P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

Learning to Unlearn Faulty Beliefs and Practices in English Language Teaching

Willy A. Renandya[*1]
Nguyen Thi Thuy Minh[2]
George M. Jacobs[3]

[1]National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Nanyang Walk 637616, SINGAPORE
[2]Department of English & Linguistics, School of Arts, University of Otago, Dunedin 9054, NEW ZEALAND
[3]Department of Language and Literacy Education, Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 50603, MALAYSIA

Abstract

Our actions arise from our beliefs about life: what we need and how best to achieve it. This article asks English language teachers to undertake an open-minded examination of some long-held beliefs in our profession and of the teaching practices that derive from those beliefs. Perhaps, based on this examination, teachers may wish to modify some beliefs and, correspondingly, change some practices. The particular beliefs examined in the article are as follows: people who begin second language learning at a younger age will be more successful than those who start at an older age; native speaker varieties of English (e.g., those spoken native-English speaking countries) should be valued over non-native varieties (e.g., those spoken in outer and expanding circle countries); the best outcome is for second language learners to use English only and stop using their mother tongue in and out of the classroom; in second language instruction, systematic, explicit and detailed instruction of grammar deserves top priority; vocabulary is considered less important than grammar; pragmatic competence need not be taught as students can acquire it on their own; learning depends on suffering, thus the famous saying "no pain, no gain"; teaching learning strategies deserves a great deal of attention;

[*] Corresponding author, email: willy.renandya@nie.edu.sg

Citation in APA style: Renandya, W. A., Minh, N. T. T., & Jacobs, G. M. (2023). Learning to unlearn faulty beliefs and practices in English language teaching. *Studies in English Language and Education, 10*(1), 1-15.

Received May 25, 2022; Revised December 10, 2022; Accepted December 13, 2022; Published Online January 31, 2023

https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v10i1.26009

teaching materials should be difficult in order to move learning forward, and only lazy and uninformed teachers use cooperative learning.

Keywords: ELT beliefs and practices, native-speakerism, grammar and vocabulary teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

Life-long learning is usually associated with learning new knowledge and skills throughout one's life. Learning new things, however, is not the only thing that enables us to grow. An important part of the life-long learning process is for us to unlearn our previously held beliefs, assumptions, and practices that are no longer tenable. Holding on to dated and unsupported beliefs may not do justice to our students and cause embarrassment to our profession.

Indeed, some of our beliefs and practices in ELT may need to be unlearned as they tend to hinder rather than facilitate language learning. Some scholars (e.g., Kubota, 2015) have gone so far as to suggest that some of our pedagogical practices may, in fact, be counter-productive or even harmful. Truscott (1996), for example, wrote that grammar correction can be a harmful practice, as there is little evidence that shows its effectiveness. While he may not be completely correct in saying that grammar correction in writing does not lead to lasting improvement of students' writing ability, his view has led to a flurry of research studies that re-examined our grammar correction practices in regard to students' writing. We now understand better what kinds of grammar correction work well, what does not work well, and what factors can influence the efficacy of our grammar correction practices (see, for example, a recent meta-analysis by Lim & Renandya, 2020).

2. FAULTY BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

In the following sections, we discuss a number of faulty beliefs and practices that the profession might need to examine in order to determine if they are well aligned with current thinking and evidence and best practices in ELT.

2.1 The Younger, the Better

The origin of the belief that younger children learn second languages better than older people and that at or after a certain age (perhaps the onset of adolescence), people's ability to acquire new languages is severely limited can be traced to the critical period hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967). Lenneberg claimed that second language acquisition happened optimally before children reached puberty. Given the right language learning environment, these children would flourish and attain native-like competence in the target language. After puberty, according to the hypothesis, children would lose their natural ability to develop full competence in second languages. They would still be able to acquire enough language to meet their communicative purposes. However, their speech would be heavily accented, and their overall language competence would fall way below that of a typical native speaker.

The idea that children are natural language learners is very appealing to both ELT experts and practitioners, so much so that the idea quickly became entrenched in their collective beliefs about second or foreign language learning. Policymakers, too, embraced the idea and began introducing policies that required schools to teach English to young children. Today, it is not uncommon to find schools that offer English lessons to primary school pupils or even to kindergarten children.

However, decades of research by SLA researchers (Ellis, 2015; Singleton & Muñoz, 2011) show that the critical period hypothesis is only partially supported, and its wide adoption in EFL contexts may not be warranted. While it is true that children are amazing learners, and they are motivated to learn almost anything, the age advantage has been mostly seen in their ability to develop native-like accents and to use the acquired language fluently and effortlessly. Their older counterparts may not sound native-like and may not be as fluent, but they are no less competent when it comes to using language for a wide variety of purposes (e.g., academic or business purposes).

Indeed, if we take away the 'nativeness' criterion from our discussion, the age advantage may begin to disappear. This is particularly true today since English has de facto become a global language where native-like competence is no longer seen as a prized learning goal as it once was (Kubota, 2015). People now learn English for more utilitarian purposes, e.g., to interact with other English speakers from different parts of the world for a wide range of purposes. Many now feel that it may be socially and culturally unacceptable to sound like a native speaker as they do not want to lose their identity as bilingual or multilingual speakers (Sung, 2016).

The concept behind native-speakerism has been seriously questioned in professional literature. A growing number of practitioners, too, have begun to question its relevance in ELT. The next section discusses some of the key objections to the ideology behind native-speakerism.

2.2 Native-Speakerism

Robert Phillipson (1992) in his book *Linguistic Imperialism*, was among the first scholars who strongly criticized one of the most enduring and central tenets of ELT, i.e., native-speakerism. Native-speakerism is founded on the belief that the native speaker is the ideal teacher, that monolingualism should be one of the key goals of second language learning (which gets translated into an English-only classroom), and that language learning should begin as early as possible. By extension, the ideal teaching materials should be written by native speakers, and the best language teaching methodology should originate from native English-speaking countries as well (e.g., UK and USA). Well-known language teaching methods such as the Oral Approach, Audiolingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, and Task-based Language Teaching method were developed by native English-speaking ELT scholars.

Although Phillipson and others (e.g., McKay, 2018) have called for a paradigm shift in ELT, native-speakerism continues to be alive in many places in the world. For example, many language institutions prefer to hire native-speaker teachers of English rather than non-native, bilingual teachers (Yeo et al., 2017). In many language classrooms, teachers continue to insist on teaching British Standard English or American Standard English, arguing that this variety has the most prestige in the world and that students should aspire to learn the standard UK or standard American accents.

Many seem to be oblivious to the fact that English has now become a global language, and having native-speaker accents may not be the most desirable. One of the reasons is that native accents may not be easily comprehensible for the millions of English speakers today who learn English from their bilingual or multilingual teachers who speak English with their unique but easily comprehensible accents.

Should we then completely abandon native-speakerism in favour of non-native-speakerism? Probably not. What we need to do is to critically examine our deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about ELT and be more willing to abandon those that are no longer tenable and adopt new beliefs that are more in line with current thinking about the nature of ELT and how best we can help our students acquire the language. Professionally trained native-speaker teachers can be excellent teachers in the same way that professionally trained non-native bilingual teachers can be outstanding teachers. Instead of putting them on the opposite ends of a continuum, we should perhaps start thinking about how we can work harmoniously together to benefit our students.

2.3 Monolingual Fallacy

According to this belief, the best way to learn English is to enforce an English-only policy in the classroom. No other languages should be allowed as these languages will only interfere with, or even harm, the natural process of language acquisition (Phillipson, 1992). In order to achieve native-like fluency in English, so the argument goes, students should be fully exposed to English and should not turn to their mother tongues when encountering difficulties in learning the target language. When they do not understand the meaning of a word, they should consult a monolingual dictionary rather than a bilingual or multilingual one. When they have difficulty expressing themselves in English, at no time should they be allowed to make use of their prior linguistic resources to make themselves understood.

Many ELT scholars today believe that monolingualism brings more harm than good to our bilingual and multilingual learners of English (Tupas & Renandya, 2021). Our job as teachers is not to promote monolingualism but to enrich and widen students' linguistic repertoire by helping them acquire an additional language. It is ethically problematic to turn our bilingual learners into monolingual speakers of English. From a psycholinguistic perspective, it is also not possible to produce monolingual speakers in an educational setting that is very different from that of a native speaker who is surrounded by the language every day and has the opportunity to use the language to meet their diverse linguistic and social needs. The majority of our second or foreign language learners do not have the luxury of being fully immersed in the language, nor do they have ample opportunities to use the language outside the classroom.

Yet, despite all of these constraints, many second language learners are able to achieve a respectable level of proficiency that meets their social or professional needs while keeping and/or preserving their first or second languages (see Renandya et al., 2019). They can switch back and forth between their first, second, and perhaps third languages conveniently in places where multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception. Singapore is an example where people code-switch and/or code-mix when interacting with other multilingual speakers.

A final point to make about the advantage of additive bilingualism is that bilinguals or multilingual individuals can enjoy numerous cognitive benefits. Research by Bialystok (2018), a cognitive neuroscientist who champions bilingualism, suggests that children who speak two or three languages regularly can enjoy more sophisticated cognitive abilities. They have more advanced levels of metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge compared to monolingual children.

2.4 Teach More Grammar

Learning a language is often associated with learning the grammar of the language. The underlying belief of this association is that one has to *master* the grammar of the language in order to speak it. Not surprisingly, grammar has always had a special place in ELT. One of the oldest teaching methods, the Grammar Translation method (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), for example, is still alive and kicking in many parts of the world despite repeated calls by ELT scholars and experienced practitioners for grammar to be but one of the many areas that students need to learn as they gain proficiency in languages.

If you walk into a second language classroom, you will find that the lesson is often organized around a grammar point. The teacher would use a PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) approach, which typically begins by providing students with a detailed explanation of the target grammar point (e.g., the present perfect tense), and then moving on by giving students worksheet exercises on that grammatical point before finally giving students opportunities to engage in meaningful or communicative practice with that tense. It is worth noting that the first two steps often take up a larger portion of class time, while the last step is given a much smaller amount of time. Sometimes, students are simply told to do their communicative practice outside the classroom.

Interestingly, despite the amount of time spent on grammar teaching, students seem to continue to have difficulty using the language for real communication. Does this mean that grammar teaching has little effect on students' ability to comprehend and produce language, or should teachers teach more grammar?

The answer to these questions depends on what types of grammar teaching we are referring to. Do we, for example, teach grammar as *knowledge* or as *ability*? Richards and Reppen (2014) offer an in-depth discussion of these two types of grammar teaching. They point out that teaching grammar as knowledge is not without value, but it plays a minimal role in helping students use the language for communication. The kind of grammar knowledge we teach (e.g., rules for producing grammatically correct sentences) is most useful for students to ace a grammar-focused language test, but it may be of little use when they try to use the language for speaking and writing.

Richards and Reppen (2014) suggested that when we teach grammar as an ability, "the focus is on how grammar is used as a resource in the creation of spoken and written texts" (p. 5). Viewed in this way, grammar is always presented in meaningful texts and contexts, not in isolated sentences. The teaching of this type of grammar involves the teacher explaining the correct form of the language, but more importantly, how that form is used in relation to the purpose, audience, and context of the communicative event. When students learn grammar this way, there is a greater chance that they may be able to use the language for real communication.

If this is true, and we believe this to be so, we should re-think our grammar teaching methods and give more attention to how we can teach grammar as an ability rather than as knowledge.

2.5 Vocabulary is Less Important than Grammar

As discussed in the previous section, grammar tends to receive a lot of attention and instructional time. When students do not do well, the response has typically been ‘teach them more grammar’. This is despite the fact that many ELT experts have for many years suggested that we should give vocabulary a more prominent place in our language programme. Wilkins (1972) was among the first to say that vocabulary is more important than grammar. In his words, “while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (pp. 111-112). This point is easy to confirm as it reflects the experience of L2 students. They either do not have the words (lack of vocabulary problem) or cannot think/find the right words (slow retrieval problem) when they try to communicate in the language.

It is not difficult to find empirical support for Wilkins’ claim that vocabulary plays a key role in the development of language skills. Study after study shows that vocabulary is the best predictor of students’ language ability. Two recent studies on L2 listening by Du and Man (2022) and Wallace (2022) showed clearly that students’ vocabulary knowledge is the most crucial factor in EFL students’ listening comprehension performance. The findings of their research echo an earlier study by Alderson (2005) which showed a strong and reliable relationship between vocabulary size and language skills (e.g., listening, reading, and writing). Given the strong correlations, Alderson (2005) concluded by saying that “the size of one’s vocabulary is relevant to one’s performance on any language test, in other words, that language ability is to quite a large extent a function of vocabulary size” (p. 88).

Vocabulary researchers (e.g., Folse, 2011; Webb & Nation, 2017) have for a long time called for giving vocabulary more attention in the language classroom. The reason is quite clear i.e., without sufficient vocabulary, students will have great difficulty understanding written texts and expressing themselves in the target language. L2 students need to have around 2,000 words to engage in meaningful communication, about 5,000 to read unabridged non-technical texts, and perhaps up to 10,000 words to comprehend more complex academic texts (Folse, 2011). Folse (2011), however, laments that “English language learners face a debilitating lexical gap between words they know and the words they need to know” (p. 362).

2.6 All You Need is Grammar and Vocabulary

There is no doubt that grammar and vocabulary play an essential role in language learning and use. But communication requires more than just knowledge of words and rules for constructing sentences. It also requires the ability to appropriately convey our messages, thoughts, and feelings according to participants, situations, and goals, as well as the ability to accurately interpret those conveyed by other participants in interactions. That is pragmatic competence or knowledge of language use in social contexts.

Studies have shown that when learners are not aware of the social aspect of language use, serious miscommunication may happen, and this can have interactional consequences. For example, in a study of compliments and compliment responses, Wolfson (1989) showed that status-equal American speakers of English tend to use compliments as a strategy for initiating interaction. That is, very often, an opening compliment, such as "I like your sweater," may lead to a longer conversational exchange. Without awareness of the function of compliments as conversation openers, an L2 English speaker may inadvertently resist such attempts at interaction by briefly responding with a modest "Oh no, it is nothing special", hence closing the conversational sequence instead of sustaining it.

In another example, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2016) demonstrated that due to unfamiliarity with email conventions in the target language, L2 English students may inadvertently offend their lecturers by writing emails that are judged by the lecturers to be too direct and status-incongruent. These findings show that not only do learners need to be able to put words into meaningful sentences by using correct grammatical structures, but they also need to learn how to use language appropriately for the social situations in which they communicate.

Nevertheless, despite its importance, pragmatic competence has received little attention in the traditional second-language classroom. An explanation for this situation is that during their teacher education programmes, teachers are not well equipped to teach pragmatics (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009). Textbooks also often neglect pragmatics, and even if they teach pragmatic acts, such as making requests and expressing disagreements, they may not adequately explain the social conventions (e.g. cultural norms, politeness, taboos) behind the choice of language forms for carrying out these acts and the contexts in which they can be used (Nguyen, 2011).

Contrary to many teachers' beliefs, pragmatic knowledge is learned quite slowly when not formally taught. Studies have shown that despite months of being immersed in the target language environment, study abroad students may still find it difficult to interpret implied meaning (e.g., expressing a negative opinion of someone's essay by asking how much time the writer has put into it) (Taguchi, 2008) or express their intended meaning and nuances (e.g., politeness) (Barron, 2006). This is because, unlike grammar and vocabulary, pragmatic 'rules' are immensely fluid and may vary greatly not only across languages and cultures but also within the same language and culture, depending on the speakers' individual identity, age, gender, the dynamics of their relationship with one another, and the specificity of the context of interaction. Many of these rules may also be opaque and subtle, hence difficult for learners to notice by themselves.

The good news is that pragmatics is teachable. Effective instruction provides opportunities for learners to notice and develop an understanding of the pragmatic functions of language forms and their applicable contexts of use. For example, learners need to be aware that although in English, both an imperative form and an interrogative form can function as requests for someone to perform an action, which form may be selected by a speaker depends largely on the co-participant, the speaker's goal, and the situation involved. Learners need to notice, for example, that while signing off an email to a friend with "Write back soon" may be appropriate, saying "Give me a coffee to go" to a barista at a café is certainly not. Pragmatic instruction should also provide learners with plenty of opportunities to try out different pragmatic acts in a range of social scenarios and reflect on how their language use may be interpreted by listeners. There is another misconception that in teaching pragmatics, we should aim to help learners develop toward native speaker norms. However, recent research has demonstrated that while learners may emulate certain native speaker norms, they may less readily embrace those norms that clash with their cultural beliefs and ideologies (Ishihara, 2019). For example, many L2 English students from Asian backgrounds may feel uncomfortable addressing their professors by their first name when this form of address is endorsed by the professors, simply because this communicative style may violate the social norms of their cultures where higher power speakers are typically addressed respectfully and formally. In this regard, the learning of pragmatics is different from that of grammar and vocabulary. While grammatical errors or wrong choice of words may reflect a lack of knowledge in most situations, pragmatic variation may result from the learner's exercising of agency and expression of cultural identity.

Hence, it is now widely accepted that pragmatic instruction should provide learners with a range of options to act on and help them evaluate the interactional consequences of their pragmatic choices rather than insisting on native speaker norms (Taguchi, 2011). This makes sense if we consider the context of English as a global language where successful communication appears to be contingent on the speaker's ability to negotiate and co-construct meaning with participants from diverse linguacultural backgrounds rather than on conformity to native speaker communicative styles (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018).

2.7 No Pain, No Gain

This belief is quite widespread among language educators. Language learning, it is believed, is a long, drawn-out process that requires a lot of hard work. Only the most hard-working students who are willing to endure hardship over a long period of time will achieve success in mastering the language. Very often, language learning is equated with the learning of other subject areas in school, such as mathematics and physics, where students need to learn and remember a lot of rules and formulas.

That language learning takes time is true. While there is no hard empirical evidence in terms of how much time it takes to acquire a language, our collective experiences tell us that students learning in an intensive context need about 12 months to develop a working level of proficiency (roughly in the A2-B1 range). To develop a higher level of proficiency so that students can use the language more fluently and accurately for wider communicative purposes (roughly in the B2 range), students will probably need to spend another year or two. So, all in all, one would need about three years or so to achieve a good command of English.

However, does this mean that second language acquisition needs to be a painful and laborious process? There is little reason for us to think so. We have met and interviewed numerous successful learners of English (those who reach a B2 level and above) who recounted their pleasant and enjoyable language learning experiences. Not surprisingly, most, if not all of them, would say that they do not enjoy listening to long explanations about grammar and discourse rules, nor do they find completing language practice exercises engaging. And yet, they seem to have no difficulty comprehending and producing the language.

Do these successful learners of English have a special talent for learning a new language? Were they born with the ability to acquire any language with little effort? Unfortunately, there are a number of people who believe that talent plays a key role in language learning. Without this inborn ability, language learning becomes unbearably difficult.

The belief that talent plays an important role, however, is not supported by research. A more plausible explanation for why successful learners are successful is that they are acquiring (not studying) the language in ways that are consistent with what ELT experts (e.g., Krashen et al., 2017) believe to be key ingredients for successful language acquisition. These students immerse themselves in the language by reading, listening, and viewing highly engaging and comprehensible materials. While having an enjoyable time doing this, they subconsciously pick up a lot of useful and meaningful language (e.g., formulaic expressions or lexical bundles, pragmatically rich language structures, and discourse rules). When the opportunities arise, they will be able to use the language structures that they have incidentally acquired through reading, listening, and viewing for real-life communication. They may struggle a bit when trying to produce the language, but this process is far from being laboriously painful.

Park (2020), for example, recounted the pleasurable experience of a famous musical band leader from Korea who became a fluent user of English as a result of watching 'Friends' (an American sitcom) during his teenage years. He would first watch an episode with the aid of Korean subtitles. He would then watch the same episode using English subtitles. He would watch it again without any subtitles. This went on for a couple of years, by the end of which time he must have watched the whole ten seasons comprising more than 236 episodes. His success in learning English could be explained using the comprehensible input theory and skill learning theory. The input theory, as mentioned earlier, states that language learning happens optimally when students are immersed in meaningful and comprehensible language. The skill learning theory states that the acquisition of a skill requires repeated practice in order to help learners develop a high degree of fluency, automaticity, and greater control in performing a skill.

2.8 'Easy' Teaching Materials Have No Place in the Classroom

Teaching materials come in many different forms these days, e.g., coursebooks, teacher-made videos, YouTube learning channels, podcasts, and web-based materials. When choosing materials for teaching purposes, teachers are often guided by some selection criteria, i.e., whether the contents are interesting and relevant, whether the length is about right, and also the level of linguistic difficulty of the text. Many teachers usually go for instructional-level texts, i.e., texts that contain some, but not too many unknown vocabulary words and/or grammatical points.

These are texts that students might not be able to understand without the help of the teacher or other learning resources (e.g., a dictionary). The presence of unfamiliar language features often serves as the new learning point of the lesson and provides the teacher with the opportunity to explain and illustrate these to help students move to the next level of their language development.

There are times when teachers use texts that are way beyond students' zone of proximal development (Antonacci, 2000). These texts are often referred to as frustration level texts, which, we all know, serve little or no purpose in language learning except to give a sense to the students that these are the kinds of texts that they will need to handle at a later stage of their learning.

At the other end of the text, the difficulty continuum is those texts that are either at or below students' current level. These texts are considered 'easy' or 'too easy'. Easy materials, many believe, have little or no role in language learning as students will not learn anything 'new'. In other words, the texts do not contain new vocabulary or grammatical items and therefore are believed to serve no pedagogical purpose. Research, however, tells us that repeated exposure to known words and familiar grammatical structures plays a critical role in supporting student learning. Frequent encounters with familiar language allow students to consolidate and strengthen their previously learned language features and, in time, help them improve their ability to use the language more fluently and accurately (Nation & Waring, 2019).

The idea that easy, highly comprehensible texts play a critically important role is supported by research that investigates the effect of input-based approaches on language development. Input-based approaches (e.g., extensive reading, listening, and viewing) are founded on the belief that language learning happens optimally when students are exposed to a large amount of comprehensible and compelling language learning materials through daily reading, listening and viewing of the target language. Empirical data to date provide compelling evidence that extensive reading, listening, and viewing should be made an indispensable part of students' language learning experience (Krashen et al., 2017; Robb, 2022; Waring, 2009).

2.9 Teach More Strategies

Joan Rubin's (1975) seminal article 'What the good language learner can teach us' provided the impetus to subsequent discussions and debates about the role of individual learner differences in language learning. Research on individual differences covering such a wide range as aptitude, motivation, and learning strategies began to appear in the ELT professional literature in the late 1970s. Of these, learning strategies received the most research attention, spearheaded perhaps by Rebecca Oxford and her research team (see Oxford, 1990, 2016), who developed a theoretical framework for investigating learning strategies from cognitive, affective, and social perspectives. Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire has been widely used by researchers from around the world to investigate the relationship between learning strategies and learner proficiency.

One of the reasons for the popularity of learning strategies is the belief that good language learners use effective strategies to aid their learning, while poor language learners do not. If we know the strategies that good language learners employ, so the argument goes, we can teach these to our less successful students. For roughly about 20 years or so (from the late 1970s to the 1990s), the field witnessed a proliferation of research on various aspects of learner strategies and their relationships with various aspects of language proficiency.

The majority of these studies are correlational in nature, with the results showing a positive association between strategy use and proficiency. Green and Oxford (1995), for example, reported that more proficient learners tended to possess a larger number of strategies and use these more frequently compared to the less proficient learners. The positive results have led strategy researchers to make a strong claim about the role of learning strategies in language learning, as demonstrated by the following quote:

> … strategies are the L2 learner's tool kit for active, conscious, purposeful, and attentive learning, and they pave the way toward greater proficiency, learner autonomy, and self-regulation (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002, p. 372)

However, a number of researchers have expressed concerns about such a strong claim. Correlational data are interesting but need to be interpreted with care. It is not very clear, for example, whether increased strategy use leads to higher proficiency. It may well be that it is the latter, namely higher proficiency, that enables students to use a greater number of strategies. Skehan (1989), for example, pointed out that "… learner strategies do not determine proficiency, but are permitted by it" (p. 97). His point was shared by a number of other scholars (e.g., Bremner, 1999; Rees-Miller, 1993; Renandya, 2012). Indeed, more recent studies in L2 listening showed that strategies played a minor role in predicting L2 listening comprehension of EFL learners (Du & Man, 2022; Wallace, 2022).

We feel it is about time that we relook at our beliefs about learning strategies. Brief training in learning strategies is probably fine, but giving strategy training too much attention is probably not the most productive way of utilizing our instructional resources (Swan & Walter, 2017; Willingham, 2006). Swan (2008) offered a sensible piece of advice with regard to strategy instruction: "while training in strategy use can contribute usefully to learner independence, this can be taken to unconstructive extremes; and such training is no substitute for basic language teaching" (p. 262).

2.10 Cooperative Learning is for 'Lazy' Teachers

Although cooperative learning (CL) has been around for years now and its efficacy has been reported in professional books and academic journals, there are still people, including administrators, students, and students' families, who believe that teachers' main job is to transmit knowledge to the students and that the best way to do this is to use a teacher-fronted, lecture-style teaching method. The students are expected to listen attentively, taking copious notes and absorbing the information imparted by the teacher. The sage on the stage teaching philosophy is still well and alive.

Hattie (2012), summarizing numerous studies on classroom talk, estimated that teacher talk accounts for 70 to 80% of class time on average. His own research showed an alarmingly higher average, at 89%. It is perhaps not surprising that these teachers feel strongly that CL, which involves teachers, sometimes plays a facilitative role. At the same time, the students work in groups learning together and supporting each other, which has little place in the classroom. CL, they would say, is used only for teachers whose teaching skills are not up to scratch and for those who are too lazy to impart knowledge during class time.

Current thinking in education and ELT, however, suggests otherwise. CL is hard, maybe even harder, work for teachers. The work begins at the planning stage, where teachers decide on the contents and structure of the lesson. In a reading lesson, for example, teachers think about the kind and amount of texts that would spark students' interest and increase their engagement level; about the amount of support that teachers and materials need to provide before or while students read the texts, about whether students should work in pairs, or slightly larger small groups, in same-gender/same proficiency level groupings or random groupings. More importantly, in order to give students optimal learning opportunities, teachers need to consider how the key principles of CL (e.g., positive interdependence, equal participation, and individual accountability, see Jacobs & Renandya, 2019, for detailed discussions of these principles) should be operationalized.

During class time, teachers provide brief instruction and explanations for a few minutes before students begin working in their CL groups. While students are interacting and exchanging ideas, teachers walk around the class, providing support and encouragement, and making sure that students are not only on task but also fully engaged throughout the lesson. Although teachers may not talk much during class time, this does not mean they are lazy or that students do not learn much. In fact, research shows that in the hands of capable teachers, CL can result in students becoming more active and motivated and learning much more and also at a deeper level compared to a non-CL lesson (Johnson et al., 2008; Slavin, 2014). After all, the students, not their teachers, are the ones who need the most practice in using the language.

3. CONCLUSION

In this article, we have discussed a number of misconceptions, unsound beliefs, and practices in ELT that we feel deserve our urgent attention. We need to work together with other practitioners and with key stakeholders (language teacher education institutions, language teacher educators, curriculum and materials developers, and community members) to critically examine our existing beliefs and practices, unlearn some of the unsound beliefs and practices and replace them with new ones that reflect current thinking and scholarship in ELT. Of course, sound teaching is context-dependent. Thus, teachers and students will need to collaborate on an evolving understanding of what works best for particular students in particular contexts. Nonetheless, we hope that the concepts explained in this article provide a useful foundation for teachers and students as they chart their own paths toward greater success and enjoyment in their lifelong journey of language learning.

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