teachers use evidence of students' knowledge and skills to adjust teaching during teaching and learning. Dann (2002) thinks that assessment for learning helps involve students in assessment, so that it is a part of learning. There are different techniques of assessment for learning; rubrics, quizzes, games, role-plays, journals, projects and portfolios. Assessment as learning helps students ask questions about their learning and reflect on their learning to develop their thinking of thinking or metacognition. It helps teachers develop students' reflection and critical thinking skills during teaching and learning. There are different techniques of assessment as learning; rubrics, journals, self-assessment and peer assessment. Rubrics are some coherent criteria that describe levels of performance quality. Quizzes are short tests with a few questions. Games are fun activities that help develop students' motivation and engagement. Role-plays are stimulating and authentic -

learning activities that help students take different roles.

Journals are reflective papers, blogs or vlogs. There are different ways to assess students' projects such as quizzes, tests, oral presentations, displays and interviews. Interim assessment refers to periodic assignments that language teachers use to monitor students' learning progress, gaps and habits for re-teaching. Unlike formative assessments, interim assessments are formal assignments that are conducted across classes or schools. There are different techniques for interim assessment such as chapter tests, extended essays and projects scored with rubrics. Teachers should map out assessment calendars, decide on the interim assessment formats, choose the most appropriate prompts and rubrics. Summative assessment refers to defining students' knowledge and skills by the end of teaching and learning. There are different summative assessments; written assessments such as papers, performance assessments -

such as demonstrations, standardized assessments such as exams against rubrics, oral assessments such presentations and final projects and portfolios. Teachers should use rubrics, design clear and effective questions and assess comprehensiveness.

To sum up, it is very important for English language teachers to define and understand students' learning needs, interests, profiles, styles and intelligences. This understanding helps them design and deliver differentiated instruction and assessment of English language learning content, process, product and environment. Thus, they help students learn language, communicate, learn and develop.

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Travel, Teaching, and Tampico for MEXTESOL
Dawn Wink

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Dawn Wink is a writer and educator whose work explores the beauty and tensions of language, culture, and place. Wink grew up on a cattle ranch in the San Pedro River Valley of southeastern Arizona. She has studied and lived in México, Spain, and Germany. With degrees in International Relations, Cross Cultural Leadership, and TESOL, Wink is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Santa Fe Community College and works with teachers in the U.S. and around the world. Her novel, Meadowlark, was inspired by her great-grandmother. Wink lives with her family in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.

We landed in Tampico, Mexico for the MEXTESOL Tampico Conference 2017 "Evolving and Involving."

Our hosts, Jorge Torres and Kim Soriano, and I studied together during a workshop intensive in Puebla, Mexico. It was lovely to reconnect and continue our shared journey of teaching and learning. Jorge and Kim invited us to the gorgeous campus of The American School of Tampico where we met with teachers and talked about *Informal Assessment: It's All About Authenticity*. Informal Assessments – It's All About Authenticity.

During our time in Tampico, the earthquakes in Mexico City and Oaxaca continued.

We felt nothing where we were, but watching the news learned of the volunteer rescuers of *Los Topos* (the moles).

We never watch news in the US, but did watch in Mexico and learned so much about the courage and heroism of these volunteers, whose initial volunteers began spontaneously in the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City: Who are Los Topos Volunteer Rescuers. -

Héctor Méndez, one of the original founders of *Los Topos*, ""Society changed in 1985 after that earthquake. It was a kind of cleaning. Because suffering cleans your spirit… So Mexican society now is a kind of catharsis — kind of a social catharsis, you see."

The next day we were off to the MEXTESOL Tampico Conference in the gorgeous *Casa de la Cultura*. We dove into ideas around Teaching Passionately .

Mil gracias, MEXTESOL Tampico, Jorge, Kim, and teachers. Here's to all of our shared journeys!

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Vocabulary Scramble
Hind Elyas

Hind is an English Instructor at Saudi Aramco in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She is actively engaged in professional development, holding various important roles. These include being the IATEFL Global Issue, the Past Chair of the TESOL International Professional Development Professional Council, and a member of the former TESOL International Womentorship in ELT committee. Hind's expertise is recognized beyond her current position, as she is a British Council ELTon Awards Judge. She was chosen as a recipient of the prestigious TESOL International 2021 Leadership Mentoring Program Award and also served as a TESOL International Convention Ambassador. Hind's research interests focus on important areas such as student engagement, differentiation, and 21st-century teaching and employability skills.

One of the fun vocabulary games I like to use in my class is called "Vocabulary Scramble"

To begin this activity, select the vocabulary words from the lesson and write each word on a separate card.

Ensure that the cards are shuffled before placing them facedown on a table.

Next, divide your students into teams, such as red, blue, green, and yellow. For each team, print out the words on colored paper that matches the team's name. This will provide a visually cohesive experience.

Assign roles within each team using role cards. These can include a -

reporter, recorder, timekeeper, and facilitator. By involving all students and giving them a sense of responsibility, the activity becomes more organized and engaging. The role cards should be on tags and lanyards that match the color of the team.

> "By involving all students and giving them a sense of responsibility, the activity becomes more organized and engaging."

To engage the students, inform them that they will need to unscramble words quickly. Enhance the activity by providing each group with tiny timers and displaying a timer on the board. Instruct a representative from each group to race to the teacher's desk, grab a word, and return to their team to unscramble it promptly. You may choose to allocate 30 seconds for unscrambling or end the round when the first group to finish shouts "snap." For added difficulty, consider introducing a round where students must define the words. This approach will undoubtedly elevate the challenge and excitement of the activity.

By following these steps, the activity will be well-structured, inclusive, and enjoyable for all students involved.

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> **"This approach will undoubtedly elevate the challenge and excitement of the activity."**

Responding to students needs to implement their professional practice: An experience of presenting at MEXTESOL International Convention
María Teresa Gullotti Vázquez

María Teresa Gullotti Vázquez, PhD in Education, collaborates with the University of Yucatán, UADY since 2007 as an English teacher. For several years was responsible for the professional practices' programs. From 2008 to 2022, she participated as a teacher of the Bachelor of English Language Teaching program. Email: tere.gullotti@correo.uady.mx; maría.teresa.gullotti@gmail.com

Presenting a topic at MEXTESOL International Convention proved to be a transformative experience, both personally and professionally. I had the privilege of participating in the 43rd convention held in Monterrey, Nuevo León, México, from October 27-30, 2016, where I addressed the topic of "Responding to students' needs to implement their professional practice".

Significance of academic presentation

Being a part of the prestigious Mextesol International Convention -

offers a unique opportunity for knowledge sharing. It serves as a platform to exchange ideas, expertise, and research findings with a global audience, thereby contributing significantly to the advancement of the educational field.

Moreover, presenting at Mextesol facilitates global networking, bringing together experts, professionals, -

and researchers from across the globe. It allows for the establishment of invaluable connections and collaborations that extend beyond the event itself. This experience enabled me to share my teaching experiences, learn from experts and fellow educators, and disseminate knowledge to hundreds of English teachers. Every presentation and discussion provide fresh insights for classroom instruction, research, and personal and professional growth.

An essential aspect to consider is the validation and recognition that comes with presenting at the Mextesol International Convention. Such an opportunity signifies that one's research and ideas have reached a level of significance worthy of sharing on a global scale. Particularly for those, like myself, working in public universities, it aligns with expectations for career development in both academic and professional domains.

The personal and professional experience of being part of such an important event as MEXTESOL International Convention, gives -

the opportunity of knowledge sharing, as it provides a platform to share ideas, expertise, and research with a global audience. This experience contributes to the advancement of the educational field.

Also presenting at MEXTESOL allows teachers and students alike to establish valuable connections and collaborations that are always extended beyond the event. This practice gave me the opportunity to share my experiences as a teacher and to learn from experts, from other teachers, and to share the knowledge with hundreds of English teachers. Every experience, every topic presented gave ideas for the classes, research and to improve our personal and professional development. Moreover, working at a public university it is expected that teachers work on their career advancements in the academic and professional areas. Hence, to present at an International Convention helps to fulfill this career advancement.

Content of the presentation

The aim of my presentation was to discuss some aspects of including supervised professional practice in the BA in English Language Teaching offered by the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, (UADY) Mexico.

Professional Practice is a compulsory subject offered to the student-teachers of eighth semester. Students enrolled in this course can practice teaching in different academic settings and work with students in diverse educational levels, ranging from pre-primary to higher education. Students have done their practice in private, public schools and the National Program in Teaching English in Basic Education NEPBE, coordinated by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP).

Professional practice is a requirement for the preparation of teachers in many universities, the UADY included, and it is considered an active participation in different field experiences. As cited in Acquah and Partey (2014) practices is an off-campus teaching exercise where -

students are required to implement the theories and skills acquired in the classroom under the supervision of their lecturers and teachers on the field to further develop their teaching proficiency.

Professional practice acknowledges the importance of linking learners with the labor market and creating relevant relationships with professionals of their academic field. The good teacher is constantly adapting. They adapt when they introduce new strategies to cope with challenges, and this ability comes only with practice (McDonough, Shaw, Masuhara 2013)

"The good teacher is constantly adapting."

The experience presented is a description and analysis of the syllabus and its connection with the training and developing distinctive competencies for professional educators. It also included several types of assessment criteria such as student-teachers' diaries, portfolios, classroom observations, reports made by the educational institution and some examples of the students' final projects.

In summary, presenting at an international convention is not just about sharing research, it is a multifaceted opportunity for learning, recognition, networking, and contribution to the advancement of knowledge. It has been a lasting impact for my professional development.

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Unlocking the power of words: tips and tricks for teaching vocabulary (without dying trying)
Cynthia Ramírez

Cynthia Ramírez is an English teacher. Certified by Cambridge University and Exeter College. Ms. Ramírez holds a bachelor's degree in Teaching English, a master's in Education, and a Doctorate in Science of Education. Author, speaker, and panelist, she is currently working as a teacher trainer at Escuela Normal de San Felipe del Progreso.
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Teaching vocabulary is one of those tasks that seem really – really- easy. Just think about it, how hard can it be to teach others how "things are called"? Well, every teacher in the world might agree with me: it is not easy, it's challenging. When introducing new words (or trying to connect to the ones we already know), teachers have to consider not only the group age, group size, interests, syllabus, time, target language, but also (and in my opinion the most important thing) the students themselves. This text is aimed to explore some ways of teaching vocabulary (from basic to intermediate levels), the challenges faced while doing it and how I have overcome them.

Learning English requires that learners master different abilities not only the communicative ones, but also those related to critical thinking for problem-solving decisions; mainly because enabling individuals to express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions with clarity and precision is the ultimate goal of learning a language. For teachers, one way to help their students to grow and foster these abilities is through helping them to learn vocabulary. Showing, modeling, and providing opportunities of using vocabulary equips students with the tools they need to navigate and succeed in a complex and interconnected world.

One way to introduce vocabulary in a motivating and efficient way is -

through songs. Teachers can motivate students up to a point, but learning is optimized when students are self-motivated (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999); therefore, using songs provides that extra motivation students need in order to connect with the language. Incorporating songs for teaching vocabulary helps teachers to align students' preferences and interests at the same time that vocabulary acquisition is being enhanced.

> **"...when students connect emotionally with a song, they are more likely to remember the associated vocabulary."**

In my years of teaching practice, I have called this activity *"Sing me, like me, learn me";* understanding that it is not only the songs that students already enjoy the ones that are going to be used, but also those that evoke emotions, and when students connect emotionally with a -

song, they are more likely to remember the associated vocabulary. For example, which song would you use to teach verbs in the past? My safe to go answer is *Summer Nights* from the Grease soundtrack. It provides the best setup for storytelling and encourages active engagement with the words and deepens comprehension.

The first thing to do is to present the song, let students watch the video and have them guess what the song is about. After, provide a list of key vocabulary words (all verbs in past) and show them in order as they were shown in the song. Students are asked to use those new words in order to retell the story. Then, practice the sonG for active listening and vocabulary recognition. Finally, encourage students to use the new vocabulary to tell other stories.

One challenge that I have faced while using this activity for learning vocabulary is that students struggle with other words from the song -

that are related to cultural context as songs often use cultural references that can be challenging for them. In order to overcome this situation, I have implemented the **Words We Almost Know Board**. In this board, I write all the words that students find interesting to learn, and explain them later. In this way, we don't lose track of the objective of the class and we can go back to those words later.

Another activity that it's been used inside my classroom for teaching vocabulary is called "Beat the clock"; this activity consists of students writing as many words as they can for 1 minute out from one main word; two rules: they can use only a Pictionary (if needed) and they have to use the letters from a word given e.g. their surnames. For this activity, students are allowed to use a Pictionary in order to connect the words they are getting with a visual clue as not all students learn well through auditory methods like songs; some may be more visual or kinesthetic learners. The purpose of using the Pictionary is to use materials that enable students to avoid meaningless manipulation of the words, but to connect with -

what they are learning. It is understood that instructional materials must achieve the dual goals of promoting ELS content and English Language Learning (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2017); therefore, using materials that provide students with different learning inputs will assure that most of their learning needs are covered.

One of the difficulties that I have faced while doing this activity, is that students get different words that are not related to each other or that do not meet the objective of the class. So, one way to face this problem is by providing meaningful target words. When students actively engage in activities aligned with a common goal, they enhance their ability to communicate effectively and, in that way, they are able to effectively use the words they have just learned.

The last activity that is going to be presented in this text is adapted from the popular game Taboo. Taboo is a word guessing -

game where players try to describe a secret word to their team without using certain "taboo" words or phrases. For this version of "No-tabooing", students have to use the words written in the card in order to describe the word given. It is designed to encourage them to use specific words or phrases when describing a secret word, instead of avoiding them. The point is to effectively incorporate these words into their descriptions while helping their team guess the target word.

Constructivist paradigm underlines the importance of a person building their own knowledge, in this sense, this activity can risk student's self-confidence to build knowledge as they might struggle with the pressure to incorporate multiple vocabulary words into their descriptions, potentially leading to confusion or wordiness. Nevertheless, one way to address this obstacle is through scaffolding. Creating a supportive and encouraging classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes can help students navigate and overcome the obstacles they encounter while -

using the "No-tabooing" game to learn vocabulary effectively.

Finally, as teachers we find it important and necessary to teach vocabulary because it is the foundation of effective communication, critical thinking, and learning success. Vocabulary encompasses a range of words and their meanings, providing students with the tools to share their ideas and thoughts. By teaching vocabulary, teachers empower their students to become confident learners who can comprehend texts, articulate ideas persuasively, and develop strong reading and writing skills. Moreover, an extensive vocabulary enhances overall cognitive abilities by fostering creativity, problem-solving skills, and analytical thinking.

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Survey says!!!
Claudia Reyes

Teacher Claudia Reyes has a Master's Degree in school administration and a BA in English teaching. She has been an English teacher at high school level for 27 years at the Escuela de Bachilleres at Querétaro's State University, Mexico.

Teaching a language is not only about grammar rules, uses, word order and all the structures that we teach during our class. We are teaching a living language, one that changes through time, that has its unique voice that will show us an ideology, way of doing things, views about life and different approaches to do things that can be very different to our native culture. When we teach, we have to consider these features that make up the language including aspects such as slang, idioms and cultural aspects that make up an ideology.

The USA has been an icon regarding TV game shows. TV programs such as The Wheel of Fortune, The Price is Right, Jeopardy, and Family Feud have been on the air for decades and have enlighten us with knowledge, emotion and sometimes a little bit of -

stress when the participant is about to lose a big sum of money, a trip or even a car!

Rodríguez, (2000) mentioned that a good way to involve the students in the process of learning and acquiring a language is by means of "letting the imagination fly, think of unreal things" where the student can enjoy themselves without worrying about their personal and academic problems.

Therefore, thinking of a way to teach vocabulary that does not involve learning a list of random words, but that includes these ingredients: a fun activity, speaking, promoting group work, good interaction between classmates and lots of fun.
The answer was ta, ta, ta...... Survey says!

"...get some ideas of what would be suitable for the student's level."

Major success!

Throughout the class hour, it is important that the teacher monitors and supervises the activity to guarantee that all the students are speaking in English and not in their native language. I recommend that students download a dictionary app such as Oxford or Cambridge that will help them out not only in this activity but in general.

It was a rewarding experience because the goals that I set were covered such as: having a good time, cooperative work in the groups, English was spoken, vocabulary was practiced.

The procedure....

First, watch a lot of Family Feud programs, which you can do on YouTube, get some ideas of what would be suitable for the student's level. Then design the cards that will be used in class. I have between 45 to 50 students per group, so 50 cards were made using cardboard and plastic.

It's show business! The day of the presentation

The students are organized in 5 groups of 9 students, where one is the host (this student has to have a good pronunciation and reading ability to be the one to read the questions) and two groups of four students each. The game rules are the same as the game, but still, take some time to review them with the students.

Follow up activity

The next class, students had to prepare a survey, the same format as the ones they played the day before,but with their own context. Once that grammar, vocabulary and structure was checked, they had to ask the questions (5) to other students from school, at least 10 students per question. In the end, we made our own "Survey said".

Here are some pics from the Survey said that I made

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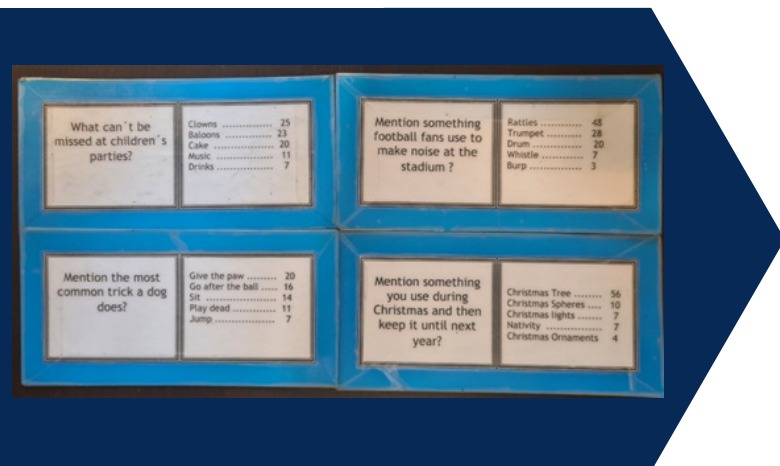
The Institute of International Education and the collaboration with MEXTESOL members over the years.
Jesús Rojas

Jesus Rojas Juarez embarked on his professional journey at the United States Embassy, specifically within the Regional English Language Office (RELO). In 1999, he transitioned to the Institute of International Education, assuming the role of Program Officer. His career continued to advance, and in 2001, he was promoted to the position of Program Manager, a role he held until 2005. During this time, he was entrusted with the responsibility of serving as the Director of National Evaluations, In 2013, Jesus achieved yet another milestone in his career when he was promoted to the role of Global Assessment Lead. Additionally, he served as an advisor for Central and South America—a role he continues to excel into this day.

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The Mexico City office was established in 1974 and serves as IIE's regional center for Latin America. In 1996, IIE Mexico started assessment services by introducing the TOEFL® ITP tests to facilitate Mexican students' access to international certifications.

Introduction of TOEFL in Mexico: The TOEFL test has been available in Mexico for several decades. It is one of the most widely recognized English language proficiency tests used by students and professionals who are looking to study or work in English-speaking countries.

Evolution of TOEFL: Over the last 50 years, the TOEFL test has undergone significant changes in terms of format and scoring. It transitioned from a paper-based test to a computer-based test and then to the internet-based test (TOEFL iBT) that is widely used today. These changes were made to align the test with modern technology and assessment practices.

Educational Impact: The availability of TOEFL assessments in Mexico has had a significant impact on the country's education system. Many Mexican students and professionals take the TOEFL test to demonstrate their English language proficiency for academic purposes, such as applying to universities or pursuing graduate studies abroad.

Professional Development: Beyond academia, TOEFL scores are also used for professional purposes, especially in fields where English proficiency is essential, such as international business, tourism, and diplomacy. Many professionals in Mexico take the TOEFL to enhance their career opportunities.

Test Preparation: The demand for TOEFL test preparation materials and courses has grown over the years. Various educational institutions and language schools in Mexico offer TOEFL preparation classes to help individuals achieve their target scores.

Global Mobility: The TOEFL test has played a role in facilitating global mobility for Mexicans. -

Achieving a competitive TOEFL score can open doors to study and work opportunities in English-speaking countries.

Online Testing: Over the years, TOEFL has adapted to the digital age by offering the TOEFL iBT Home Edition, which allows test-takers in Mexico and around the world to take the test from the comfort of their homes, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the years we have received, uploaded, prepared and delivered +2,500,000 tests to +950 institutions all over Mexico.

The Institute of International Education is pleased to have worked along with teachers and institutions members of MEXTESOL since its inception. Being part of the continuous efforts of academic advancement of schools all over the country makes us proud and compromises us to give our best.

Congratulations MEXTESOL on this 50th anniversary!

Teaching Vocabulary Alongside a Hidden Ally…Podcasts
David A. Peña

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Introduction

As English teachers, we all have to teach more and new vocabulary to our students. It is part of the language learning and growth process that must be instilled as well as encouraged in every classroom. Of course, there are those students that voraciously will with ease add new words to their own personal collection, however there are those who won't. Therefore, I will share my input on a curious yet not-so-popular manner of enriching students' vocabulary with a friend by the name of "podcasts".

Benefits of Podcasts for Vocabulary Building

Let us start by looking at the hidden benefits here. Podcasts can be -

a great tool for improving anyone's vocabulary. If students start to listen to podcasts on a regular basis, they will expose themselves to new words and phrases that perhaps may have never been used or mentioned in the everyday classroom. Podcasts can help students expand their vocabulary and improve their own language skills in general. Think of it this way, in order to build a house we need bricks, and the only way to get the construction going is to have an abundance of bricks. So the more a person listens to proper and adequate podcast material, the more "vocabulary bricks" they will have on their "building site".

Even if a student tells you that they did not understand 95% of the -

words they heard in the episode...their brain is still doing the work of accumulating words, sounds, sentences, word combinations, and much more. The reason is that when our brains are focused on a listening activity, they require less brain power versus an activity that needs the involvement of the eyes and body. The brain, therefore, has a more significant and easier time capturing and sorting data, even if it does not know what it means exactly the first time around.

As this becomes a more and more consistent and disciplined skill, the benefits reap gradually and effectively. The brain memorizes old and new vocabulary, pronunciation, and word order as well as makes proper connections between the new words and their respective meanings.

Podcasts focus on specific topics or themes, which means that you as a teacher can assign certain podcast channels or episodes so students can learn specialized vocabulary. There is a great variety of classroom- and school-friendly content that you can find on the various existing platforms of your choosing. If you are worried -

that some content might be inappropriate just make sure that you filter out "explicit material", you may also notice a sign, icon, or capital letter "E" for explicit content that you should not assign in your classroom.

Tips on How to Use Podcasts for Vocabulary Building

Here are some tips and ideas on how to use podcasts for vocabulary building in (and outside) the classroom:

1. Choose podcasts that are interesting for your students. This will make it more likely that they will stick with it.
2. Tell your students to listen to podcasts at comfortable speeds. If they are beginners, you may want to assign podcasts that are spoken slowly.
3. Show them how to look up unknown words in a physical or online dictionary and write them in a small notebook or "vocab journal".
4. Have them repeat the words out loud helps them remember.

5. Encourage them to use the word in classroom conversations. This will in turn help them solidify their understanding of the word.

Here are some podcasts that are good for vocabulary building:

1. The English Podcast
2. Coffee Break English
3. 6 Minute English
4. Duolingo Spanish Podcast
5. BBC Learning English

Conclusion

Whether you're a language teacher or educator looking to expand your students' vocabulary, podcasts are a powerful tool to add to your toolkit. You can easily integrate them into your school's LMS; they do not require your students to sit at a desk, look at a whiteboard, or be in a classroom. These activities can be done almost anywhere, anytime–while washing the dishes, walking the dog, doing chores, and so on. So why not give them a try and see how they can help you improve your students' language skills both in and outside the classroom?

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Personal Reflection: MEXTESOL & Teaching Through Difficult Times
Luis Prezas

Luis Prezas is an internationally certified English and French language instructor with over 25 years of experience. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages, a major in Translation and Interpretation, a Master's degree in Education, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Innovation and Networked Society. He has additional studies in psychology and is primarily interested in new approaches in language teaching and learning through digital technology, as well as socio-emotional aspects in the teaching-learning process and foreign language literacy.

This year 2023, our Mexican Association of English Language Teachers, MEXTESOL, celebrates its 50th anniversary. At this significant juncture, it is only fair to acknowledge the vocation and efforts of all the English language professionals who have substantially contributed to the development of our Mexican society, enabling several generations of children, adolescents, young adults, and adults to get closer to their goals and transform their life projects into tangible realities.

I learned about MEXTESOL approximately 25 years ago and since then it has been an important -

part of my professional development as an English language teacher. Through all these years, we, its members, have closely followed the advances in research on second language acquisition, and improved our school practices.

Nobody can deny that one of the events that definitely left a mark on our generation on both students and teachers was the COVID 19 pandemic, which began in the last quarter of 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China. This pandemic swiftly spread across the globe in a matter of weeks, and had an unforeseen impact on every country around the world, and our beloved Mexico was not an exception. Our country suffered both, economic and, regrettably, human loss.

This health emergency not only brought our core strengths to the forefront, but it also revealed certain deficiencies that had to be addressed in the following months, one of such concerned education. It is through this text that I pay homage to those brave teachers who did not give up, but did what was necessary to continue with their calling, accompanied by our teachers' association.

One of the measures governments around the world took to protect the population was the transition from traditional in-person education to virtual instructional environments. The emerging strategy of delivering education through desktop computers and/or laptops, mobile devices such as cell phones and tablets, was implemented nationwide in Mexico in March 2020, encompassing all levels of education, both private and public. National education authorities' directives, which were followed by every local and institutional authorities, led to the suspension of in-person classes with the aim of reducing population mobility and thus -

preventing healthcare facilities from becoming overwhelmed.

Teachers were instructed to continue lessons and other academic activities through the internet; they were free to choose the mode of lesson transmission according to the teacher's skills and the needs of their classes in question. As is widely known in the education community, there is a wide range of methods for implementing distance education, from learning management systems or educational platforms to social networks and email communication.

This freedom to choose the transmission medium had its own advantages and disadvantages, as some teachers opted for the virtual teaching modality, conducting live electronic lectures at specific scheduled times, typically coinciding with regular class hours, using transmission systems like Zoom or Google Meet. Others, such as myself, chose to orchestrate instruction through designed activities that could be completed at -

a time of day that students found most convenient, communicating the assignments through email.

Mextesol back then held training sessions and conferences around the country through its local chapters to train teachers on the use of technology, in order to favor the continuity of instruction.

Generally speaking, activities were outlined in a word processing document, which included hyperlinks to explanatory videos created by teachers themselves, or hosted on platforms like YouTube, to self-correcting exercises, and to written and oral production tasks that students had to submit to the teacher and then receive feedback and the corresponding evaluation on specified dates.

At the beginning, this transition from physical classrooms to the virtual teaching and learning environment was met with enthusiasm and positivity by all involved parties. The innovative measure seemed reasonable and exciting at the -

same time, as it meant staying at home, protecting against contagion, and, simultaneously, not halting the progress of academic activities for the 2020-1 school period. However, as weeks went by, the academic workload multiplied exponentially, for both students and teachers. Many of our students felt overwhelmed, due to the volume of work assigned across various courses, coupled with the challenges of managing their time while staying at home, which often led to a false sense of being on vacation.

The need to design activities that promoted student self-management, and that enabled them to demonstrate the knowledge and language skills acquired, along with the desire to provide clear and specific feedback to each student, significantly increased the amount of time typically devoted to these tasks. It is not difficult to imagine the hours that both learners and instructor spent in front of screens during this initial experiment with distance education.

Then came the matter of providing adequate and effective feedback to each student, which was one of the major challenges during this period. Work and assignments were received and returned with annotations, suggestions, and corrections promptly provided to each student.

This contingency, made us deepen our knowledge about the implementation of technology to our teaching practice, we learned the different LMS available, the importance of gamification to keep our students motivation, the modalities of flipped classroom instruction, student and teacher socio-emotional stability, and in general the principles that support distance education, all these topics have become part of our teaching tools that now after the lock-down and back into our regular classrooms have proved to be worth retaining and implementing in our daily teaching practice. We are different from our past selves, we have come out of the crisis renewed and stronger than ever, and MEXTESOL, as well as other national and -

and international professional associations, has been crucial in our improvement and preparation. We celebrate MEXTESOL's 50th anniversary altogether more than prepared for the challenges ahead.

Happy anniversary, Mextesolers!

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