

Developments in Education

**A VOCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
ON THE 'ENGLISH FOR THE WORLD OF WORK' PROJECT**

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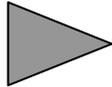
Introduction

This article is presented as a complement to previous articles focusing on English for the World of Work (EWoW) which were written from an applied linguistics perspective. This article looks at EWoW from the perspective of the reform of the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system which is currently underway in Romania.

The EWoW project originated following consultations with stakeholders with an interest in improving the quality of English teaching and learning in Vocational Schools. Teachers and inspectors were particularly concerned at the absence of relevant curriculum and learning materials coupled with limited hours allocated in the timetable for learning English in these schools. They considered that one serious consequence of this was poor learner motivation and achievement.

In parallel, the government's plans for the reform of the TVET system meant that it was possible to link improvements in English language teaching and learning in the Vocational schools to broader TVET reforms.

In the sections which follow, there will be an explanation of how the TVET reform agenda and innovations in English came together and the benefits arising from this. The article will conclude by describing what is distinctive about the approach to the teaching and learning of English which was adopted in EWoW and make suggestions about the way forward.

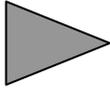


TVET Reform

As part of the process of transition to a market economy, Romania has recognised the critical importance of ensuring human resource development which matches emerging industry sectors and addresses the skill requirements of both Romanian and international labour markets. This has resulted in a reform agenda to assist the TVET system to structure itself so as to be able to respond flexibly and appropriately to rapid and constant changes in the labour market. Therefore, Romanian's TVET reform agenda includes the following elements:

- Strengthened collaboration between education and industry.
- Curriculum which reflects employers' skills requirements
- Partnerships between general subject, practical subject and employers to build more demand-led learning environments.
- Integration of theoretical and practical learning
- Careers education and guidance
- Support and encouragement for learners to become independent and responsible for their own learning and development.
- Support and encouragement for learners to develop skills which are required within the labour market and to be able to update these as required throughout their working lives.

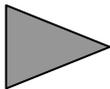




Linking TVET Reform to English Language Teaching and Learning

EWoW is a demonstration project. It *illustrates* how, in a very practical way at school level, some key elements of the VET reform agenda could be realised through development and innovation in English Language teaching and learning. For the approach to be effective, however, it is useful to point out that there were some important pre-conditions about the use of English in the local environment. One of the factors which made the project possible was the recognition of relatively recent changes in the use and status of English in the ‘World of Work’. The project demonstrated that English is now in regular use in a number of different sectors in the Romanian economy. This reflects the findings of David Graddol who points out that English is now used substantially in environments where many of its users are not native speakers, and as such English has become a lingua franca for users whose first languages may be different.

One very practical consequence of this is that it is now possible to assume that it is no longer necessary to look to the UK or US or elsewhere in what used to be called the ‘English Speaking World’ for sources of authentic English as it is used in industry. It turned out that linguistic data could be collected from local industry in Romania. In this way, ELT has the potential to become more like ESOL. The EWoW project exploited this circumstance by researching and collecting locally generated English language data and converting this into learning material. This approach meant that English teachers and learners could see directly how the learning of English was useful for finding a job in the local area, at the same time, local employers could see how schools were seeking to ensure that their graduates were appropriately prepared for jobs requiring English Language skills.



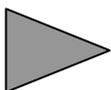
The Benefits of Linking TVET Reform with English Language Teaching and Learning

In order to undertake the necessary research, schools had to be pro-active in researching local companies where English language skills were likely to be in demand. In order to do this, English Language and Practical Subject teachers had to collaborate to share and analyse their employer networks. Also, although it had



traditionally been the role of teachers to research needs and develop learning materials, it was decided that learners would become more motivated and active if they had direct exposure to the ways in which English is used in the World of Work. So it was agreed that learners would conduct the research and develop materials with the support of their English and Practical Subject teachers.

The actual process of conducting the research meant that learners could practice their English in real-life situations, and by being exposed to the realities of the World of Work, they were better placed to make informed career choices. Alongside this, the research process enabled them to acquire and develop some of the major employability skills required by employers, for example, team-working, communication, problem-solving and learning how to learn. Above all, learners were placed in a situation where they could demonstrate their worth to employers. The conversion of English Language data into learning materials involved closer integration of English and Practical Subjects which is needed in a demand-led curriculum. Furthermore, the resulting materials reflected the skills required for using English in different industrial settings.

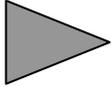


Summary of the Distinctive Features of 'English for the World of Work'

- The project *researches* and *exploits* authentic language as it *occurs* in the local world of work.
- The project *develops* learning materials which illustrate English language use in a vocational context.
- The project *blurs* the traditional boundaries between teaching and learning by involving learners in needs analysis and materials development
- The project *enables* learners and teachers to develop a closer understanding of how English language is used in local industry
- Learners not only *have* an opportunity to practice using English in real life settings, but they also *have* opportunities to develop and practise key employability skills.
- The project *enables* learners to link the English language skills they are learning at school with finding work.



- The project *enables* learners to see the links between English language and other school subjects.
- The project makes English teachers, practical subject teachers and industry collaborate in order to ensure that English Language skills were fully integrated.
- The project *paves* the way for the introduction of more ‘just in time’ models of delivery. Learners *develop* the skills required to identify and exploit English language as it *is* used in the work environment. This is a transferable skill which they will be able to take forward for use in other future work environments.



The Way Forward

A fundamental tenet of TVET reform is the forging of closer links between education and industry and EWoW succeeded brilliantly in that. Furthermore, it is now possible to point to a fundamental shift in what can be considered learning materials. The recognition that there is a reliable source of authentic English use in the local environment means that there is the potential to begin to think about the design of learning environments which exploit local sources of authentic English. For example, users of English in local companies can be invited into the classroom to interact with learners including conducting mock job interviews or doing role plays, similarly, learners on work placements can be given the task of seeking out settings in which English is used and finding work based opportunities to practise and improve their own English Language skills. Further collaboration between English and Practical subject teachers will make it possible to design projects and assignments which further expose learners to local sources of English in use and where English and Practical subjects are more fully integrated.

The work which has already been done on materials, demonstrates both the value of the approach and enthusiasm for it. However, up to now this has been a demonstration project with pilots in a range of different sectors. The next stage should be to scale-up to enable these achievements to be rolled out more broadly. There will need to be work at the level of curriculum, including standards-setting and assessment. There will also need to be policy analysis and discussion to determine whether in future English might need to be handled as a ‘basic skill’ rather than as a foreign language.



In conclusion, from what has been said, it is clear that the work done *so far* on EWoW in Romania has been ground-breaking. It has not only shown what can be done and but it has also pointed the way forward. It is very much to be hoped that this approach can not only be taken forward in Romania, but that other countries will be able to follow suit by complementing and building on a model which Romania has so admirably pioneered.

The author

Ann Simpson has a background in English Language Teaching, both overseas and in the UK. In the UK she worked for many years in the Industrial Language Training (ILT) Scheme. The ILT scheme assisted employees and job seekers from minority ethnic communities to acquire language skills appropriate for undertaking vocational training employment. She is currently a senior education advisor for the British Council. Her responsibility is specially focused on Technical and Vocational Education and Training . She undertook the initial design work for the 'English for the World of Work' project in Romania and is currently providing consultancy support for the 'Languages for the World of Work' project in Albania.

