

**World Teachers' Day 2022**

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**Exploring Children's Experiences of Learning  
English in the Traditional Primary Classroom:  
Identifying Resources and Opportunities**

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# Hello!

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# Outline

- Research project one aimed to understand how primary school children experienced learning English in the traditional classroom in Egypt, and what suggestions they had for improving teaching and learning English.
- Research project two aimed to use children's suggestions to bring changes in the classroom.



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# Traditional Classrooms in Egypt

- Teacher-centered
- Whole class instruction with little interactive and collaborative learning
- Teaching to the test
- Focus on learning vocabulary & grammar and reading and writing skills with little attention to listening and speaking skills.

# Theoretical assumptions: Sociocultural theory

- Learning is not an individual process but a social and collaborative process of co-constructing knowledge with others.



# Theoretical framework: Sociocultural theory

- Social resources (e.g. teachers and peers) and material resources (e.g. textbooks) mediate/facilitate learning. The usefulness of these resources depends on how they are accessed and used.



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# Project 1

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# Research questions & activities

We asked 10-year-old pupils (n=393):

1. What **personal goals/motives** for learning English did they have?
2. What were their **suggestions** for improving classroom teaching and learning?

We used simple activities to elicit children's ideas:

## 1. Sentence starters

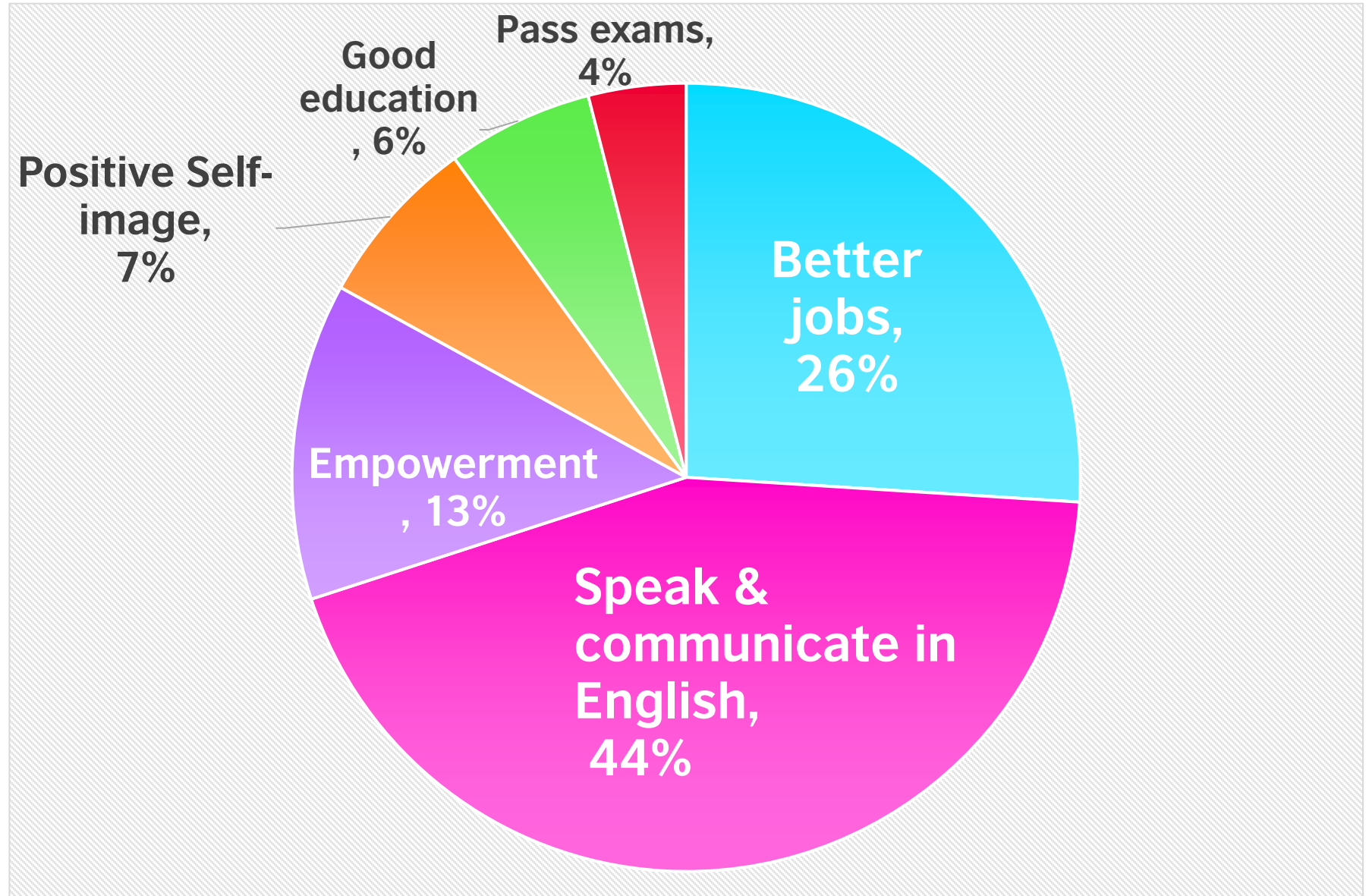
In the English classroom, I would like to learn English so that .....

## 2. Drawing activities

Draw your dream English classroom where you would learn English well.



# What were children's personal goals for learning English?



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## What does this tell us?

- Children are mainly motivated to learn English for social, higher-cognitive and self-related reasons/goals.
- Passing Exams is not necessarily the most important goal for children- even in exam driven contexts.

- ✓ Children are more likely to exert effort and engage in learning if they perceive classroom activities to be useful and relevant to their personal learning goals.
- ✓ It is very important for teachers to be aware of their learners' goals and aspirations.

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## 2. How could teaching and learning English in the classroom be improved?

- Write down in the chat box what you think are the three top things that **teachers could change/do** to improve teaching and learning English in the classroom.

# How could teaching and learning English in the classroom be improved?

## Fostering Positive Affect

- “No one in class was afraid of the teacher.”
- “Teacher treats us with all respect and appreciation; engages all pupils in the questions and encourages them and this makes us want to learn.”
- “Teachers make us feel good about ourselves.”

# How could teaching and learning English in the classroom be improved?

## Maximising Participation and Collaboration

- “When I **answer** questions so **often**, I feel I can learn English well.”
- “I have the **freedom to ask** whenever I need to.”
- “I like **pupils to work together** because their experiences are the same.”
- “We are young. When we **speak in pairs**, we are very happy.”

# How could teaching and learning English in the classroom be improved?

## Supporting learner agency/autonomy

- “You shouldn’t depend on the teacher or the book. You should have access to other resources... and read different topics...”
- “I try and find answers for myself and teacher respects me, and I learn”
- “Those who are very good at English ... depend on themselves.”

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# We concluded that classroom teaching and learning could be improved by ...

- Utilizing peer learning (social resources)
- Ensuring that classroom activities related to children's interests & needs.
- Supporting children's autonomy in making choices about what and how they learned.

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# Project 2



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Project 2 aimed to help teachers use **Pairwork** activities in a way that developed children's **speaking skills** and built their **competence, autonomy and relatedness** **(CAR)**



We used Ryan and Deci (2000) SDT to guide our work. SDT describe three ingredients necessary for all learning:

1. A belief in one's own **competence**

[I can do this!].

2. A sense that one is choosing one's own behaviours  
[**autonomy**]

[I make my own decisions!].

3. A feeling of **relatedness** to other people [I belong and am valued!].



# How does it work?

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## Using pairwork with 'Dialogues' to build CAR & practice Speaking

Children practice the dialogues in pairs, **all at the same time**, to provide maximum speaking and practice time for all the children.

# Using pairwork with 'Dialogues' to build CAR & practice Speaking

Teachers observe children working in pairs from a distance.

When teachers choose to monitor learners' work from a short distance, they might intimidate some learners, especially who **lack sense of Competence**.

# Using pairwork with 'Dialogues' to build CAR & practice Speaking

Teachers shouldn't directly correct all language mistakes.

Over emphasis on correctness curbs children's sense of **Competence** and creates an atmosphere of competition rather than **Relatedness** in the classroom.

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# Using pairwork with 'Dialogues' to build CAR & practice Speaking

Teachers should be careful to pair each child with someone they can easily work with.

For example, pairing a slow learner/ low attainer with a fast learner/ high attainer might not be helpful as the high attainer may be impatient to go at a slower pace or provide support to the low attainer.

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# Using pairwork with 'Dialogues' to build CAR & practice Speaking

Teachers can ask the children to choose who to work with, and therefore supporting their **autonomy** and **Relatedness**.



# Using pairwork with 'Dialogues' to build CAR & practice Speaking

Pairs can choose which role in the dialogue they want to start with.

Children can choose the role that is easier or more interesting for them.

Children can also change some words in the dialogue and use words they know or would like to practice.

This provides good support for **Autonomy**.

## KEY FINDING

MORE AUTONOMOUS CHILDREN FEEL  
LESS ANXIOUS & ARE MORE CAPABLE OF  
LEARNING.

# TEACHERS CAN HELP *ALL CHILDREN* SPEAK ENGLISH IN THE CLASS BY HAVING:

- Less corrections *MORE PAIRWORK!*
- Less focus on correct answers & more focus on *participation FOR ALL*
- More support for *ALL* children's sense of *competence* (e.g. praise, encouragement for everyone)

# TEACHERS CAN HELP *ALL CHILDREN* SPEAK ENGLISH IN THE CLASS BY HAVING:

- Children *choose more* (e.g. who to work with)
- Lots of *practice* in pairs before asking children to speak in public
- More *relatedness* among ALL children in the class

# More Information about our research

1. Hargreaves E, Mahgoub M, Elhawary D. An investigation into improved primary school English language learning in the traditional classroom (An Egyptian case study). 01 Sep 2016. British Council, LONDON (Report)

[https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub\\_G164%20ELTRA%20An%20investigation%20into%20improved%20primary%20school%20FINAL WEB.pdf](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub_G164%20ELTRA%20An%20investigation%20into%20improved%20primary%20school%20FINAL_WEB.pdf)

2. Elhawary D. & Hargreaves E D. Why won't they speak English? An investigation into how young learners perceive and negotiate anxiety and autonomy in the EFL classroom. British Council, LONDON (Report)- Forthcoming.

**Thank you**