

The Role of a Learner Engagement Manual in the Dynamics of the Language Classroom

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Abstract This study addresses the pressing need of engaging learners of English as a foreign language at basic education level in meaningful learning experiences. It investigates the role of a learner engagement manual on classroom dynamics. The researcher designed a learner engagement manual and trained twenty pre-service teachers at the College of Education and Basic Sciences at Ajman University of Science and Technology on using it at practical training schools. An observation sheet was applied before the training on the manual. It was later applied to the same classrooms after the training. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviation and Wilcoxon equation using the SPSS Version 20 were used to measure the effectiveness of the manual. Results show that the learner engagement manual helps both teachers and learners create an entertaining, dynamic and engaging classroom. These results have an implication for curriculum developers, teachers and test developers for involving learners as active participants in all aspects of the teaching-learning process.

Keywords: *engagement, classroom dynamics, teaching strategies, language, interactive teaching*

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1. Introduction

Engagement is regarded as an important component of interactive teaching. Thus, there is an emphasis on the importance of maintaining pupils' interest in language learning and providing an enjoyable and engaging classroom environment. Early studies identified student engagement through observable behaviors such as participation and time on the task. [4] Some researchers focused on the emotional or affective aspects of engagement such as Connell (1990) and Finn (1989) who identified it as feelings of belonging, enjoyment and attachment. Other researchers such as Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) studied aspects of cognitive engagement such as students' investment in learning, perseverance in the face of challenges and use of deep rather than superficial strategies. Another group of researchers included self-regulation, referred to as the extent to which students demonstrate control over their learning actions, as a component of cognitive engagement. [4].

One of the challenges facing schools and teachers today is how to provide an engaging curriculum. Such a curriculum should be relevant to the actual world in which the child is living as well as allowing the opportunity for hands-on activities, child's questioning, curiosity, exploration, discussion and reflection. Children need to have tasks suited to their age level, language ability and interests. They need to feel included as valued members of

the learning community, to have an access to success and recognition and to enjoy learning.

Meaningful engagement in classroom activities is a key protective factor in children's cognitive and social development. [3] It helps them make a psychological investment in learning. They incorporate the new material in their lives (Newman et al., 1992, p.12). Teachers should engage the pupils through experiential, authentic activities relevant to the pupils' lives and suited to their levels and interests. They should reach out to all pupils and provide support when needed.

Authentic, experiential and enjoyable learning experiences help children become more interested and motivated and consequently, more engaged in the learning process. [3] These experiences satisfy some of the fundamental psychological needs of children, namely the need for competence, success and fun. Engaging learners' emotions helps better retention and more enjoyment. [6] Geake and Cooper (2003) emphasized that the strongest connections in our brains occur when we are emotionally engaged in concrete, meaningful learning experiences. [3]

The most effective learning experiences are engaging. Teaching should be tailored to students' needs. Many children commence their schooling without the language skills and the supportive background to assist their learning. They may fail to achieve satisfactory results. In the past, such students could leave early and join unskilled work. The restructuring of work eliminated such opportunities and called for specialized skills. [9]

Learning is more effective if it attracts the attention and interest of the learner. It should also be relevant and contextualized. It should require an action on the part of

the learner. [13] Relevance is an important variable in the in the teaching/learning process. If something is important or relevant to students, they are more likely to actively participate and experience long-term learning. Authentic methods of instruction require learners to produce, rather than reproduce knowledge that is relevant to their own lives and to achieve tasks in ways that are of value to themselves and to society [7].

Whenever children are allowed to take risks, apply learning in different contexts and express their opinions in a non-threatening atmosphere, they are highly engaged in the learning activities. Children are more engaged when they understand the learning objectives and try to review their learning and improve it. They are capable of entering into many roles and having different identities. Both teachers and learners bring their knowledge, skills, attitudes and creative capabilities to the learning process. Consequently, having balanced roles and responsibilities for both teachers and pupils can help engagement. An indication of that engagement is when learners participate, attend classes, pay attention to the teacher, respond to teacher's directions and questions, show enthusiasm and engage in a range of peer or group interactions and develop longer attention spans. Whenever pupils and teachers share decision-making through discussion, recursive role taking and co-construction of learning activities, they engage in a joint exploration of learning and teaching.

Children are not simply language learners; they are individuals who have psycho cognitive make up, personal history, prior experiences and life goals. These factors combine to influence their attitude to the process of language learning itself and the way they define the goals of learning. Each learner has his/her personal perspective on language teaching/learning. Effective teaching depends crucially on teachers being able to tune in to the meaning which language learning has for their students, both as individuals and as members of a learning group [20].

Learners' willingness to join in as collaborators in the teaching/learning process determines their success. Learners have a shared set of expectations, interests and needs. These shared aspects have roots in their cultural background or may emerge from the interpersonal dynamics of a given class group. An explicit culture of success where there are high expectations, high aspirations and an explicit celebration of that success can create an optimism and hope which are fundamental to engagement, commitment and motivation. Teachers' acceptance of learners, respect for their comments and opinions and listening attentively to their answers are all motivating factors that lead learners to be engaged. Assessing children's growing commitments is also motivating. In addition, implementing a sense of humor and relating information to children' culture and background lead to engaging and meaningful learning experiences.

Teachers, like learners, are individuals and their actions in the classroom reflect their individuality and their own personal philosophy of teaching. Each teacher defines the nature and goals of language teaching according to his own rationality of teaching. This affects what teachers do in the class and how they interact with the actions and expectations of other participants. Teachers need to examine their own expectations and assumptions and how these contribute to the dynamics of their teaching. [20] It

is, therefore, necessary to explore what the classroom means to the different participants involved, and how these various rationalities influence participants' choices and decisions.

Humor and laughter help relieve tension, make learning more human, increase students' interaction and participation, and make the learning environment more enjoyable. It is also important for emotional health and well-being. It can help capture and keep students' attention. People tend to remember humorous incidents better than others do, so it can maximize students' recall in instructional situations, particularly when the humor is spontaneous and relevant to the topic being taught [7].

Teachers are crucial to the presence of humor in the classroom. They can promote appropriate uses of humor by using a variety of strategies to foster enjoyable and humorous approaches to the teaching/learning process. Teachers can display playfulness, take risks, be open to learners' ideas and communicate the message that learning can be fun, even though it requires hard work and persistence.

Teaching should expand beyond school building into the society. Media can be used not only as a source of information and entertainment but also as a form of public education. Because the mass media constitutes a powerful and pervasive force, educators must guide students in review of the electronic media and their effects on individuals and society. Students should be trained to show their own products on the school website, to design and work on e-games, caricatures and language comic strips, which tune in their local dynamics.

Teachers must inform their decisions about which teaching tools and techniques to use with knowledge related to individual learners and diverse learning needs. They also must consider learners' prior knowledge and experiences so they can effectively connect what learners already know and can do with the new knowledge and skills they are learning. Effective instructional approaches are culturally responsive and culturally relevant. Culturally inclusive approaches promote harmony among different groups and increase students' knowledge of their cultural heritage. In addition, culturally responsive instructional strategies create connections between different curricular components, are authentic, are learner-centered, and are relevant to learners' real lives. Such relevance and connections can be achieved in part by using materials from learners' cultures and history to illustrate specific principles and concepts [7].

Teachers need to be trained to structure the learning environment, both the physical environment and the affective one, to promote and encourage more active learner participation and more student responses to teachers' questions. Students' language learning goals and needs influenced proactive decisions about tasks and materials; students' affective states had an impact on interactive decisions.

2. Problem of the Study

The researcher's daily observation of classrooms at basic education schools as part of her work as a trainer and an academic supervisor shows that most of the learners at the English class are de -motivated and lack a

passion for learning. They study for getting grades in their examination. In spite of the fact that they do participate in all the activities (mainly Interrogation, Response and Evaluation activities), they are not genuinely engaged. A close look at the life of classrooms shows that these classrooms rely on performance, examinations and competition. There is little space for individual support, collaborative learning and peer tutoring which results in frustrated, disengaged and demotivated pupils. Dewey referred to the destructive power of schools. His quote about school sapping our souls applies to both teachers and students. Schools create test takers rather than nurturing human beings [15,16].

Children do not have choice on content, activities or testing. School days are too planned with specific timing for each subject and activity and pupils sitting at their desks listening to 1teachers' explanations, reading textbooks and filling out worksheets that leave no room for spontaneity. Based on these problems in the observed classes, the researcher designed a manual and got pre service teachers to apply it for engaging pupils and igniting the dynamics of the language classroom.

3. Questions of the Study

Based on the review of the related literature in addition to the experience of the researcher as a teaching staff and an academic supervisor, the current research is seeking to answer the main question of this study which is "*How can teachers and learners collaborate on creating a dynamic and engaging English language classroom?*". From this question, a number of sub questions are raised as follows:

- What is the effectiveness of a learner engagement manual on the teaching strategies that promote a dynamic classroom?
- How can a learner engagement manual affect the learning environment?
- What is the impact of that manual on learners' participation and involvement which affect the dynamics of the classroom?

4. Significance of the Study

This study gets teachers to help learners to be motivated, interested and engaged in the language classroom. Being involved in the learning process helps to prevent the problems that arise from disengagement and demotivation. Learners' reluctance to participate in the class activities and to accomplish the various tasks in a timely manner is alarming. Learners' inattentiveness and their failure to show a genuine interest in language learning are major problems faced by the teachers at UAE schools. This study helps teachers deal with these problems.

5. Definition of Terminology

Engagement:

Engagement describes the situation when learners are captured, heart and mind; cognitively and affectively, in learning. Rosebrough (2010) identified engaged learners as "self-regulated, defining their own goals and evaluating

their own achievement. They become energized by their learning; their joy of learning leads to a lifelong ability to solve problems by transferring their knowledge to new contexts. Engaged learners are also cooperative, having and valuing the skills to work with others." [14]

Teaching Strategies:

A strategy is a step-by-step process of building pupils' ability to complete tasks on their own. It has objectives, content, teaching materials and evaluation means. Soliman (2011) proposed and defined creative-interactive teaching strategies as the teaching approaches that involve learners and call for their varied responses where learners are expected to play an active role. [18]

Classroom Dynamics:

Classroom dynamics refer to the interaction between learners and teachers in a classroom community where learning is lively, meaningful and fun.

Basic Education Level

It refers to the school years when schooling is obligatory from grade 1 to grade 9 for children ages 6 to ages 14.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study is concerned with pre-service English language teachers at the basic education schools in UAE in the second semester of the academic year 2011/2012 and in the first and second semester of the academic year 2012/2013.

7. Study Method and Data Collection

The researcher reviewed the relevant literature such as Deakin Crick 2006; Cefai 2008; Hewitt 2008, Schever 2009; Pardoe 2009; Furedi 2010; Gerver 2010; Suarez-Orozco 2010; Wegerif 2010; and Browne 2007 to design the learner engagement manual. It was shown to jurors who provided the researcher with suggestions and comments. Ninety percent of jurors agreed on the clarity and suitability of the content of the manual to the objectives of the study. The researcher provided the pre service teachers with a copy of the manual and clarified how they can make a good use of it. The manual focuses on the teaching strategies, pupil-teacher partnership, learner's involvement and participation in addition to the learning environment (Appendix II).

The researcher applied the observation form in the second semester of the academic year 2011/2012 and in the first and second semester of the academic year 2012/2013 respectively to twenty professional diploma student-teachers (in this research referred to as pre-service teachers) at the College of Education and Basic Sciences at Ajman University of Science and Technology (AUST). These students enrolled for practical training and had to attend schools three days a week for a whole semester as part of their graduation requirements. At the same time, they had to finish the remaining theory courses. They had been taught by the researcher a theoretical course entitled

“Methods of Teaching English” with its practical part, which is “Microteaching”.

It is worth mentioning that the pre service teachers were observed at the first two weeks of their teaching practice before receiving the manual. They had been trained by the researcher on learner engagement through classroom learning activities and the teaching/ learning strategies modeled by the researcher herself in the theoretical course and through an explicit discussion of the definition of learner engagement, classroom dynamics and the procedures for the implementation and evaluation of that engagement. They were also administered to research on active learning and to role-play pupils in “Microteaching” in parallel to their teaching practice at the practical training schools for the following four weeks of their practical training. Then, they got the learner engagement manual and were observed again in the last eight weeks.

8. Instruments for Data Collection

A five-point Likert scale observation sheet was developed by the researcher as the instrument for data collection in this research. The purpose of the observation is to track the changes in the dynamics of the classroom to show the role of the learner engagement manual in creating a dynamic language classroom. It consists of three domains. The number of items in its original version was 68. The researcher got a feedback on the observation form from experienced professionals in the field to

measure face validity and jurors’ validity. After conducting modifications based on jurors’ ratio of agreement, the observation form in its final version was applied (See Appendix I). The researcher calculated its reliability. In its final version, the observation form consists of three sections, a total of 64 items. The first section covers the teaching strategies. It consists of 34 items. The second section focuses on the learning environment. It consisted of 10 items. The third section gauges learners’ involvement and participation. It has 20 items. As a five-point Likert scale has been used, grades have been given to each scale as Always 5, Usually 4, Sometimes 3, Rarely 2 and Never 1.

Among the objectives of the observation sheet is to make sure that pre service teachers apply the manual in their teaching. It also aims at observing the teacher-pupil partnership in language teaching and learning and the dynamics of their classrooms. The researcher and the cooperating teachers (the second observer) observed the pre service teachers for each observation. The correlation between the observation of the two observers at the times of applying the observation form was calculated. Inter-rater reliability was assessed by calculating the correlations between the two raters who observed five pre-service teachers using the same observational sheet. The correlations were then calculated between the two raters over each of the three domains of the observation sheet; teaching strategies, learning environment, and students’ involvement. [Table 1](#) summarized the results.

Table 1. Correlations between the Two Raters

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Instructional Skills (34 items)	.16	.55**	.36*	.26	.30
Learning Environment (10 items)	.50	.54	.16	.80**	.80**
Students Involvement (20 items)	.55*	.60**	.79**	.25	.25

The results in the above-mentioned table show high agreement between the two raters over most of the teachers as *: $P < .05$ and **: $P < .01$. However, some values are not statistically significant because of the small size of the sample of the observation especially with the learning environment domain which has only 10 items. In general, the results of the correlations indicate acceptable level of inter-rater reliability. This supports the use of the observational sheet in collecting the data of this study.

9. Procedures of the Study

To answer the first research question, “What is the effectiveness of the learner engagement manual on the teaching strategies that promote a dynamic classroom?”, the researcher reviewed the literature related to the teaching strategies that invite learner engagement especially her own work for her doctorate thesis on creative-interactive teaching strategies [18].

Based on the review of literature, the researcher assembled the items of the first domain of the observation sheet. Previous studies on instruction and its effect on learner engagement show that a variety of practices such as cooperative learning, encouraging learner autonomy, providing learners with choice, relating content to real life and encouraging creativity promote learner engagement (Dolezal et al., 2003; Guthrie et al., 1999; Guthrie et al.,

2000, Schunk et al., 2008; Skinner and Belmont, 1993; Skinner et al., 2008).

Literature on learner engagement also shows that teachers who support learners and challenge them at the same time manage to engage those learners such as Lutz et al., 2006; Turner and Meyer, 2004; Dolezal et al., 2003; Turner et al., 1998; Skinner and Belmont, 1993. The combination of challenge and support was illustrated in Turner and colleagues’ 1998 study. In that study, the researchers examined the relationship between teachers’ instructional discourse with students and involvement in Math instruction. Questionnaires were responded to by fifth and sixth grade students in seven mathematics classrooms regarding their experience at the end of four or five class periods. The extent of student involvement was determined by the match between challenges and skills based on the flow paradigm. Students in high-involvement classrooms reported feeling more intrinsically motivated, open and relaxed than those from low-environment classrooms. Moreover, Bogner et al. (2002) found that the most highly engaging teachers individualized their instruction. Lutz et al. (2006) found that when teachers gave direct attention to students individually, students were highly engaged 76% of the time.

To answer the second question, “How can a learner engagement manual affect the learning environment?”, the researcher reviewed the literature related to learner engagement and assembled the items of the second

domain of the observation sheet. Soliman (2011) called for letting learners take the lead through encouraging learners' generated questions, organization, management and evaluation of discussions, and problem solving. In engaging classrooms, all pupils are provided with:

- Experiential and enquiry- based tasks where they can connect learning to their own experiences
- Learning tasks suited to their interests, developmental level and pace
- Opportunities to experience learning as an enjoyable activity
- Opportunities for success and recognition
- Support in learning as required
- A focus on learning rather than just achievement
- Opportunities to learn together and from each other and to construct learning experiences together
- Opportunities to be fully included in the classroom activities [18]

To answer the third question, "What is the impact of the manual on learners' participation and involvement which affect the dynamics of the language classroom?", the researcher reviewed the related literature and assembled the items of the third domain of the observation sheet. Research shows that teachers teach the learner, not the content; therefore, the focus should be on how to get learners to be responsible for their own learning. Learners should not depend on the teacher as the only source of learning, but rather discover their own capabilities to learn and view their peers as a valuable source of learning. "By questioning themselves and their strategies, students become expert learners. They learn how to learn. They become able to ask good questions. Teachers are well-organized, make effective use of time and use classroom time to maximize learning." [10]

Moreover, teachers who provide opportunities for an academic intensity- that is high level of concentration in challenging and important activities, in addition to a positive emotional response- can facilitate meaningful engagement. According to the literature on learning engagement, Discussion engages students, broadens their perspectives and promotes meaning-making, decision-making and higher-level thinking." [19]

In addition, Rosebrough (2010) stated that "Teaching occurs when learning happens and learning results when students are engaged with new information in contexts meaningful to them." [14]

Based on the literature review, the researcher assembled the learner engagement manual and trained the pre service teachers on its application. The learner engagement manual focuses on the nature and quality of instruction (teaching strategies) as well as the role of the learner in the learning process (partnership) in addition to the dynamics of the classroom (learning environment). The manual includes guidelines for teachers and pupils to create a new mindset to establish conditions that support learning and attend to the cognitive, social, affective and physical capabilities of learners. It helps them develop high-quality personal relationship where each of them is having a positive contribution to develop an intensive and purposeful involvement. It also guides them in creating a dialogue on language learning and a passionate learner who develops the desire and capacity to keep on learning the foreign language.

Teachers are nurturing educators ensuring a balance between the academic and affective aspects of teaching and learning. As educators, they have the responsibility to educate and inspire the whole child- mind, heart and soul. They are sometimes likened to therapeutic agents who support pupils in need of help from different social, emotional and behavioral difficulties. [3]

They help build a caring relationship with them, finding their strengths and giving them roles and responsibilities, while keeping them in the classroom activities and rewarding their participation and effort.

10. Findings of the Study

One hypothesis was tested through the application of the observation sheet. This hypothesis was stated as follows: There are no significant differences at level 0.05 at applying the learner engagement manual between the pre application and the post application of the observation sheet on the sample of the study. The statistical analysis started by screening the data for outliers and missing data. No outliers or extreme values were observed and all variables had complete data with no missing values. The following is a detailed description of the observational scale, participants and results:

As mentioned before, the observational Scale which was used to collect that data in this study consisted of 64 positively worded items each measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). It included three subscales: Teaching Strategies (34 items), Learning Environment (10 items), and Students Involvement and Participation (20 items), the scale was used to collect data from participating teachers before and after using the learning engagement manual on their classes.

Correlations among the Subscales

The following table includes the correlations among the three subscales and the overall scale of the observational scale for the pretest data.

Table 2. Inter –Subscale Correlations for the Pre-test Data

	1	2	3	4
Instructional Skills (1)	1			
Learning Environment (2)	.39	1		
Students Involvement (3)	.57**	.57**	1	
Overall (4)	.93**	.60**	.82**	1

All correlations were statistically significant ($P < .01$) except the correlation between the Teaching Strategies subscale and the Learning Environment subscale which is also high but not statistically significant because of the small sample size. Table 3 contains the correlations among the three subscales and the overall scale of the observational sheet for the post- test data.

Table 3. Inter –Subscale Correlations for the post-test Data

	1	2	3	4
Teaching Strategies (1)	1			
Learning Environment (2)	.57**	1		
Students Involvement (3)	.79**	.31	1	
Overall (4)	.98**	.63**	.86**	1

All correlations were statistically significant ($P < .01$) except the correlation between the Students Involvement Subscale and the Learning Environment Subscale which is also high but not statistically significant because of the small sample size. The high correlations among the subscales and with the overall scale indicated that these subscales highly related as they measure different but related aspects of teaching learning activities.

Participants

Participants in this study were 20 pre-service female teachers who completed their bachelor degree in-English

language. They were enrolled at the professional diploma program at the College of Education and Basic Science in Ajman University, UAE. The average of their ages was 22.00 years with a standard deviation of .86, while their average GPA was 3.30 with a standard deviation of .50. As for their nationalities 15 (75%) participants were Omani, and 4 (22%) were Palestinians and 1 Iraqi (3%).

Teaching Strategies Subscale

Teaching strategies were assessed through 34 items. [Table 4](#) presents the pre and the post results of these items as well as the overall average of this subscale.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of the Pre and Post Results of Teaching Strategies

No.	Items	Pre Results		Post Results	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Encouraging students to participate	1.35	.49	5.00	.00
2	Motivating students to predict the content	1.05	.22	4.00	.79
3	Eliciting new information and vocabulary from students	1.60	.50	4.35	.59
4	Activating students' prior knowledge	2.00	.00	5.00	.00
5	Relating the information to students' real life	2.80	.41	4.40	.50
6	Distributing questions consistently among students	2.00	.00	4.50	.51
7	Listening attentively to students' answers	2.00	.00	4.50	.51
8	Respecting students' opinions/comments	2.60	.50	4.05	.22
9	Using a variety of questions	1.45	.51	3.85	.59
10	Encouraging students to ask questions	1.05	.22	4.75	.44
11	Using illustrations and diagrams	2.75	.44	4.75	.44
12	Encouraging students to build on each other's ideas	1.75	.44	4.3	.47
13	Rewarding students' efforts rather than final product	2.00	.00	4.65	.49
14	Discussing how students reach an answer	1.00	.00	4.7	.47
15	Giving elaborate feedback	1.45	.51	4.75	.44
16	Using reinforcement	1.75	.44	4.45	.51
17	Giving clear instructions	1.80	.41	4.35	.49
18	Explaining the purpose of each learning activity	2.00	.00	4.45	.51
19	Employing body language and voice	2.55	.51	4.55	.51
20	Encouraging students' anticipation questions	1.00	.00	4.55	.51
21	Guiding students to use charts, graphs, etc.	1.45	.51	4.80	.41
22	Arranging seating according to the topic of the discussion	1.30	.57	4.50	.51
23	Using songs, language games and/or jigsaw activities	2.10	.31	4.75	.44
24	Designing learner-centered activities	1.50	.51	4.30	.47
25	Designing activities aligned with various learning styles	2.00	.00	4.95	.22
26	Encouraging students to use skills suitable to the learning	2.55	.51	4.25	.44
27	Guiding students to summarize and present their outcome.	1.55	.51	4.05	.76
28	Promoting peer tutoring, peer editing	1.55	.51	3.90	.85
29	Using an evaluation of each student within groups	1.00	.00	4.80	.41
30	Modeling constructive, appropriate uses of humor	2.00	.00	4.75	.44
31	Acknowledging students for appropriate uses of humor	1.30	.47	4.25	.44
32	Using comic strips and/or cartoons	1.00	.00	4.35	.49
33	Using cards, posters and real objects suitable to students	2.35	.81	4.55	.51
34	Promoting students' use of learning strategies	1.00	.00	4.25	.44
Total		1.72	.11	4.80	.12

As can be observed from [Table 4](#), there was clear improvement in all items due to the implementation of the learning engagement manual. Moreover, some items such as item 1, item 4, item 21, item 25, and item 29 were strongly improved by the use of the manual. The overall change was also clear and important as it was improved from an average of 1.72 to an average of 4.80.

The first research question of this study was concerned with assessing the improvement of the pre-service teachers on their Teaching Strategies. As the sample size (20 participants) is not big enough to use parametric statistics to check the significance of the improvement, a non-parametric statistics was used in this analysis. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a non-parametric statistical

test which is used when comparing repeated measurements on a single sample as in this case. The results of Wilcoxon test indicated significant differences with $Z = -3.95$, $p < .01$.

Learning Environment Subscale

Learning environment was measured through 10 items. Table 5 summarizes the results of the items of this subscale as well as the overall result.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of the Pre and Post Results of Learning Environment

No.	Item	Pre Results		Post Results	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Students are allowed to choose from a range of activities	1.75	.44	4.50	.51
2	Students of different language abilities are included	1.45	.51	5.00	.00
3	Students are following clear codes of behavior	2.55	.51	4.55	.51
4	Students are surrounded with a variety of resources	2.80	.41	4.55	.51
5	Teacher and students appear relaxed and confident	2.00	.00	5.00	.00
6	Errors are dealt with as part of the learning process	1.75	.44	4.30	.47
7	A balance between the use of feedback and the lesson	1.30	.47	4.30	.47
8	There is an established routine to build familiarity	1.00	.00	4.30	.47
9	There is a structured turn-taking and turn-giving	1.05	.22	4.75	.44
10	A positive attitude towards learning is prevailing	1.80	.41	4.25	.44
Total		1.75	.07	4.55	.10

The learning engagement manual had a big effect on learning environment as shown from the changes on the averages of all items displayed in Table 4. There was also a clear and significant improvement on some items such as item 2, item 5, and item 9. The significance of the improvement between the pre results and the post results on the learning environmental subscales was also tested by Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The results indicated statistically significant differences with $Z = -3.98$, $p < .01$.

Students' Participation and Involvement Subscale

The third area or subscale was students' involvement and participation in the teaching/ learning activities. This subscale was assessed through 20 items. The descriptive statistics of these items on the pretest as well as the posttest are summarized in Table 6 as follows:

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of the Pre and Post Results of Students Involvement

No.	Item	Pre Results		Post Results	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Being attentive	2.00	.00	4.45	.51
2	Responding to calls for participation	2.35	.49	4.35	.49
3	Accomplishing tasks on time	3.00	.00	5.00	.00
4	Putting in an effort in learning	1.95	.69	4.50	.51
5	Interacting using the target language	1.55	.51	4.00	.00
6	Showing an enthusiasm when approaching tasks	1.00	.00	4.95	.22
7	Presenting work in an eligible and intelligible manner	1.00	.00	3.25	.44
8	Refraining from disrupting classroom activities	2.25	.44	4.25	.44
9	Being initiative and responsible	1.00	.00	4.05	.69
10	Ability to articulate learning objectives	1.55	.51	3.00	.00
11	Selecting the possible strategies for learning	1.80	.41	3.00	.00
12	Showing an ability to review and improve work	1.05	.22	4.30	.47
13	Working with different peers in different occasions	1.00	.00	5.00	.00
14	Showing fluency and negotiation of meaning	1.80	.41	3.55	.51
15	Dealing with mistakes as part of the learning process	1.80	.41	3.80	.41
16	Being able to point out points of strength and weakness	1.00	.00	3.55	.51
17	Being curious about the perspectives of others	1.70	.47	5.00	.00
18	Being involved in the task	2.00	.00	5.00	.00
19	Working on tasks independently	2.00	.00	4.00	.00
20	Asking varied-level questions on their own	1.00	.00	3.95	.22
Total		1.64	.11	4.15	.08

The results of the students' involvement are very similar to the results of the other subscales described above. The learning engagement manual strongly affected students' participations in the learning process. The strong effect is clearly observed due to the change on the averages of all items between the pre results and the post results. Additionally, some items such as item 3, item 6, item 13, item 17, and item 18 were positively affected more than the rest of the items in the subscale. As

followed with the other subscales, the overall significance of the subscale was assessed by conducting Wilcoxon test. The results indicated statistically significant differences with $Z = -3.99$, $p < .01$.

The Overall Scale

The effect of the learning engagement manual on the scale (64 items) as a whole was also estimated. First, the averages of the 64 items on the pre testing as well as on

the post testing were calculated and compared. Second, Wilcoxon test was used to test the significance of the change. The results indicated statistically significant differences with $Z = -3.93$, $p < .01$.

GPA and Teaching Performance

Table 7. Correlations between the GPA and The Observational Subscales

		Instructional Skills	Learning Environment	Students Involvement	Overall Scale
Pre-Testing	GPA	.56*	.53*	.28	.54*
Post-Testing	GPA	.53*	.36	.34	.52*

Generally, correlations were high between the GPA and each subscale and for both the pretest and the posttest. Some correlation values were not statistically significant (at level 0.05) which is due to the sample size which reduced the statistical power of the tests. However, the correlation between the GPA and the overall scale was significant ($p < .05$) for both the pre and the post data collecting.

To sum, the above-mentioned tables show the differences between the means and the standard deviation of the grades of the pre service teachers at the first application of the observation sheet and those of their grades at the post observation. Wilcoxon test for matched pairs (non-parametric statistics) was used to test the hypothesis. As the tables show, there were significant differences between the averages of the grades of the sample of the study at the first application of the observation sheet and the averages of their grades at the post observation at level 0.01 for all observation domains. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis which is “ There are significant differences at level 0.05 at applying learner engagement between the pre application and the post application of the observation sheet on pre service teachers in favor of the post application”.

The interpretation of the results of applying the observation sheet showed that the teaching performance and learning engagement affected the dynamics of the classrooms of the pre service teachers before and after applying the learner engagement manual. The learning environment became dynamic and teachers and pupils shared responsibilities in the process of language teaching and learning. Teachers became more able to engage pupils in the learning activities as well as in getting them to take decisions and make choices related to their learning. Pupils were involved in the tasks and showed a genuine interest and willingness to participate, make mistakes, self-correct and peer support. They showed self-reliance and commitment.

The researcher, the second observer and the pre service teachers at each school discussed the improvement in the performance after each observation. Pre service teachers reflected on their application of the manual, their performance and the performance of the pupils. They reported that the manual helped their classrooms become conducive to language learning. They highlighted the benefits of the manual in handling pupils with behavior problems and the demotivated ones. They enjoyed sharing responsibilities with their students.

11. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study is consistent with the viewpoints of Bowden and Marton's (1998) whose approach to

The relationships between pre-service teachers GPA and their performance in teaching were assessed by calculating the correlations among these variables. The correlation between GPA and each subscale for the pre-testing data as well as post testing data were summarized in Table 7.

teaching and learning focuses on enriching the learning experiences of students. They recommended curriculum that exposes students to variation of experiences. For them, curriculum should engage students in learning activities that encourage a differentiated understanding of the critical aspects of situations to develop meaningful understanding and conception in the learning experience. [17]

The results of this research concur with the previous related literature on curriculum design and programs development such as Bowden et al.(2000), Fallows& Stevens (2000), Bowden and Marton (1998), Brown and McCartney (1995) and Barnett. [17]

They saw that the focus of curriculum should be on developing students in higher education context to apply knowledge to deal with new situations in the future, to judge a situation, and to develop an understanding of that situation. Both institutions and students themselves should be involved in the monitoring of student development. Students do not need the learning of separate skills. They need to recognize that they are developing lifelong skills that they have gained confidence in utilizing these skills.

This study emphasizes the importance of engaging learners. It pinpoints that children should find a pleasure in learning. They can choose which products they want to create to demonstrate their learning. Pupils' self-initiated ideas can be used by the teacher and developed into purposeful, inquiry-based investigations. Pupils need to rethink failure. Instead of portraying failure as something bad which gets children to avoid risk-taking, pupils need to feel the positivity of failure. Using portfolios of authentic work and student presentations and performances and self- assessment can help pupils become responsible and engaged.

12. Recommendations and Suggestions

Results of the analysis of the observation sheet in addition to the researcher's mentoring of the pre service teachers during the teaching practice in different schools show that there is a need for more studies on learner engagement especially in curriculum construction and development. Learners need to be involved in their learning process as well as in the evaluation of their learning. However, time constraint, students' reluctance to drive away from substantive content, their tendencies to memorization and their concentration on grades and the dominating belief in competitiveness form a challenge to a full development of such engagement.

Much attention should be given to extra-curriculum activities. These activities give pupils a chance to implicitly learn some generic skills such as leadership,

team- work and problem solving. Among these activities are cultural activities which enable students to embrace diversity and show tolerance towards cultures other than their own, sports activities which help students show self-confidence, social activities which help students develop intra-and interpersonal skills as well as scientific activities where students work on researching, Internet surfing, organizing information, making use of library, evaluation and presentation.

Teachers and curriculum developers need to listen to learners' voices. Active learning strategies make the classroom a dynamic environment where learners have a voice and where they view teachers as flexible enough to take risks. Teachers should care about the quality and persistence of participation in classroom activities.

Statement of Competing Interests:

The author has no competing interests.

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Appendices

Appendix I

The Observation Sheet

Developed by

Randa Abdou Soliman

	Items	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
I.	Teaching Strategies					
1	Encouraging students to participate					
2	Motivating students to predict the content					
3	Eliciting new information and vocabulary from students					
4	Activating students' prior knowledge using advance organizers/info graphics					
5	Relating the information to students' real life/experience					
6	Distributing questions consistently among students					
7	Listening attentively to students' answers					
8	Respecting students' opinions/comments					
9	Using a variety of questions according to students' language level					
10	Encouraging students to ask questions					
11	Using illustrations and diagrams					
12	Encouraging students to build on each other's ideas					
13	Rewarding students' efforts rather than final product					
14	Discussing how students reach an answer					
15	Giving elaborate feedback					
16	Using reinforcement					
17	Giving clear instructions					
18	Explaining the purpose of each learning activity					
19	Employing body language and voice					
20	Encouraging students' anticipation questions					

	Items	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
21	Guiding students to use charts, graphs (visual representations)					
22	Arranging seating according to the topic of the discussion (e.g. U shape for argumentative topics)					
23	Using songs, language games and/or jigsaw activities					
24	Designing learner-centered activities					
25	Designing activities aligned with various learning styles (audio-visual-kinesthetic)					
26	Encouraging students to use skills suitable to the learning task (skimming/scanning for reading and drafting/proofreading for writing)					
27	Guiding students to summarize and present their outcome.					
28	Promoting peer tutoring, peer editing					
29	Using an evaluation of each student within groups					
30	Modeling constructive, appropriate uses of humor					
31	Acknowledging students for appropriate uses of humor					
32	Using comic strips and/or cartoons					
33	Using cards, posters and real objects suitable to students' age, level and background					
34	Promoting students' use of learning strategies such as memorization strategies					
II. Learning Environment						
1	Students are allowed to choose from a range of activities/stories					
2	Students of different language abilities are included within each group (emphasizing on interests)					
3	Students are following clear codes of behavior					
4	Students are surrounded with a variety of resources and multiple sources of information(videos, PowerPoint presentations, Newspapers, textbooks, etc.					
5	Teacher and students appear relaxed and confident when interacting using the foreign language					
6	Errors are dealt with as part of the learning process					
7	There is a balance between the use of feedback and the flow of the lesson					
8	There is an established routine to build familiarity (reading corners, worksheets tray, etc.)					
9	There is an structured turn-taking and turn-giving					
10	A positive attitude towards learning is prevailing					
III. Student Involvement & Participation						
1	Being attentive					
2	Responding to calls for participation					
3	Accomplishing tasks on time					
4	Putting in an effort in learning					
5	Interacting using the target language					
6	Showing an enthusiasm when approaching tasks					
7	Presenting work in an eligible and intelligible manner					
8	Refraining from disrupting classroom activities					
9	Being initiative and responsible					
10	Demonstrating an ability to articulate learning objectives					
11	Showing an ability to decide on the possible strategies for meeting learning objectives					
12	Showing an ability to review and improve work					
13	Working with different peers in different occasions					
14	Showing fluency and negotiation of meaning					
15	Dealing with mistakes as part of the learning process					
16	Being able to point out points of strength and weakness					
17	Being curious about the perspectives of others					
18	Being involved in the task					
19	Working on tasks independently					
20	Asking varied-level questions on their own					

Appendix II

The Learner Engagement Manual

Developed by

Randa Abdou Soliman

Introduction:

Teachers' genuine interest, in contrast to fake interest, in children's work and their use of language matching the developmental stage of pupils and their sense of humor help to make all pupils involved in a highly engaging and enjoyable learning experience. In addition, acknowledging pupils' knowledge and skills and using their own examples, opinions and stories helps their academic development. Providing pupils with an elaborate feedback on their discussions, giving them chances for an active participation in decision making related to classroom rules, planning discussion and resolving conflict help pupils become in control of their learning.

This learner engagement manual focuses on the nature and quality of instruction, the learning environment in addition to the role of learner involvement and participation. It also tackles the issue of learner-teacher partnership and the

dynamics of the language classroom. In addition, it includes guidelines for teachers and learners to create a new mindset to establish conditions that support learning and attend to the developmental levels of learners. It helps both teachers and learners develop high-quality personal relationships and an intensive and purposeful involvement.

Section I: Teaching Strategies

Introduction:

In this section, pre service teachers read about teaching strategies and reflect on their performance in the classroom. Discussions, microteaching and presentations are planned to allow them to express their views on various teaching strategies and practice each strategy.

Outcomes:

1. Pre service teachers discuss the strategy and carry out the related activities
2. Pre service teachers use the strategy in their classrooms
3. Pre service teachers develop a favorable attitude related to the strategy

Resources:

Textbook, Activity book, Handouts, Data show

Activities:

Discussion, PowerPoint Presentations, Microteaching

Evaluation:

Outcome 1 is evaluated through observing pre-service teachers' discussion and carrying out of the different activities through observing their actual performance in the classroom.

Outcome 2 is evaluated through applying the observation sheet

Outcome3 is evaluated through pre service teachers being appreciative of and responsive to their attempts to use the strategy in their classrooms.

Content:

A strategy is a step-by-step process of building students' ability to complete tasks on their own. The teaching strategies in this manual are organized within the framework of the revisited version of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives so that the teacher can evaluate the relationship between planning an objective at a certain level of the taxonomy and selecting a teaching strategy. They can be used to achieve objectives at more than one level of the taxonomy; develop a knowledge base, promote understanding, cause students to apply what they learn, require and develop students' ability to do analysis and generate evaluation and creativity.

Employing a set of creative interactive teaching strategies can help teachers use visual or graphic aids in their teaching and get students to create illustrations, graphs, diagrams and charts to demonstrate that they have interpreted data or new concepts successfully. They can be used to capture students' attention and maintain their interests. Teachers can employ creative-interactive strategies and plan learning activities that provide students with experiences so that they gain new bits of knowledge. The teacher must assist students in ordering and classifying the knowledge they have gained so that it is readily accessible. [18]

These teaching strategies are summarized as questioning strategies, brainstorming, categorization and labeling strategies, discussion strategies, problem solving strategies, Pedagogical humor Strategy and Cooperative learning and teaching.

Constructivists emphasize that teachers need to go beyond transmission models and move toward knowledge construction models of teaching and learning. These construction models involve structuring reflective discussion of the meanings and implications of content and providing opportunities for students as they engage in inquiry, problem solving or decision-making. [2]

Social constructivists emphasize teaching that features discussion, exchanging views and negotiating meaning. This includes cooperative learning that is structured as students work in pairs or groups. They see teacher as a discussion leader who poses questions, promotes dialog and helps group recognize areas of consensus or disagreement. Teacher and students share responsibility for initiating and guiding learning efforts. Everyone has expertise to contribute. Students try to make sense of new input by relating it to their prior knowledge and by collaborating in dialog with others to co-construct shared understanding.

Rosebrough (2010) suggested that teachers should use diversified teaching strategies to reach each student. He also emphasized that teaching occurs when learning happens and that is clear when "students are engaged with new information in contexts meaningful to them".

November (2012) suggested the following teaching strategies:

- Teach for learning
- Know how students learn
- Teach students how to learn
- Teach by asking questions
- Teach the whole child
- Place students in the center
- Inspire through experiences that connect the child to the world [11]

Halsey (2011) proposed the ENGAGE Model that is an acronym for the following strategies:

E for Energize Learners
N for Navigate Content

G for Generate Meaning

A for Apply to Real World

G for Gauge and Celebrate

E for Extend Learning to Action [5]

He also proposed the *Brilliance Learning System* as follows:

- Rebalancing the learning equation;70/30 principle where teachers dedicate 70% of their preparation to the How of learning (Learning Design) and 30% to the What (Content) and where learners do 30% of the listening and 70% of the talking in the classrooms.
- Creating a continuous flow of connections as teachers connect to each student
- Knowing oneself- that is teacher's self-awareness, connection with self and others, approval of oneself and practice of self-care
- Valuing Learners through knowing learners- that is to build a community of practice, be flexible, read the classroom, create a safe learning place, recognize that people want to learn and assume positive intention

MacGilchrist (2004) referred to the following teaching strategies that can engage children through a "Learning to Learn" Project:

- Closing the gap between what children are doing and what they need to be doing to raise the standard of their work through a reminder prompt " Say more about ... " and a scaffold prompt "Can you describe how?"
- Setting targets in groups with teacher's support.
- Paired or group marking through a "three stars and a wish" scheme. The three stars are for achievement and the wish identifies an area for improvement.
- Self-marking where children can identify their points of weakness.
- Sharing strategies they use to find a correct answer or solve a problem
- Discussing difficulties without having a sense of shame for not getting many of the answers right
- Using mind-maps to identify areas of difficulties and graph progress
- Providing systematic developmental feedback for pupils and rigorous evaluation of progress [8]

Research on learner engagement and teacher's role highlights that teachers whose teaching involves learners academically, emotionally and socially use the following strategies:

- Model their own enthusiasm
- Model thinking
- Ask learners to explain, elaborate and reflect
- Give learners immediate feedback on progress
- Set-up appropriate challenges and making goals clear
- Scaffold instruction
- Manipulate motivational discourse (including encouraging learners, treating mistakes as opportunities for learning and for peer tutoring, reducing anxiety, and emphasizing joint responsibility among teacher and learners)
- Encourage different points of view
- Care for their students
- Approach learners as individuals (Bogner et al., 2002; Lutz et al., 2006)
- Give ongoing assessment
- Respond to individual learning styles
- Provide opportunities for differentiated instruction (Dolezal et al.,2003, Smith, 2009)
- Use humor skillfully [18]
- Give learners chances for reviewing their correct and incorrect answers after taking a quiz or a test
- Give an opportunity for learner creativity and genuine interactivity [18]

Section II: Pupil-Teacher Partnership

Introduction:

In this section of the manual, pre-service teachers read the part on partnership. Discussions, microteaching and presentations are to be used to allow teachers to express their views on partnership and practice it.

Outcomes:

1. Pre-service teachers get acquainted with partnership and its implementation techniques.
2. Pre-service teachers use (plan, implement and evaluate) partnership in their classrooms
3. Pre-service teachers develop a favorable attitude related to partnership

Resources:

Textbook, Activity book, Handouts, Data show

Activities:

Discussion and presentations

Evaluation:

Outcome 1 is evaluated through pre-service teachers' discussion and carrying out the various activities.

Outcome 2 is evaluated by applying the observation sheet

Outcome3 is evaluated through pre-service teachers' participation in the varied activities and their creativity related to suggesting varied ways of implementing partnership in their classrooms.

Content:

In engaging classrooms, all basic needs are addressed and pupils have an enjoyable learning experience. Pupils feel safe and happy. Teachers spend time in getting to know pupils individually, building relationship with them, listening to their concerns, discovering their strengths and weaknesses and making them feel an invaluable part of the group. All pupils work hard, but each according to her/his pace, readiness and competence level. The focus in the class is on learning. Pupils who are stuck or have learning difficulties are not seen as keeping the others behind but as providing an opportunity to offer assistance. Pupils are learning from each other and helping each other to learn. Effort is celebrated, individual and group strengths promoted and socio-emotional literacy given a priority. Various modes of material presentation, resources and activities as well as making use of multisensory techniques are implemented in an engaging classroom. The classroom is a place like home where pupils even the disruptive ones, as Houghton (2001), become the teacher's "allies" in teaching and learning according to the experience told by one teacher. [3]

Rosebrough (2010) stated that

"Engaged Learners are self-regulated, defining their own goals and evaluating their own achievement. They become energized by their learning; their joy of learning leads to a lifelong ability to solve problems by transferring their knowledge to new contexts. Engaged learners are also cooperative, having and valuing the skills to work with others." [14]

Realizing the potential of every individual learner, setting well defined roles and responsibilities for both teachers and pupils will help pupils to realize that every child matters in the language classroom. Learners' voice needs to be heard. That's why flexibility and choice are emphasized in an emotionally-safe classroom environment. Vygotsky proposed the "zone of proximal development" where learners capacity are extended beyond what they are capable of independently as well as "more capable others" referring to the importance of teachers creation of learning opportunities that encourage learners to extend their learning repertoire and employ adaptation to meet the different needs of learners as well as allow learners to select from arrange of offering. Accordingly, pupils need to be allowed to choose how to demonstrate competence, whether and how to engage in group work and what to submit for assessment.

Cefai (2008) suggested guidelines on managing pupils with social, emotional or behavior problems as follows:

- Reach out and connect with them
- Focus on their positive qualities
- Listen to their problems
- Instill self-belief
- Give each pupil a fair chance without being prejudiced
- Help them feel an invaluable member of the learning community
- Make sure that all the pupils have equal access to the learning experiences
- Make adaptations in content, methodology and resources

Section III: Learning Environment

Introduction:

In this section of the manual, pre-service teachers read the part on learning environment. Discussions, microteaching and presentations are to be used to allow them to express their views on creating an engaging learning environment.

Outcomes:

1. Pre-service teachers get acquainted with techniques of creating an engaging dynamic learning environment.
2. Pre-service teachers become able to ignite an engaging dynamic learning environment in their classrooms
3. Pre-service teachers develop a favorable attitude related to engaging dynamic learning environments

Resources:

Textbook, Activity book, Handouts, Data show

Activities:

Discussion and oral presentation

Evaluation:

Outcome 1 is evaluated through pre-service teachers' discussion and carrying out the various activities.

Outcome 2 is evaluated by applying the observation sheet

Outcome 3 is evaluated through pre-service teachers' participation in the varied activities and their creativity related to suggesting varied ways of creating an engaging dynamic learning environment.

Content:

It is argued that when children's mind, soul and heart are engaged, their thoughts and emotions are connected together in ensuring a long-lasting learning experience. In that sense, there is no longer a need for rewards or grades to encourage participation. No charts with points or stars for achievement. Charts and posters can be done by pupils themselves and show their talents, works and interests. Learners are engaged in the learning experience when they are interested and involved. The classroom environment affects their engagement as well as teachers' behavior and attitude.

Even if the teacher is using a number of teaching strategies, it is the learning environment that determines whether learners are genuinely interacting and non-deceptively engaged or not. Teachers and learners should work on creating optimal learning environments. Beard and Wilson (2006) highlight that there is a relationship between the design of activities and the learning environment in which these activities take place. They declare that the classrooms, in that sense, change into a new label of learning spaces where there are spaces for group learning, spaces for deep concentration, spaces for innovation or creativity and spaces for quiet reading. Indiana University offered a broad definition of a learning environment as a physical, intellectual, psychological environment which facilitates learning through connectivity and community. [1]

The engaging classroom is a showcase of pupils' work and artefacts such as a computer artwork, an illustrated story, a composed poem, a collection of stamps or pictures, drawings, cards, and crafts. The response of peers, classroom visitors and teachers of all subjects as well as occasionally invited pupils from other classes or schools to their work can be rewarding. Displays created by students help them have connections and a sense of ownership of their products and their learning. Changing displays helps learners interact with the environment as it stimulates brain development. Generating ideas can be enhanced through a variety of resources that are available.

The peer group itself is the most valuable and important resource of learning. Pupils could help each other succeed. Peer tutoring works well with pupils who have considerable reading and spelling difficulties. Everybody could learn and help each other to learn.

Teachers are to assess pupils' growing commitments, and likely personal benefits from what they study such as enthusiasm and interest. Explicit culture of success where there is a lot of high expectations, high aspirations and an explicit celebration of success can create an optimism and hope which are fundamental to engagement, commitment and motivation. Learners need to be helped to relate their learning experience to their experience in real life. A "KWL" chart can be used to get pupils to identify what they know, what they want to know and later on, what they have learnt. Furthermore, self-reliance is to be highlighted to help pupils get an ownership of their own learning.

Giving pupils a freedom of choice related to working with different peers in different occasions and deciding on the methods of presenting the work of the group can help them remain involved in the learning tasks. Calling for pupils' self-generated questions while guiding them on producing varied-level questions can lead to more dynamic classrooms where pupils are taking the lead and becoming responsible for their learning.