



TeachingEnglish

## British Council: TeachingEnglish

A podcast series for teachers  
of English



# Episode 6: How can I teach effectively in challenging contexts?

Show notes



## Episode overview

For decades, the educational dial in northern Nigeria, had barely moved. Low levels of literacy and numeracy prevailed across the state of Kano. Since 2019, the British Council have worked with governmental and non-governmental partners to implement its Kano Literacy and Maths Accelerator (KaLMA) project, the aim of which is to build foundational Maths, Hausa and English literacy skills, using a TaRL (Teaching at the Right Level) approach. In our interview, Mohammed Wais, a coordinator of the NGO “Wave of Hope” at the Nea Kavala refugee camp in northern Greece, shares his experience of teaching English in this challenging context, providing ideas, initiatives and insights into how teachers can be as effective as possible.

## In this episode

Language teaching challenges come in many different shapes and forms

Although more children than ever before are attending school, the quality of education which they are getting is mixed

Lots of research shows that children learn more effectively when they learn with students who are at the same level

It may just be a very small change which can have a big impact on a school, a class, or even just an individual student

English is something that everyone knows as well as their traditional language

Still we continue and didn't give up and we just find a way to teach them, motivate them and this, teach them or help or support them with their English language

# Classroom application

## Think about your own practice

- What is challenging about the situation in which you teach? What can you do to try and minimise these challenges?
- Do you talk to your colleagues about these challenges? Are you able to identify some solutions to these challenges together?
- If you are working in challenging circumstances, don't try and change everything at once. It is impossible to make lots of changes in a short space of time. Be realistic in the goals which you set.

## Classroom activity

Why not try Jumping on the Letters (the game mentioned in the field report) with your class. A lesson plan for this session is given below.

### **Jumping on the Letters**

*Jumping on the Letters* is a fun activity which helps children learn the sound and shape of individual letters. It can also be used to learn the spelling of syllables (in Hausa) or words (in English).

NOTE: Try to follow these steps as closely as possible in your session so as to achieve the main learning objectives<sup>21</sup>. Later you may decide to do some of the parts differently. Also note that:

- **Words in bold** = words which you say to the children
- Words which are underlined = look at the bottom of the page for more information
- **WORDS IN CAPITALS** = repeated stages (adapt the Hausa to English)
- *Words in Italics* = learning resources

### **BEFORE THE SESSION**<sup>22</sup>

- Make sure you have the following materials:
  - Hausa letter cards
  - English letter cards
  - Chalk
- Decide which letters you want to focus on in the session. You should:
  - Choose between 6 and 10. If you choose too many, it may be confusing for the children.
  - Choose a mixture of letters which are familiar and unfamiliar to the children. If they already know some letters, it can build their confidence
  - It is best to choose letters which they can use to spell out words, so make sure you include at least 2 vowels
- In the middle of the room, write out the letters in a grid on the floor. Or you can place the letter cards on the floor. Writing out the letters makes it easier for all children to see. For example:



<b>d</b>	<b>a</b>
<b>i</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>m</b>	<b>o</b>

### **DURING THE SESSION**

#### **Stage A – 20 minutes. Focus on Hausa (Whole Group)**

**A1.** Welcome the children into the room<sup>23</sup>. This will help them relax. When children feel more relaxed, they learn language more effectively. Make sure they are all sitting in a circle.

**A2.** Say: "Today we are going to learn about Hausa letters. Who can tell me some Hausa letters?"

**A3.** Do Think, Pair, Share<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Learning objective: The language (e.g. letters / words / sentences) which you want the children to learn within the session.

<sup>22</sup> Before the session: It's important that you prepare for the session so that you make the most of the time you have with the children. It takes only a few minutes to prepare for this session.

<sup>23</sup> Welcome: You might ask questions like: 1. How are you feeling today? 2. What lesson have you just had? 3. Have you done anything fun today? 4. What are you going to do later?

<sup>24</sup> Think, Pair, Share: 1. Children listen to your question and think about their answer. 2. Children present their ideas to their partner. 3. Pairs share their ideas with the whole group.

A4. Say: “What letters did you say? Can you see any of these letters written on the floor?” The children should identify these letters. Let them stand up and point to the correct letters. Do a choral drill<sup>25</sup>.

A5. Ask for a volunteer<sup>26</sup>. Say a letter (e.g. a). She or he has to jump on it. Repeat this with 2 more letters (e.g. m and d). See the diagram below:

d	a
i	n
m	o

d	a
i	n
m	o

d	a
i	n
m	o

A6. Repeat this process several times with different children.

A7. When the children understand the activity, ask for two volunteers. One child will be the ‘jumper’ and the other will be the ‘facilitator’. The ‘facilitator’ will now say a letter for the ‘jumper’ to go on.

- If the jumper is correct, get the children to say well done
- If the jumper is incorrect, get them to say where they should have jumped

A8. Repeat this process several times. Different children will play the role of ‘facilitator’ and ‘jumper’.



### STAGE B – 20 minutes. Focus on Hausa (Small Group)

B1. Say: “Well done. You are very good at this. I now want you to play the same game but in groups. Can you do this?” Elicit<sup>27</sup> the task which children think they have to do.

B2. Divide the class into groups<sup>28</sup>.

B3. Give each group a set of ⇒ Hausa Letter Flashcards. Then:

- Together, the group find the letters written on the floor. They place the letters in a grid in their part of the room
- One child is the ‘facilitator’. One child is the ‘jumper’. The other children in the group will check that the jumper goes on the right letters
- Children change roles



You should walk around the room and:

- Help any groups who aren’t sure what they have to do
- Provide support and advice
- Encourage the children

<sup>25</sup> Choral drill: 1. Clearly say the letters on the floor. 2. The children repeat your pronunciation. 3. Check in groups / individually that they can say the letters accurately.

<sup>26</sup> Ask for a volunteer: Don’t make anyone volunteer if they don’t want to. Don’t choose only loud or strong children. Give many children the chance to take part. Make sure you have a good gender balance (girls as well as boys).

<sup>27</sup> Elicit: Ask the children to say what they think. Don’t just tell them what to do – they should try and work it out by themselves.

<sup>28</sup> Divide the children into groups: The booklet contains details of this. The groups should be as small as possible.



## STAGE C – 20 minutes. Focus on English (Whole Class)

C1. Say: **"Your Hausa is excellent. So we will now study some English. Is this ok? What English letters do you know?"**

C2. REPEAT STAGES #A3-A8.. You will need to change any letters which are only found in Hausa (b, d, k, r, sh, ts, y). Also remember that the pronunciation of some letters is different in Hausa and English. For example, d, k, t, m, n, r in Hausa are pronounced differently in English.

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## STAGE D – 15 minutes. Focus on English (Small group)

17. REPEAT STAGES #B1-B3. Use ⇒ *English Letter Flashcards*. Say: **"Well done. You are very good at this. I now want you to play the same game but in groups. Can you do this."**

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### Variations

This plan should be followed when you facilitate this session for the first time. When you do it again, some of the children will hopefully remember the activity. As children become more familiar with the activity, you can use more letters and make the task more challenging. Different ways in which you can do this include:

- **Use letters which may be unfamiliar:** In Hausa, this would include b, d, k, ky, sh, ts. In English, this would include k, q, v, x and z.
- **Use more letters:** If you use too many letters at first, children may find it confusing. When they understand the activity, you can use more letters (a maximum of 10).
- **Ask children to form words using the letters:** They have to jump between different letters to make words. For example, using the letters d, o, m, a, i and n, they can make the Hausa words *domin, ina, da and idan* in Hausa, and the English words *am, an, man and main*. You can also let them use the same letter more than once, e.g. *noon, nama, dama, mama, damina, maina, Imani* in Hausa, or *did, moon, noon and onion* in English.
- **Focus on consonant clusters:** When most learners can understand the individual letters, focus on clusters. In English, this can include initial clusters such as *br, ch, fl, gr, tr, pl, pr, sq, str and sw*. For more advanced children, you can also focus on final clusters such as *mp, nd, nt, os, th, ts*.
- **Use pictures:** You can also do the same activity with word cards or picture cards.

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## English Language Information

Suggested groups of letters and English words which you can make are presented below:

<i>b/r/i/g/h/v/e = be, beg, bit, birth, bite, get, her, he, hi, hit, it, the, their, tiger, bright</i>	<i>c/h/o/p/i/s = chip, chop, hi, hip, his, hg, oh, ship, shop, sip, so</i>	<i>f/l/a/g/e/w = age, awe, few, flag, gel, law, leaf, leg, wag, wage, we</i>
<i>e/r/d/t/s/a = are, art, as, at, dare, dart, date, dear, ears, eat, rat, read, red, sad, sat, seat, stared, tears, trade</i>	<i>p/o/l/y/m/e/a/n = alone, am, any, ape, employ, lamp, lay, male, man, map, me, mean, men, money, my, on, open, pan, plan, plane, play</i>	<i>q/u/i/t/e/r/s/a/d = air, are, as, at, ate, die, due, east, quiet, quit, quite, raise, ride, rise, sea, set, squad, star, stare, sure, tea, tie, true, us, use</i>

## Social media

Please share your views about this episode, and the series, on social media using the hashtag #TEBC. Let us know your thoughts, reflections, comments and whether you have been able to use any of the ideas in your teaching.

## Detailed notes

Use these notes to find out more about the contents of Episode 6.

Phrase	Explanation and Further Information
<b>Field Report: KaLMA</b>	
KaLMA programme	The Kano Literacy and Maths Accelerator (KaLMA) pilot project was launched in October 2019 by the Kano State Universal Basic Education Board, Ministry of Education, and Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education in collaboration with the British Council and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Africa with funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Due to COVID-19 related school closures, the pilot was put on hold from April to December 2020 and resumed in schools in January 2021. The programme aims to build foundational Maths, Hausa, and English literacy skills for over 37,000 Primary 4 to Primary 6 pupils in two full local government areas, Dawakin Tofa and Wudil in Kano State, Nigeria. Find out more from the <a href="#">British Council Nigeria website</a> .
Kano	Click <a href="#">here</a> to find out more about Kano State.
Many children finish primary school without these foundational skills	Click here for an interesting article about literacy in Nigeria. This page from UNICEF also contains a lot of useful information.
Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)	The TaRL approach works by assessing children (generally in Grades 4 to 6) and dividing them into groups based on learning level rather than age or grade; dedicating time to basic skills rather than focusing solely on the curriculum; and regularly assessing student performance, rather than relying only on end-of-year examinations. The TaRL approach is adaptable, holistic and focuses on helping education systems to improve children's foundational reading and mathematics skills. Its evidence-based approach, focused on learning outcomes, emerged out of the recognition that enrolment in school does not guarantee learning.
Dual language approach	This approach uses children's home language, Hausa, in order to assist their learning of an additional one, English. The academic literature shows the value of multilingual education, and how knowledge of L1 (in this case Hausa) can be used by learners to acquire L2 (English). Rather than treating them as separate entities, adopting an approach which integrates the two

	<p>can be an effective, efficient and fun way of teaching language(s). Using this approach has a number of benefits, including children being able to make explicit links between the two languages, the time available for language learning is maximised, and multilingualism and multilingual practices are normalised in the classroom.</p>
<b>Interview with Mohammed Wais</b>	
Nea Kavala	Learn more about Nea Kavala camp <a href="#">here</a> .
Wave of Hope	<p>Information from the <a href="#">Wave of Hope website</a> describes the organisation in the following terms:</p> <p>“WHF was started in Moria camp by its founder, <a href="#">Zekria Farzad</a>, a journalist who escaped from Afghanistan and arrived on the isle of Lesbos in Greece with his wife and 5 children in February 2019. He immediately felt the urgent need to provide attention and education to children in the camp and started teaching English to them with just a whiteboard on a bench in the Olive Grove, the hills of olive trees surrounding the refugee camp of Moria where the camp had spread. Thanks to the support of the local refugee community in Moria, that firstly offered their own tents to host lessons and then helped building the first official class of the school (a 25 square meters tent made of scrap pallets and plastic sheets), Wave of Hope for the Future have grown steadily, offering classes in English, Greek, German, French, Music and Art (from 7.30am to 22.30 Monday to Friday) with 44 teachers to over 2.700 students at the time that the school was burned down during the fire that destroyed Moria camp on the 8th and 9th of September 2020.</p> <p>In the meantime, also some of the refugee teachers were moved to other camps in mainland Greece and started new schools there. After just one and a half year WHF operates schools in five refugee camps across Greece with over 4.000 refugee students: Lesbos (inside the One Happy Family community after the fire destroyed the school and the entire camp of Moria in September 2020), Athens (Malakasa and Ritsona camp), Thessaloniki (Nea Kavala camp, Dimitri Hotel) and also in Afghanistan (in the Farza district, one hundred kilometers north of Kabul), where we are rebuilding and refurbishing a school that was destroyed and abandoned when the Taliban were occupying that region.</p> <p>Our schools have become an important support platform for our people, not only for education but also for community organization and emergency aid. Since the fires in Lesbos</p>

	Island, for example, we have been organizing emergency food distributions and since march 2020 we are running the Covid-19 Awareness Team to educate refugees on the virus and distribute PPE to the community.”
RefugeeEd	The mission of <a href="#">RefugeeEd</a> is “To ensure that children and adults fleeing violence have access to a good education, by promoting collaboration and providing support and expertise to local organisations, teachers, and volunteers.”
Moria Camp	Moria was the largest refugee camp in Europe until it was burned down in September 2020.
Farsi	Persian, known to its native Iranian speakers as Farsi, is the official language of modern-day Iran, parts of Afghanistan and the central Asian republic of Tajikistan. Persian is one of the most important members of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It is distantly related to Latin, Greek, the Romance, Slavic and Teutonic languages, and English. Kurdish, Baluchi, Pashtu and Ossetic are the other modern Iranian languages.
Baby Shark	" <b>Baby Shark</b> " is a hugely popular children's song and associated dance.

## Useful links

- A presentation by Dr Richard Smith on [Teaching in Difficult Circumstances](#).
- Chris Sowton has published a book entitled [Teaching in Challenging Circumstances](#), and has written several blogs on this topic – e.g. [here](#). You can also watch a webinar [here](#) entitled Ten strategies for teaching effectively in challenging circumstances which he recorded for the British Council.
- A Teaching English webinar by Marie Delaney entitled [Dealing with Challenging Learners](#).



# Glossary

The following words at the B2, C1 and C2 level (according to the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#)) are used in this episode.

## B2 words

addicted  
additional  
affected  
aware  
barrier  
booklet  
circumstances  
commerce  
community  
conflict  
context  
contexts  
contributed  
cooperative  
council  
didn't  
drugs  
educational  
effective  
effectively  
emphasis  
episode  
episodes  
equipped  
expectation  
extract  
focus  
gender

host  
illegal  
impact  
institutions  
interpreting  
legal  
make a  
management  
master  
meaningful  
mental  
misery  
motivated  
motivation  
nails  
occupied  
originally  
passionate  
practical  
pressure on  
process  
publication  
refugee  
relevant  
researchers  
resources  
schedule  
schedules  
sensitive

settle  
significant  
specific  
state  
states  
straightforward  
strategies  
struggling  
suffered  
target  
tensions  
throughout  
to do with  
try out  
unfamiliar  
volunteer  
volunteers  
widely  
wise

## C1 words

aid  
attaining  
dictating  
dual  
duration  
funded  
grouping  
inclusive

innovative  
insufficient  
integrate  
know what  
literacy  
make it  
motivate  
namely  
noticeable  
officially  
outcome  
outcomes  
perspective  
radical  
restriction  
status  
sustainable

## C2 words

core  
familiarised  
fragile  
fundamental  
humanitarian  
narrator  
practitioner  
rhymes  
talked about