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Pathways to Greater Success for Adolescent Learners of English as a Second Language

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Abstract

This review article describes approaches that teachers may find useful in teaching adolescent second language learners. It is argued that adolescents are a special group due to development challenges such as physical, emotional and behavioural changes. What instructional approaches are recommended by second language learning specialists? What on-line resources are available for teachers who decide to add one or more of the approaches presented in this article? The author reviewed the academic publications of four groups of international providers of resources for teachers of English as a second language. They were (1) the British Council, Cambridge International Education, Oxford Education, Harvard Education, and the Centre for Language Studies of the National University of Singapore, (2) specialised journals, including the *Asian English Language Journal* and *The Reading Teacher*, (3) publishers of educational learning materials, and (4) on-line support sites such as Lexia Learning, ESOL Courses, Extensive Reading Foundation, and Fluent U. The review focused on teaching approaches specific to modern-day adolescent learners of English as a second language. In deciding which of the approaches for inclusion in this review article, two criteria were used: (1) approaches that were relevant to adolescents already familiar with computers and the Internet, and (2) approaches that were relevant to adolescents world-wide – not limited to learners in particular countries or regions. Seven approaches, in the opinion of the author, met these criteria. They are: i) decoding skills; ii) learning English through songs; iii) learning English through Interactive On-line Lessons and Quizzes; iv) Extensive Reading (ER) Programme, including a list of graded readers; v) Dictation; vi) Structured Oral Presentations; and vii) a Topic-based Curriculum. This review article concludes by observing that adolescents whose first language is not English, and who complete their secondary school education **without** attaining at least minimum skills in English, will be seriously disadvantaged, not only in their personal lives, but in future career opportunities. The Appendix provides information about 'graded readers' for those who are unfamiliar with this resource for teachers of English as a second language.

Keywords**:** *adolescent learners, decoding skills, extensive reading, graded readers, topic-based curriculum*

1. Introduction and literature review

Much has been written about the importance of beginning the process of learning English as a second language as early as possible. However, many teenage students have been unable to acquire even minimal English skills in their early years. One question for secondary school teachers of English as a second language is how best to help those students 'catch up'? Are there teaching approaches that are particularly suitable for adolescent learners? Fortunately, there has been much research on teaching approaches that may be more appropriate for the teenage learner (Brandon, 2018).

1.1 Learning the first language

Before proceeding to discuss approaches to learning a second language, it is important to review some facts about the learning of one's first language. It is well accepted that linguistic competency in one's first language is not easy for most many students – it is a challenge. It is not something that can be achieved in just six or eight years or, for many, not even in 12 years. This is true for school children everywhere in the world.

Acquiring a language normally refers to an *unconscious process*, as when children *acquire* their first language. This process consists of the parents communicating with the child through daily interactions in their home and community environment on a daily basis. That process is natural and unconscious and begins at birth (Krashen, 1982). The acquisition of a child's home or first language continues more formally when the child enters school. This may be in a pre-school setting or in a so-called 'regular' school at, say, six years of age.

It's important to remember that when Thai children, for example, are *learning* a second language such as English, they are also learning math, science, social studies, art, music, and physical education *in Thai language* (Wallin & Cheevakumjorn, 2018). In the case of Thailand, one recent piece of evidence suggests that developing academic proficiency in one's first language is difficult for many learners. Some 380,000 grade 12 students who sat for the 2016 O-Net (Ordinary National Education Test), only 53% passed their own Thai language exam (Mala, 2017).

Adolescent learners are expected to achieve a basic level of literacy in their own language, that is, learn to read and write that language. But, in addition, they are also expected to acquire basic skills and understandings in core academic subjects – mathematics, science, geography, literature and history. And, to do this successfully, they need a sufficient level of competence in their own language. These are normal expectations. However, by adding the requirement of acquiring skills in a second language at the same time, places an additional burden on adolescents.

1.2 Developmental Challenges

In addition to the challenge of learning their first language, as well as a second language, adolescents are also facing personal developmental challenges. They are in an in-between stage between childhood and early adulthood. The many changes experienced by adolescents can be grouped into five major categories: physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioural. Some key features of each of these are described in this section.

1.2.1 Physical development

Adolescents experience a growth spurt, involving their bones and muscles. This begins in girls around the ages of 9-12 and in boys around the ages of 11-14 (Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention [ReCAPP], 2018). The physical changes of early adolescence often lead to:

- Being treated in a new way by those around them. They may no longer be seen as just children, but as sexual beings to be protected — or targeted. They face society's expectations for how young men and women "should" behave.
- New concern with physical appearance and body image**:** both adolescent boys and girls are known to spend hours concerned with their physical appearance. They want to "fit in" with their peers yet achieve their own unique style as well.

Many adolescents experience dissatisfaction with their changing bodies. Weight gain is a natural part of puberty, which can be distressing in a culture that glorifies being thin. In response, some adolescents begin to diet obsessively. About 20% of all females aged 12-18 engage in unhealthy dieting behaviours. Some of these adolescents develop eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia (ReCAPP, 2018).

1.2.2 Cognitive and Social Development

There is a dramatic shift in thinking from concrete to abstract which gives adolescents a new mental tool which makes it possible for them to analyse situations logically in terms of cause and effect. This gives them the ability to think about the future, evaluate alternatives, and set personal goals. It is now possible for them to engage in introspection and mature decision-making. As a result, most developing adolescents will:

- become more independent
- take on increased responsibilities, such as babysitting, or part-time jobs
- shift their school focus from play-centered activities to school work
- begin to consider future careers and occupations
- look to peers and media for information and advice
- begin to develop a social conscience: becoming concerned about social issues such as pollution, climate change, and, even corruption
- begin to develop a sense of values and ethical behaviour: recognising the value of traits such as honesty, helpfulness, caring for others (ReCAPP, 2018).

1.2.3 Emotional and Behavioural Development

As adolescents begin to exercise their new reasoning skills, some of their behaviours may cause parents and other adults to be uncomfortable. However, it is normal for them to:

- Argue for the sake of arguing
- Jump to conclusions
- Be self-centred
- Constantly find fault in the adult's position
- Be overly dramatic (ReCAPP, 2018)

Santrock (2011) in drawing upon Erikson's life-span development theory, states that this stage in human development is a time of 'identity confusion'.

Prior to this stage, most elementary school children eagerly direct their energies toward mastering knowledge and intellectual skills. Santrock argues, though, it can be a time when some children develop a sense of 'inferiority, unproductiveness, and incompetence'. This carries over into the next developmental stage, adolescence. This stage is a time when they "try to find out who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life. They are confronted with many new roles and adult statuses (such as vocational and romantic) … If they do not adequately explore different roles and fail to carve out a positive future path, they can remain confused about their identity." (Santrock, 2011, p. 74).

1.3 Implications for Learning a Second Language

Adolescents, as students, are under a lot of pressure. Yes, they are full-time students, and thus have a lot of time for learning, but, as second language learners, they have a double burden. Teenagers are expected to become literate in their own (national) language, proficient in basic core subjects, and, at the same time begin to learn a second language. For many adolescents these three expectations are a very large and sometimes daunting challenge. These are the expectations of *important others* such as parents and teachers, and, of course, the expectations of their community.

As discussed in the previous section, adolescent learners are at the same time also experiencing complex changes to their physical and endocrinal systems. Their bodies are changing, and their emotional response patterns are not stable (Santrock, 2011). The implication for teachers and for schools is that the task of teaching a second language to adolescents is more complex than teaching pre-adolescents. It calls for special approaches and the creation of special environments. Adolescent learners are a unique sub-group of second language learners because of the developmental changes they are experiencing. Their needs cannot be solved merely *by just doing things differently* from those which were used in the earlier years of their educational lives (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

1.4 Adolescent Learners of English as a Second Language

Haynes and Zacarian (2010) point out that the term, 'English language learners', refers to students who are learning a language including English. Learners who are not fully literate in their first language may take as many as five or more years before becoming relatively proficient in academic studies. It is important to note that literacy in one's first language is an important underpinning to becoming literate in a second language.

Krashen (1982) argued that learning a second language requires three central elements: a comfortable learning environment with a low level of anxiety, meaningful classroom tasks that engage students in practicing listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the new language, and, engaging in tasks that are 'just a bit beyond' the students' current ability level.

Second language adolescent learners in countries like Thailand will have had some exposure to English. Many will have heard English spoken by tourists and most likely will have seen English in print – billboards, labels on imported products, signs in major shopping complexes and in bus and train terminals (Brooke, 2017).

Teachers, in working with teens, need to help their students by giving them essential tools such as 'decoding' skills – skills in phonics and practice in pronunciation. Also, teachers need to have a deliberate

plan for vocabulary development – not only for use in social interaction but more importantly for academic learning.

Academic language skill building requires an explicit focus on 'key terms, words, idioms, and phrases that are needed to learn and engage in the subject matter' not only in the language of instruction but in second language learning (Haynes & Zacarian, 2010).

2. Criteria for Selecting the approaches for inclusion in this review article

The author reviewed the publications of four groups of international providers of resources for teachers of English as a second language. They were (1) the British Council, the National Curriculum of the United Kingdom, Cambridge International Education, Oxford Education, Harvard Education, and the Centre for Language Studies of the National University of Singapore (CLS-NUS), (2) specialised journals, including the *Asian English Language Journal (AELJ), The Reading Teacher*, and the *Rangsit Journal of Educational Studies*, (3) international publishing houses including MacMillan, Oxford University Press, Pearson International Education and Cambridge University Press, and (4) on-line support sites: Lexia Learning, ESOL Courses, Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF), and Fluent U.

Articles and papers, which discussed teaching approaches specific to modern-day adolescent learners of English as a second language, were reviewed. Two criteria were used to decide which of the approaches would be included in this present review article: (1) approaches that acknowledged the fact that today's adolescents are already familiar with computers and the Internet, and (2) approaches that employed reading materials and learning activities that were international in scope, and, thus, more suitable for adolescents world-wide – not limited to learners in particular countries or regions.

Among the many approaches discussed by international providers of resources for teachers, seven, in the opinion of the author, have an appeal to adolescents in most countries of the world, and most of whom are already familiar with using the Internet for both personal and academic purposes. The list of approaches and primary sources are shown in the following table.

Table 1 List of approaches Teaching English as a Second Language to Adolescent Learners

No.	Approach	Source
1	Decoding skills	National Curriculum of the UK; Cambridge International Education
2	Learning English through songs	the British Council; FluentU; Lexia Learning
3	Learning English through interactive on-line lessons and quizzes	British Council; ESOL courses; FluentU
4	Extensive reading (ER)	ERF; Harvard Education; MacMillan, Oxford University Press; Cambridge University Press
5	Dictation	CLS-NUS; ESOL Courses
6	Structured oral presentations	AELJ, British Council; the Reading Teacher
7	Topic-based curriculum	British Council

This review article describes each of the seven approaches, and provides information about free on-line resources which are available to teachers everywhere.

3. Strategies for teaching English as a second language to adolescents

No attempt has been made to prioritise the order in which these seven approaches are presented. *One is not more important than another. Each approach is important in itself.* Depending on the amount of time available for each lesson, the frequency of lessons, and the interest level of their students, teachers are encouraged to try out one or more of the seven approaches.

The first approach to be described is one which equips adolescents to become familiar with the structure of English sounds and the visual representation of those sounds. Both are important for improving students' listening skills as well as students' ability to read English text materials.

3.1 Decoding skills

Second-language learners of English should acquire at a very early stage those phonological skills that help them to decode the sounds of English. They also need frequent practice in associating the sounds of English with letters and combinations of letters, and, thus, make it possible to more easily *read* English text. Teachers of teenage learners should continue to provide opportunities whereby their decoding skills with continue to increase in order for them to comprehend more complex subject matter. The process by which students learn to associate letters and combination of letters *with the sounds of English* must be explicit and intensive. It must not be seen as a one-time process (Brooke, 2017).

One source for materials to assist teachers in helping their students improve their decoding skills is the National Curriculum of the United Kingdom (National Curriculum Assessment, 2016). The student materials are known as *Phonics Screening Check*, the first of which is known as 'Key Stage 1'. Most teenage learners may already have skills needed to pass this first screening check. However, teachers are well advised to ensure that this is the case. There are many sets available for downloading. A different set has been produced for each examination year, beginning with 2014. The materials consist of real words and 'fake', non-English words. Examples of non-English words are: *fot, keb, gan, ulp, poth, shan, dat, cag, vin, ept, and veen.*

These materials help learners to link sounds and letters in the order in which they occur in words, and also in naming and sounding the letters of the English alphabet. The materials also help promote speaking and listening skills, phonological awareness, and oral blending of sounds in common English words.

The use of these materials is a teacher-led activity. However, the National Curriculum website provides many other suggestions which are activity based. These include learning the lyrics of songs and the singing of songs. These can be adjusted according to the age and competency level of the students, as well as the songs with which student may already be familiar.

3.2 Learning English through songs

A second approach for strengthening English competency is through songs. There is considerable evidence that young people, especially, can learn a lot of English through listening to and singing songs. English songs contain a lot of useful vocabulary, phrases and expressions for the second-language learner (FluentU, 2018)

Listening to songs also help with pronunciation and understanding of the English language's rhythm and tone. Many of the words and sound patterns found in a song are repetitious and this is one reason why songs are more easily remembered. And, nowadays, most adolescents are familiar with the process of downloading songs, thus making it possible to take their favourite English songs wherever they go.

The creators of FluentU (2018) recommends sites such as *YouTube* and *Vimeo*. Both have large libraries of English music videos, in which the lyrics have English subtitles. Other sites are *Lyrics.com* and *Smart Lyrics.com.* These specialty sites have a feature that makes it possible for students to hover over a word which causes the video to pause and a pop-up provides a definition (in English) of the word.

3.3 Learning English through interactive on-line lessons and quizzes

A third approach takes advantage of adolescents' love for computers and their skill in the use of the Internet. Internet-based platforms are excellent sources of materials and activities to challenge even the most reluctant of teen-age second language learners.

One such is *ESOL Courses,* a free on-line learning platform. The company which maintains this site *is ESOL Courses Limited*. It is based in England. Hundreds of easy interactive listening lessons, reading exercises, and quizzes are available on this platform (ESOL Courses Limited, 2017).

This site, ESOL Courses' platform, makes it possible for teachers to choose from 5 levels: Beginners, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, and Advanced. Thus, teachers have resources for all of the students in their class – even those whose competency level is still at or near the beginners' level.

There are many lesson topics. Among them are the following: The Alphabet, Classroom Words and Tasks, Numbers, Polite English Expressions, Weather, the Olympic Games, Lady Gaga, and Street Soccer, for example.

Among the various types of lessons are the following: Listening, Vocabulary, and Grammar; Speaking and Listening; Culture and People; Multiple Choice Quizzes; and Listening Comprehension practice.

3.4 Extensive reading

The fourth approach is that of Extensive Reading (ER). It is important to encourage and support adolescent learners in an extensive reading programme (ER), sometimes referred to free voluntary reading (FVR). The word 'free' is interpreted to mean students may choose what they want to read. And, 'voluntary' means that students are not compelled to read the materials. Both of these terms are important when including ER or FVR in second-language programmes for adolescent learners.

It is generally agreed that an extensive reading programme should be available both in class time as well as in free time. Maley (2008) pointed out that most second language learners will never 'meet the new language' enough times in typical classrooms in a typical academic year to actually begin learning the new language. Simply, there are not enough in-class hours. Every school day, second-language adolescent learners are also engaged in learning mathematics, science, and many other required subjects.

Maley cited evidence that by providing additional exposure to English through a carefully managed ER programme, adolescents will acquire, *mostly subconsciously*, knowledge about word groupings, spelling, new vocabulary, and punctuation necessary for both speaking and writing English.

Depending on the range of books titles available to students, ER can also expand general knowledge about interesting places in countries different from that of the readers themselves. According to Maley (2008), most teenagers possess a rather limited knowledge of the world. They have no time! Extensive reading can lead to new knowledge and understanding of places beyond the students' experience (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

ER can also improve 'self-esteem'. This is important for adolescents. Maley suggests that by reading a foreign language book, such as an English (easy) novel *for the first time*, can be a motivating factor to read a second English language book. There is little doubt that many teenagers will feel a sense of pride in such an accomplishment. And, their parents will be pleased, too.

Additionally, ER can develop and encourage learner autonomy – something many adolescents value. Maley (2009) pointed out that reading, by its very nature, is a private and is very much an individual activity. He states "It can be done anywhere, at any time of day. Readers can start and stop at will, and read at the speed with which they are comfortable. They can visualize and interpret what they read in their own way".

Teachers who wish to begin an ER programme for their English second-language students should first consider the following advice provided by Krashen (2009) some years ago.

- Arrange a time for reading every day; not just once a week; provide more time rather than less time
- Make sure plenty of books are available; and, downloadable websites are accessible to students
- Comic books are okay; magazines are okay; graded readers are okay
- Impose minimum censorship on what is read
- It is okay for students to read 'easy books' – even below their actual reading level
- It is okay for students to read 'hard' books' – often above their reading level
- Students don't have to finish every book they start to read (getting bored with a story is normal)
- Supplement a free reading programme with activities that serve to make reading more comprehensible and interesting, such as the teacher (or the more advanced students) reading aloud interesting stories in class, or reading aloud specific paragraphs that are particularly exciting, or that exemplify unusual word constructions
- Include story writing among the various projects students are asked to complete

However, there are some don'ts. Krishan (as cited in Maley, 2008) urged teachers to

- avoid using rewards for reading, because, they argue, reading is pleasureful and rewarding in and of itself;
- don't test students on what is read;

- do not require book reports; and, use zero or minimum accountability
- consider allowing eating and drinking while reading (if this is permitted by school authorities).

The injunction for teachers is to make reading an enjoyable experience, a distinctive departure from learning computational skills in mathematics, for example.

> Finally, the link between extensive reading and improved English writing skills is neatly summarised by the famous writer, William Faulkner: "Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they (the writers) do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it is good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out the window" (Babauta, 2017).

Another quote which describes how another writer, Nicholas Sparks, has learned from his reading experiences:

> "You must read, and read a lot. Did I say A LOT? I read over a hundred books a year and have done so since I was fifteen years old, and every book I've read has taught me something. I've learned that some authors are incredible at building suspense (see *The Firm* by John Grisham), I've read others that scare the jeepers out of me (see *The Shining* by Stephen King). Some authors can weave an incredible number of story lines into a single, coherent novel, with all parts coming together at the end that makes it impossible to stop turning the pages (see *The Sum of all Fears* by Tom Clancy), while other authors make me laugh out loud (see *Bloodsucking Fiends* by Christopher Moore). By reading a lot of novels in a variety of genres, and asking questions, it's possible to learn how things are done—the mechanics of writing, so to speak—and which genres and authors excel in various areas." (Babauta, 2017).

Both quotes reinforce the fact that there is a strong link between reading and writing. During the preschool and primary school years, children learn how written language can be used for purposes such as telling stories, and recording facts, how print is arranged on a page, and how letters and sounds combine to form words (Moore et al., 1999).

Thus, it is important that this experience be continued when children reach the adolescent stage. Adolescents, who are in the process of increasing their proficiency in English as a second language, need to continue exposure to more advanced reading experiences. This can be accomplished by using graded readers with vocabulary sentence constructions which are in line with their present level of proficiency.

For readers of this article who not familiar with 'graded readers' the Appendix, which can be found at the conclusion of this review article, provides a detailed explanation of this important resource for teachers of English as a second language. Included in the Appendix is a list of major publishers and suggested titles.

Teachers of mathematics, science, and social studies, will be interested to know that recent research has shown that students who enjoy reading for pleasure will also out-perform non-readers on content-specific achievement tests. A recent study, carried out with Grade XII Science students at a bilingual high school in Thailand, has provided data which revealed that FVR (free voluntary readers) students out-performed non-readers on the 2014 PISA (Programme of International Student Assessment) science test (Gumsa, 2016).

Gumsa observed that many students and teachers tend to be skeptical that something so pleasureful as reading stories could help students' performance on science achievement tests. Her research revealed that readers in her Grade XII (final year) class obtained higher science test scores than her non-readers after an 8-week experimental period.

The next section of this paper describes a sixth approach. It outlines a method by which second-language adolescent learners can gain a variety of vicarious experiences and at the same time become more confident as listeners and as writers of English.

3.5 Dictation

Dictation, the fifth approach, is a technique for improving *aural* (or listening) comprehension. However, it has other benefits, too. Typically teachers would choose several paragraphs from a 'graded' reader at a level of difficulty appropriate to a majority of their students' present level of competency in English, and which will hold their attention. This should take place, if possible, at least once every week to provide students with practice in writing what they hear (Rahimi, 2008).

Although the one giving the dictation would be the teacher, it could also be a student who has already developed sufficient skills in reading English aloud such that classmates can understand, and who would not be embarrassed to read to classmates. This technique gives second language learners practice also in the use of punctuation and capitalisation, as well as in using contextual clues to determine which word is the correct one (know/no; too/to; four/for; write/right, for example).

Rather than using a pen and paper, some students, particularly those with strong keyboarding skills, should be encouraged to record the dictation *using their computer notebook or tablet*. This, in itself, can be a motivator for certain adolescent learners. [The author of this review article has had considerable positive experiences with the use of this approach.]

3.6 Structured oral presentations

In order to provide student-centred activities, teachers should create a 'final project' in which teachers ask students to make an oral presentation using the 'foreign' language, in this case, English. Oral presentations are a major departure from their daily routines and inevitably creates considerable apprehension among students for obvious reasons.

As Wilson and Brooks (2014) point out, this 'final project' is very time consuming because it involves only one student at a time. And, thus takes away from the all-too-limited time available for second language learning. The number of hours in the weekly time-table for learning a second language is always limited, never enough!

Most teachers are aware of the importance of providing students with practice in interacting with others using the new language. However, the typical (final) oral presentation experience does not provide students with an adequate number of opportunities in which they can use the new language in an authentic context' (King, 2013). As King points out, large class sizes and a mandated curriculum tend to focus more on grammatical accuracy than on communicative competence, thus making practice interacting in English virtually impossible.

A second criticism of individual oral presentations in what many students would describe as a 'foreign language' is for most teenage-students an awkward and uncomfortable experience. Most 'hate' standing in front of their peers, presenting a report or describing an experience in their own language – even more so in a foreign language (Wilson & Brooks, 2014)

What about the students who are not presenting? They become passive members of the audience, and become bored. They are bored not just because the topics being presented may be uninteresting to them, but also because they have difficulty understanding the 'broken' and the halting language of the embarrassed presenter (King, 2013).

The challenge, especially for teachers of adolescents studying a second language, is to devise strategies that can overcome some of these disadvantages. In their article, *Teaching Presentation: Improving Oral Output with More Structure*, Wilson and Brooks (2014) describe a different genre of oral presentations, namely, the 'poster' presentation. They argue that poster presentations can benefit both the students as well as their teachers.

A poster presentation, which is the sixth approach, starts with the learners working individually, or in pairs, or in groups of three, on a topic of interest to them, and one which has received their teacher's approval. This latter point is important. It assures that the students' proposed topic is, in fact, researchable. Also, the topic should have some educational value, that is, the topic should not be a frivolous one.

The term 'working' refers to several key tasks. Undertaking Internet research to gather relevant facts which could be of interest to their classmates (or a wider audience) is the first of the key tasks. And, second key task is to determine which of them would lend themselves more easily to bullet-type key phrases. The

third task is perhaps even more difficult, that of drafting the phrases with the use of a word processor and s*pellcheck*, to ensure that the bullet-type phrases are grammatically correct and no misspellings.
These key tasks will require some experience in using the Internet (for academic research purposes), as well as basic reading comprehension levels in order to determine what are some key concepts and phrases. Hopefully, in the case of group work, one or more members in each group will have had similar experiences in earlier second-language projects (Moore et al., 1999).

Visuals, too, are important. There are many learning styles: some students possess a learning preference for visuals, for example. The English idiom 'A picture is worth a thousand words' suggests that a single image can communicate meaning or essence more effectively than a written or verbal description. Thus, the selection of appropriate images or visuals becomes an important element in the design of academic posters, as well as the actual physical task of designing and constructing the poster itself.

It is here where those students who are perhaps less confidant in researching and writing English can excel. They, too, will have a 'greater stake in the presentation'. And, in addition, poster making can improve group dynamics. Even the students who were known as weaker students in terms of their English skills are now able to make an important contribution to the presentation (Wilson & Brooks, 2014, p. 515).

There are many possible scenarios for the actual presentations. Which presentation scenarios are the most suitable depends on the size of the class, the facilities that are available, and timetable flexibility.

One possible scenario is to schedule the presentations on a particular day, in the classroom or in a larger space, where half of the class stand by their posters taking turns explaining and answering questions to the other half of the class, as they move about from one poster to another poster. Then, after a short recess, during which students enjoy some snacks and drinks, the other half of the class presents their posters to the first half.

Another scenario, as described by Wilson and Brookes (2014), is to invite other second language teachers and their classes to come to a 'showing'.

Poster presentations, when properly managed, can provide students with a level of autonomy in the performance of a variety of second language learning experiences, in a relatively short time-frame. Students will feel comfortable about making short presentations to their peers, in such a project, and, in turn the experience will strengthen their level of confidence in using the new language.

There is yet another benefit. Poster presentations provide little or no time for students to feel bored because the presentations require active participation on the part of all students. And *all members* of a class can benefit from both giving and listening to oral (and visual) presentations. Not the least of the many benefits, poster presentations also help cater to different learning styles (Wilson & Brookes, 2014).

3.7 Topic-based curriculum - Classrooms without textbooks

In reviewing the six previously described approaches presented in this research report, readers may notice that there has been no mention of standard-type textbooks. The emphasis has been on activities that call for 'learning by doing', rather than those that are primarily teacher-led. This reflects evidence that 'students learn best when the curriculum (and classroom materials) [are] socially relevant and when students are given opportunities to examine their (own) world . . . ' (Hayes & Zacarian, 2010).

Textbooks which were designed for second language learners in the United Kingdom or for Chinese exchange students studying in Canada, for example, may not be the most suitable for second language learners in Asian countries. Those textbooks are quite appropriate for those for whom they were designed, but not necessarily for students studying English as a second language in their own country. For example, the place names are not familiar. The faces in the photos don't look familiar. Their names are unusual. The activities being described are not ones in which the students have participated themselves. In other words, the materials in such textbooks are not only written in a 'foreign language', but the stories appear to be meant for students elsewhere.

A topic-based syllabus, the seventh approach, includes reading materials and topics relevant to the students' own culture, and photos that show the ethnic mix in their home country, for example. Teachers in Thailand are fortunate to be have two English daily newspapers, the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*. Both of these dailies are of international quality and provide relevant and timely stories and photos on a wide range of topics. Using a topic-based syllabus as a framework can provide a greater stimulus for language learning

for adolescent learners because the context can be familiar and thus more relevant to the learners (British Council, 2011).

By starting with a topic of interest and then discussing or explaining an issue or an opinion, students will find out what they already know, what they do not know, and what they can become interested in knowing. These, in turn, can provide further objectives, whether they are grammatical, lexical or pronunciation-based, and on which the teacher (and the students) can build the various sections of the course.

Teachers who have the background and experience will know that the key to developing a successful topic-based course will require first a discussion with students as to their interests and motivations. For example, inviting the students to express their likes and dislikes (food, fashion, movies, sports, TV programmes, music), and, what's going on in the nation. Another popular theme for adolescents might centre on what are their future hopes and dreams.

Students with greater fluency, and experience in the use of English, should be encouraged to help classmates who are less competent, by translating their likes and dislikes in such a discussion session.

The most successful topics will be those for which there are varying and differing opinions. The list produced from these early discussions can give teachers clues as to which course books or types of articles from English language daily newspapers may prove to be helpful print sources for use in future lessons.

Although it will not be possible to take into account all the interests expressed by students, the British Council (2011) English language teaching experts recommend that teachers plan to select three or four to be covered within a specific time-frame. Then, together with the students, discuss what might be their learning objectives.

For teenage learners of English as a second language, these may include:

- to learn specialised vocabulary to better understand relevant print material and to pronounce new words both singly and in a phrase or sentence
- to keep a personal diary of new words and phrases, including translations using their first language
- to gain experience in identifying key ideas from Internet-based articles and reports found in local English language newspapers and magazines
- to practice preparing short summaries and/or reports using bullet points

Remedial grammar and error correction are two topics that should be discussed with second-language learners. Some students might prefer to be corrected 'on the spot'; others may prefer a less public method. Adolescent learners are perhaps more sensitive than younger-age learners in how they prefer to be corrected.

Teachers should keep a list somewhere visible to the whole class, of the more common errors which students make and from time to time review these. A few examples include upper case letters for proper nouns; the importance of commas when using words such as 'too'; and, the correct use of italics. Again, the exercises found in language learning text books can be an excellent source for the busy teacher.

Teachers are encouraged to use a wide variety of sources and resources. To illustrate, the British Council (2011) provided a list in the case where students have agreed that one of their interests is 'cinema'.

As a starting point it is suggested that teachers find out which films they really enjoy and why. Then follow up using the Internet and local English language newspapers to research films currently showing in cinemas and observe the language used by the advertisers in describing those films.

For an extended focus, *YouTube*, for example, can be used to watch some of the earlier award-winning films that are examples of the various popular genres which were identified by class members.

This instructional technique can introduce students to distinguishing the different accents of English speakers, and develop an increasing awareness of differences in culture, fashion, and architecture in the various historical periods portrayed in the films.

To conclude, Jennifer Goodman of the British Council, acknowledges that teaching without a course book can create extra work, but, it can 'keep your classes fresh and interesting for your students . . . definitely give it a try from time to time' (British Council, 2011).

4. Concluding Remarks

This review article has attempted to bring together a variety of pathways, or approaches, to aid teachers in their on-going challenge of ensuring greater success for adolescent second-language learners of English – approaches that have been recommended by internationally reputed experts in second language learning, major publishers of support materials, and on-line resource providers – all of whom are committed to assist teachers of English as a second language.

Adolescents are a unique to group of second language learners. Many of which are reluctant learners of a second language for a variety of reasons discussed in this review article.

This author believes it is important for second-language teachers of English to make use of the many resources that are available on line – resources that can be adapted to the needs and interests of computer literate Thai adolescent learners. This paper has described ideas for teachers of English as a second language as to how best to help adolescents become *engaged learners*. The term 'engaged learners' refers to students who have been motivated to increase their attention and focus on second language learning through meaningful student-centred activities.

Heads of departments of content subjects have a role, too. Second language learning needs the support of all teachers – mathematics, science, art, music, and social studies. Professional teachers should support the learning of languages, both first and second. It needs the support not just teachers of languages!

Finally, the best schools are never content with the *status-quo*. The best schools, in the view of this author, are always searching for ways to improve the success rate of their students. This is especially important for adolescent students studying English as a second language. Acquiring competencies in English is more important these days than ever before.

High school graduates who have not acquired competencies in a second language, such as English, are certain to be among the more disadvantaged in this present era of internationalization. (Wiriyachitro, 2002)

5. Appendix: Graded readers

This Appendix is intended to provide detailed information about 'Graded Readers' for those who are not very familiar with this important resource for teachers and learners of English as a second language. Graded readers are books that have been created for second language learners. They are simplified versions of famous novels or original stories. The simplification is with respect to vocabulary and syntax levels in order to make the content more accessible to second-language learners at various levels of skill development.

Major publishers of English graded readers include Cambridge University Press, Macmillan, McGraw-Hill Asia, Oxford University Press, and Pearson English Readers, among others. (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2016). Publishers of graded readers specify the level of difficulty, such as Level 1, Level 2, and so on. Others specify 'Beginner', 'Elementary', 'Intermediate', 'Upper Intermediate', and 'Advanced', for example.

Graded readers are available in either British or American English. [Note: the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) use British English. Thus, it is recommended that teachers of English in Thailand should recommend graded readers which use British English, especially for students whose career aspirations might include working in the civil service. [Teachers in other countries who wish to use graded readers for their students should take into account which spelling system is the one which is used by their governments.]

Some publishers of graded readers are now including a CD-ROM. Learners can then hear the story being narrated by professional speakers of English. Also, several publishers have begun to make available some graded readers ***on line***, for example, Penguin. See http://www.librarything.com/series/Penguin+Readers/.

What follows are a sample of titles from one publisher, Pearson English Readers. This selection serves to illustrate the vast range of well-known English stories which have been developed for readers at various levels of English proficiency. The content of the graded readers in the following list are marketed as being suitable for adolescents.

Level 1: A Christmas Carol, Missing Coins, and 20,000 Leagues under the Sea
Level 2: King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, The Railway Children, Three Short Stories of Sherlock Holmes
Level 3: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
Level 4: Diary of a Young Girl
Level 5: Round the World in Eighty Days
Level 6: Great Expectations and Journey to the Centre of the Earth (Pearson Publishing, 2019)

Contemporary themes exist in abundance, too. There are literally thousands of such readers. Each are set in various countries around the world. Included here are some examples of Cambridge readers for Levels 1, 2 and 4 that are ideally suitable for teenagers:

Level 1: Help! About a teen and an unusual computer that has surprising skills. Inspector Logan: A story about a missing woman and a dead body, and Inspector Jenny Logan and her new job in Scotland.
Level 2: Within High Walls. Nancy is a security guard at a refugee detention centre. She falls in love with one of the detainees and her world changes completely.
Level 4: Berlin Express. A 20-year old Japanese student when he travels on holiday to Berlin meets a sinister looking man who later turns out to be an assassin who has been hired to kill an international VIP person.

It is clear that adolescents *can* advance their language proficiency levels through extensive reading. However the stories must be at a competency level which does not require a dictionary, and which can captivate the reader's interest. (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

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