

# Language teaching techniques in the classroom – keys to learning languages successfully!



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William Hague recently told academics there was an “urgent need for Britain to improve its language capacity” and that “Britain’s global standing in business was at grave risk from a lack of men and women with language skills.” This is particularly worrying

given the steady decline in the popularity of language learning in schools over recent decades. It is essential therefore, that teachers find new ways to promote the relevance of languages and make language classes more enjoyable. With today’s rapidly evolving technology there are many ways for language teachers to make language lessons interactive, engaging and enjoyable through a variety of resources. After consulting with a number of language teachers on this subject here are some of the successful language teaching techniques in today’s language classrooms.

## Embrace new technology.

Interactive whiteboards: An interactive whiteboard is much like a standard whiteboard but it connects to a computer and a projector in the classroom to make it a very powerful tool for language teachers. The interactive whiteboard is simply a large, touch-sensitive version of the computer screen. It is controlled by touching it with a special pen (or, on some types of boards, with your finger). Anything that can be accessed from your computer can be accessed and displayed on the interactive whiteboard, for example Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, photographs, websites or online materials allowing the teacher to add variety to the lesson for a variety of exercises: reading, writing, pronunciation, listening and speaking.

IPad apps and other web tools: Teachers have a range of web tools and new technologies available to them to encourage pupils to improve their pronunciation of the target language. Podcasting allows you to record audio material yourself to listen back to time after time. One teacher has used podcasts to enable her students make recordings of reading out loud in French

so that they can hear where they are pronouncing words incorrectly. After studying the correct ways to pronounce words, they then re-record the same piece of text and this time they pronounce the words correctly. Podcasts also allow students to practice the language in their own time, making them responsible for their own learning. Vocaroo is one web tool that pupils can use to make recordings to send to their teacher for feedback.

Similarly, Vodcasts allow pupils to make video recordings in the target language as part of their speaking homework. One teacher found that the pupils enjoyed this so much, they even asked to do more speaking work! Apps such as Ipadio and Audioboo could well represent the future for speaking homework.

Without a doubt by seeing their own work published online gives pupils a huge sense of achievement which encourages them to continue improving their foreign language skills. Since most students find it easy to use computers they are in their comfort zone so can easily focus on learning the language this way.

St. Bede’s Catholic School and Sixth Form College,

County Durham have set up a shared MFL blog page on the school’s website where they publish pupils work in the target language. As part of their language strategy they regularly invite foreign speakers to visit the school and they have developed close links with schools abroad via videoconferencing which allows them to see the real need to communicate in a foreign language and ultimately broadens their minds. The school actively encourages these links through regular exchange visits to schools abroad.

Authentic and up-to-date resources. Using real life resources in the target language stimulates pupil’s motivation and creativity when they can see the language in a realistic context. For example, subscribing to a foreign magazine or using newspaper articles allows pupils to connect not only with the target

language but also the culture. One of the recommendations made by Ofsted in its report

**“Achievement and Challenge” was that “schools must use more authentic materials to help develop pupil’s language skills and understanding of a country’s culture.”**

Foreign exchange trips whereby pupils stay with a host family are an excellent opportunity for cultural immersion which brings the language to life. Allan Hemsworth a retired teacher who has been arranging exchange trips for over 40 years says,

“There’s nothing that isn’t positive about exchange trips. We’ve had a few problems with homesickness, but no disasters. It’s a rite of passage, and the motivation to learn the language increases in the kids exponentially.”

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# Language teaching techniques *continued*

Native-speaking language assistants. By investing in a native-speaking language assistant students will gain confidence at using the language. Often, within the classroom environment there is not enough time available for each pupil to practice speaking the language. Many students find it daunting to speak in a foreign language in front of the rest of the class. By spending just a few minutes each week with a native-speaker either individually or in small groups they will have a much better chance to actually speak the language and furthermore being able to communicate with someone from the country itself will increase their enthusiasm and give them greater confidence to use the language.

In-service training courses for teachers. Although language teachers have studied the language to degree level with a compulsory year spent living in the country where the language is spoken, taking part in an in-service training course during their career as a teacher can have a huge impact on their professional development. This involves the teacher spending a week or two in the exchange country whereby they can job-shadow in a school. This refreshes their knowledge of the language and renews their enthusiasm for the language and culture which they will bring back to the classroom and therefore their revitalised energy will be passed on to pupils. If the teacher looks as if they are enjoying teaching the language, it is much more likely that pupils

will enjoy learning it. These visits also give teachers the opportunity to bring back useful, authentic resources for lessons.

What is particularly good about these courses is that there is European funding available therefore the school budget is not affected.

A varied approach. It is apparent that the key to successful teaching is variety. There needs to be lots of speaking through pair and group work backed up by the other three skills; listening, reading and writing.

Task-based learning through communication and practical uses of the language is now a common approach in British schools. Bringing languages to life by getting children out of their seats and actively involved in the language and culture is vital. For instance, Brighton Hill Community College, Basingstoke strongly believes languages are an asset to all students regardless of their ability and to highlight to pupils the importance of languages and cultural understanding it organises a series of events such as an International cooking and Dance event to celebrate the “European Day of Languages” celebrated every September. It has organised a German Football League to reach out to boys who would normally reject language learning and it has also run several study visits abroad. Similarly, Bournemouth School in Dorset runs several “Language Days” one of which involved Year 10 pupils developing a new product to be marketed to foreign visitors.

Stimulating visual aids. Good teaching displays on the classroom walls with key vocabulary or verb patterns as well as lively, interesting posters are vital to engage pupils and to inspire them to learn more about the language and culture.

Making pupils responsible for their own learning. Pupils should be encouraged to discover the method of learning that works best for them, since there are so many ways to learn a language. Luca Lampariello, a hyperpolyglot and language consultant who speaks twelve languages, says:

***“Languages cannot be taught, they can only be learnt. The best way is to tell students right away that they are responsible for their own learning process, and the teacher is just a guide who has to motivate them.”***

## **Keeping up with new technology**

The problem with embracing new technology and teaching ideas is that it is extremely time-consuming to research the most suitable apps for each specific age group and it is an ongoing task keeping up to date with them.

Often there is just not enough time available for teachers to research them fully before putting them into practice. There is also the concern that the pupils may be more tech-savvy than the teachers! However, there are ways that teachers can keep abreast with

the ever-changing educational environment by joining online fora such as TES, Linguanet and Mfl resources as well as subscribing to the MFL Twitterati. This is an excellent platform for teachers to share ideas and offer feedback regarding innovative classroom teaching practices. There are currently 956 subscribers with language teachers communicating with each other from all over the world. Teachers can also join the Association for Language Learning to share teaching ideas.

In the Modern Languages report, “Achievement and Challenge” by Ofsted, it is clear that it would like schools to use more new technology in language classes. However, it must be acknowledged that to enable teachers to embrace technology and develop innovative ways of teaching languages to enhance pupils’ experiences, adequate levels of investment need to be made in terms of both funding and time. This can only be achieved if those in higher positions share and support teachers’ aims to provide excellent language lessons and are willing to provide the necessary level of support. Technology is here to stay therefore we need to learn how to embrace it to inspire today’s students when it comes to learning languages.

**An opinion piece by Fiona Dunmore of Viva Language Services.**

**For more information visit [www.vivalanguageservices.co.uk](http://www.vivalanguageservices.co.uk)**

## **Young people without good GCSEs in English and maths must continue to study the subjects.**

Thousands more young people will have the chance to leave school, college or training with a good grasp of English and maths after the introduction today of a major government reform.

From this term, all pupils who fail to achieve

a good pass – C or better – in English or maths GCSE by the time they finish secondary school must continue to study the subjects in post-16 education until they get these qualifications.

The reform was proposed in 2011 by Professor Alison Wolf in her ground-breaking review of vocational education, and backed by Education Secretary Michael Gove.

Professor Wolf highlighted the thousands of young people who leave school or college without good English and maths.

She said it was “shocking” that the system of funding schools and colleges post-16

“actively discouraged 16- to 19-year-olds from catching up with their English and maths.”

For young people aged 19 in 2012:

- 285,000 had left secondary school age 16 without a C or better in both GCSE English and maths
- by the age of 19, 255,000 still did not have a C or better in both GCSE English and maths

The move will help address concerns that standards of literacy and numeracy among many school and college leavers are not good enough.