

1 Who are the learners?

Main focus

To raise awareness regarding the learners, their backgrounds, their level of comprehension and production.

Learning outcomes

- Trainees are aware of the diversity of learner purposes, goals, expectations, and degree of motivation.
- Trainees can describe different levels of proficiency in general terms.
- Trainees understand the importance of identifying and accommodating learner differences.

Key concepts

- purposes, goals, expectations, motivation
- English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a second language (ESL), English as an international language (EIL), English for specific purposes (ESP)
- acquisition vs learning
- monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism

Stage	Focus
A Warm-up	reflecting on a previous second language learning experience
B Learners' purposes	identifying the different purposes for learning English
C Learners' goals	distinguishing between different goals
D Learners' expectations	relating learners' expectations to their background
Reflection	thinking of questions to ask to (or about) the learners

Note: It is expected that this session will take place prior to the trainees meeting their teaching practice classes for the first time. If this is not possible, it should be scheduled as near to the start of the teaching practice as possible, so that trainees can get the maximum benefit from the diagnostic task (see **Reflection**).

A Warm-up

You could begin this stage by briefly relating a language learning experience of your own. Organise the class into groups to share their experiences. The objective of the activity is to identify context factors that impact on learning, particularly the learners' purposes, achievement goals, expectations and degree of motivation. At the end of the discussion, elicit examples of widely differing learning experiences.

Trainer's manual: A The learners and their contexts

An alternative way of introducing this activity is to set up a 'Find someone who....' activity, with trainees milling in order to ask and answer questions to find trainees who share certain language learning experiences. Photocopy and distribute the following rubric:

Find someone who:

- speaks at least two other languages fluently
- is bilingual
- taught themselves a second language
- picked up a second language simply by living in the country where it is spoken
- studied a second language at school but didn't enjoy the experience

B Learners' purposes

Ask trainees to read the profiles and identify the learners' reasons for learning English. These are, in general terms:

- Ning Wang – to pass an exam, and then to study in English
- Lucia – probably no immediate purpose
- Kazankiran and Maxim – integration into an English-speaking society, including work and education
- Soni Kim – travel
- Carmen – business
- Mies – academic study.

- 1 You could write up the abbreviations (EFL, ESL, etc.) on the board, and ask trainees if they know what they stand for. Trainees then identify the one that best matches each situation. (You may like to do the first one with them.) Answers: Ning Wang: EFL, EAP; Lucia: EFL; Kazankiran: ESL; Maxim: ESL; Soni Kim: EFL; Carmen: ESP, EIL; Mies: EAP, EIL. Note that the term ESOL (= English for speakers of other languages) is widely used to cover both EFL and ESL.

Note that none of these terms is unproblematic, and that the point of the matching activity is to problematise them, to a certain extent. The difference between *foreign* and *second* is not always obvious; and for many learners English is not their *second* but perhaps their *third* or *fourth* language (which is why the acronym EAL – *English as an additional language* – is sometimes preferred). Also, now that English has global language status, it is likely that the EFL/EIL distinction will become blurred, to the point of being irrelevant. (ESP is dealt with in more detail in *Classroom Teaching Session 22*.)

The next three questions introduce key concepts in language acquisition:

- 2 The nearest to a pure bilingual (i.e. someone who has two 'first' languages) is perhaps Mies, (Dutch and English), but it could also be argued that all these learners are bilingual (or multilingual) in that they have (some degree of) competence in more than one language. Since Kazankiran already speaks two languages, the addition of English will make her multilingual. It is worth pointing out that bilingualism/multilingualism is a more 'normal' condition than monolingualism: for many learners, English will not be even a second language.
- 3 All things being equal, the closer the first language and the second language are – in terms of vocabulary, grammar, script, and pronunciation – the more likely the former will aid the learning of the latter. Thus, Lucia's Italian, Carmen's Portuguese and Mies's Dutch will contribute more to their English learning than, say, Soni Kim's Korean, or Kazankiran's Kurdish and Arabic.

1 Who are the learners?

- 4 The distinction between (intentional) *learning*, e.g. in a classroom context, and (incidental) *acquisition* is a useful one, but, again, easily blurred. The clearest instance of acquisition in these profiles is Maxim. Both Ning Wang and Kazankiran are attending classes, but they are probably also picking up English by virtue of living in an English-speaking context. This is not the case with Carmen or Soni Kim, who are closer to the learning end of the spectrum. Mies started English at such an early age that he probably picked up (i.e. acquired) more language than he learnt formally, at least initially.
- 5 Those living in an English-speaking environment (Kazankiran, Ning Wang, and Maxim) will be getting the most exposure, but this may be limited, depending on the contact they have with English-speakers. Mies will also be getting a lot of exposure, although more to non-native speakers than native speakers perhaps. Soni Kim is probably getting the least exposure, since Carmen probably already uses her English in her business dealings, and Lucia is attending classes both at school and after school. All of the case studies (except perhaps for Soni Kim) are *users* to some extent. Even Lucia could be said to be putting her language knowledge to use, even if this is in a classroom context. This suggests that labelling learners as, simply, *learners*, masks the fact that many of them are already using English, maybe in ways that do not always reflect the content and pace of their formal learning.
- 6 Without more information, it is hard to say who is likely to be motivated or not. Motivation is a rather personal attribute, and is not necessarily a result of having a clear purpose (or motive) for learning, although this certainly helps. The extent that the learning experience fulfils the learners' expectations will also contribute to their motivation.
- 7 The answer to this question will obviously depend on the particular circumstances of the trainees, but it is likely that most of them will be anticipating teaching in (adult) EFL, rather than ESL, contexts, and to groups rather than one-to-one or online.

C Learners' goals

The point of this section is to introduce criteria for establishing learning goals, and to suggest that different learners will have different goals, in terms of the level of proficiency they wish (or need) to achieve. The concept of *partial competence* may be sufficient for many.

- 1 a Maxim; b Kazankiran; c Soni Kim; d Carmen.
- 2 Soni Kim and Maxim are at the basic user end of the scale, while Carmen probably aims to be an independent user and Kazankiran a proficient user. Note that these terms are borrowed from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEF), a 'detailed model for describing and scaling language use'.

D Learners' expectations

- 1 Ning Wang expected a more traditional, teacher-controlled, accuracy-focused classroom.
- 2 The type of classroom he was used to in China.
- 3 Given the exam-orientation of the course he is attending, these expectations could be considered realistic.
- 4 Despite Lucia's expectations (based on her school experience) not being met, she was happy since the less formal, learner-centred approach of her evening classes probably seemed appropriate.
- 5 The notion of *appropriacy* is probably more important than simply trying to match instruction to learners' expectations. The new approach was more appropriate for Lucia than for Ning Wang.

Trainer's manual: A The learners and their contexts

REFLECTION

- 1 Ideally, this task should be prepared in advance of the trainees meeting their teaching practice classes for the first time. The trainees can then conduct interviews with their teaching practice students: if there are more students than trainees in these classes, the interviews can take place in small groups. The number of questions will depend on the level of the classes, but, in any case, they should be quite broad, offering learners plenty of opportunity to speak. E.g. 'Tell me about your English classes at school in ...'
- 2 If it is not possible for trainees to interview the students, the questions can be directed at you, as long as you know who will be in the teaching practice classes.

2 Learners as individuals

Main focus

To raise awareness about the individual needs of learners and how these needs can be accommodated.

Learning outcomes

- Trainees are aware of the diversity of learner purposes, goals, expectations and degree of motivation.
- Trainees can describe different levels of proficiency in general terms.
- Trainees understand the importance of identifying and accommodating learner differences.

Key concepts

- learning styles, multiple intelligences
- learning strategies, learner training
- learner autonomy, individualised instruction

Stage	Focus
A Warm-up	reflecting on learner differences
B Learning style	identifying different learning styles
C Multiple intelligences	identifying different kinds of intelligence
D Learning strategies and learner training	identifying learning strategies and evaluating learner training approaches
E Learner autonomy	exploring ways of developing learner autonomy
Reflection	summarising ways of dealing with diversity

Note that this session should be timetabled only when the trainees are already familiar with their teaching practice students.

A Warm-up

Trainees can perform this reflective task in pairs or small groups. Ideally, they should work with other members of their teaching practice group, so that they share a familiarity with the learners. Note that some of the differences they identify may relate to the context factors discussed in Unit A1, such as previous learning experience and motivation. A brief review of this session may be helpful.

B Learning style

- 1 Characteristics of a passive–experiential learning style (type C) might be: they enjoy the social aspects of learning, and like to learn from experience, but more as observers than active participators; type D learners, on the other hand, are willing to take risks, are not afraid of making mistakes, and prefer direct communication rather than analysis and study of rules.

Trainer's manual: A The learners and their contexts

- 2 Trainees can work on this task in pairs or small groups. Some typical questions might be:
- How do you feel when your teacher corrects you?
 - Do you like games and groupwork in class?
 - Do you try to speak English outside the classroom?
 - How often do you read in English?
 - How often do you watch English movies?
 - Do you note down new words when you read them?
 - Do you review your English lessons?
 - Do you always do your homework?

Note: If trainees have the opportunity, they could use their questionnaires in their teaching practice classes, and use the data to feed into their 'Focus on the learner' assignment.

C Multiple intelligences

Note: As well as the intelligences listed, other intelligences, such as *emotional intelligence*, *natural intelligence* and *spiritual intelligence* have been proposed. You could also point out that classroom activities involving movement and physical contact may not go down well in certain contexts.

- 1 The activity is designed to foster interpersonal intelligence. There is also a kinesthetic element, perhaps, since it involves touch and movement.
- 2 You can make this task easier by suggesting that trainees consult their coursebooks to find activities that might match the different intelligences.
 - *visual intelligence*: anything involving images, e.g. visual aids, video, learners drawing (e.g. a picture that is dictated to them)
 - *kinesthetic intelligence*: activities involving movement, e.g. action games (like *Simon says...*), 'Total Physical Response' techniques, drama activities, etc.
 - *musical intelligence*: listening to and singing songs; jazz chants; background music (as in Suggestopedia).

D Learning strategies and learner training

- 1 1 The areas of language learning that these strategies focus on are:
 - Learner A: pronunciation, particularly intonation; memorising chunks of language
 - Learner B: vocabulary
 - Learner C: speaking/interacting
 - Learner D: reading
- 2 The learning principles involved might be:
 - A: repetition aids memory, at least in the short term; subvocalisation helps pronunciation
 - B: forming associations aids memory
 - C: interaction is necessary for language learning; collaboration aids learning
 - D: using 'top-down' processes such as guessing meaning from context improves reading fluency
- 2 The extracts target:
 - A: vocabulary learning
 - B: dictionary use, for both pronunciation and meaning
 - C: note-taking and record-keeping, especially of vocabulary

- 3 You may prefer to assign one extract per group, and then have groups report back. Possible ways of exploiting these extracts include:
- A: demonstrating the use of word cards in class; asking learners to prepare their own and to show them to each other; testing each other; including a word-card writing and testing slot in each lesson, at least initially, until learners are in the habit.
 - B: distributing dictionaries and asking learners to work together to find the meanings and pronunciation of unfamiliar words; asking them to group words that rhyme, using the dictionary; using dictionaries to choose between similar words to fit a context, e.g. commuter, computer.
 - C: completing a verb chart; dictating verbs that learners then record in their notebooks, along with their pronunciation; asking learners to 'proof-read' each other's vocabulary records; reviewing their notes in later lessons and asking them to pronounce the words to each other.

E Learner autonomy

Before this activity, elicit the different kinds of reference sources that are targeted at learners, such as grammar reference books, dictionaries (print, on-line, CD; monolingual, bilingual, picture, specialised, etc.), vocabulary exercise books, the reference sections of their coursebooks, CD-ROMs and internet grammar sites. Then, elicit as many different ways in which learners might have exposure to English, even in non-English speaking contexts, e.g. films, TV, songs, books, newspapers and magazines, adverts, internet (including sound files, video, etc.), computer games, tourists, etc. Trainees can use these lists to help brainstorm ideas in order to make suggestions for each of the questions. Some possible ideas:

- a Read graded readers; magazines targeted at learners; literature written for English-speaking children or teenagers; short authentic texts about topics they are familiar with.
- b Listen to songs where the lyrics are available, watch videos with English subtitles; download short news reports from the internet, and read their associated news story.
- c Watch movies with English subtitles, rather than L1 subtitles; record movies and watch short segments repeatedly, perhaps with a copy of the script, if available; choose movies that are based on a novel or a play, and read the book in advance, especially if it's available in a simplified form (e.g. classics such as *Pride and Prejudice*); avoid films whose English is very vernacular, regional, etc.
- d Probably not; alternatives are learning words that come up in reading texts, or at least learning from lists of high frequency words (such as the *defining words* found at the back of most learner's dictionaries).
- e Find grammar sites on the internet, buy a grammar reference book with exercises (e.g. *English Grammar in Use* by Raymond Murphy, CUP); use the exercises in the coursebook and the workbook.
- f Start a blog; find sites dedicated to learners; join a chat room; use the reference material available, including corpus sites; download the lyrics of songs, extracts of films, reading and listening material, etc. (For further ideas, see *The Internet and the Language Classroom* by Gavin Dudeney, CUP.)
- g Use pronunciation materials; join an English-speaking club; have a conversation exchange with an English speaker who wants to learn your language; record yourself speaking, etc.

Trainer's manual: A The learners and their contexts

REFLECTION

Organise trainees into groups and distribute materials to make posters or projections. Points that might come up are:

DO	DON'T
diagnose learners' needs, interests, learning styles, goals, etc.	treat learners as if they were all the same
provide a range of different activity types, topics etc.	use the same approach all the time, e.g. to teaching grammar or practising vocabulary
offer choices, and involve the learners in making decisions about the materials, activities, etc.	use the coursebook all the time
help learners make the best use of their learning style/intelligence	expect all learners to work comfortably at the same pace and rhythm
show learners how to take advantage of opportunities for learning outside the classroom	ignore learner resistance or frustrations
teach specific strategies to improve learning (learner training)	assume everyone learns in the same way that you do
mix and match learners, providing different opportunities for collaboration and interaction	
provide individual assistance and counselling where possible	
get feedback on the learning process at regular intervals	