

Learning English

Editorial

England told classes for migrants need to improve

The standard of English language classes for adult migrants and refugees in England is improving, but more needs to be done to raise class quality from "satisfactory" levels to good or outstanding, according to the latest report from the UK's education watchdog Ofsted.

The report also warns that not enough businesses are providing English classes for migrants in the workplace.

Ofsted inspected English for speakers of other languages (Esol) courses at over 20 state-funded further and adult education colleges in England. Its report, published this month, provides the first indications of how the Esol sector has been affected by the withdrawal of government subsidies for all students, which took effect in August of last year.

Inspectors say that data available suggest Esol enrolments nationally dropped by 14% in autumn 2007 compared to the same period in 2006, and asks the government to monitor the impact of fee policy changes closely.

The government's efforts to standardise qualifications for Esol students appear to have been successful, with most providers now offering courses leading to recognised Esol Skills for Life qualifications, which were introduced in 2004. But students' success rates remain



low with only 64% achieving satisfactory results.

In the report, Ofsted says more needs to be done to persuade employers of the value of offering Esol learning to employees. Students should be given more opportunities to gain work experience.

South Korea signs up to student swap with US

The US government has demonstrated its commitment to supporting South Korea's campaign to boost English language skills, with an offer to host up to 5,000 Korean students a year on study and work placements in the US. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, below, and South Korea's foreign minister, Yu Myung-hwan approved the Work, English Study, Travel (West) programme in New York last month.

University graduates will be able to apply for West programme visas, which will allow them to enrol on self-funded five-month English language training courses, then find internships with US companies for up to 12 months. They will be allowed to travel in the US for a further month.

South Korea will offer US citizens an 18-month working holiday programme visa.

Meanwhile, the government has unveiled plans to offer Koreans an alternative to travelling abroad to learn English, by creating a city dedi-

cated to English language learning on the island of Jeju.

Ministry officials announced last month that the city, which is due to open in 2011, would cost \$1.17bn and eventually accommodate 12 English-medium schools.

Call to tax Britain for language advantage

Last month's European Day of Languages, the Council of Europe's celebration of linguistic diversity and language learning, has prompted a controversial proposal to compensate EU countries for the cost of having to learn English by taxing Britain and Ireland.

Michele Gazzola, a researcher at the economics languages and training observatory at the University of Geneva, said that English speaking countries gain huge financial advantages from not having to master Europe's main language of communication. They should help to fund their neighbours' efforts to learn English.

Gazzola quotes a 2005 study that estimates the UK's savings on language education, and profits from the sale of English language teaching materials to the rest of Europe, at between \$14bn and \$23bn.

His solution is simple: end the controversial \$7bn annual rebate that the UK receives from the EU budget and spend the money on expanding the EU's interpreting and translation services or supporting linguistically burdened researchers.

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Teen talk

What's happening on November 4?



Lindsay Clandfield

Is the language classroom a place for politics? Many would argue that it isn't, especially with teens and younger learners. Talking politics isn't always easy in your own language, let alone a foreign one. Others warn that teens are not interested in politics. They don't have a vote, so why should they care?

But the media coverage of the impending US presidential election makes it difficult to ignore. Teachers can be assured that this is one political event about which most students will have some knowledge. While for young people, using the US elections could be a springboard to talk about politics and political apathy in a way that doesn't offend or bore, but engages them. Here are some ideas.

Do a reverse quiz on the election to introduce the topic. In a reverse quiz you provide the answers and the students make the questions. Besides being good grammar practice for question formation, it also allows for different possible questions. My reverse quiz on the US Election would include the following: *Barack Obama and John McCain, the White House, Republican, Democrat, November 4.*

Dictate the following sentences and ask students to rate them from 0-10, 10 being totally agree and 0 being totally disagree: *Young people don't care about politics. Young people are only interested in shopping and music. Young people don't watch the news. It isn't important to know about world politics.* Use these to provoke a reaction and kick off a class discussion. Ask students to stand on an imaginary line in the classroom depending on what number they gave, or ask them to justify their answers.

In the run-up to the election, keep the momentum going. Give election watch assignments for homework, with students reporting back orally on what they found on television or the internet. Ask them to conduct informal polls among family of who they would vote for if they could. You may be able to prove that not all young people are ignorant of world politics.

To borrow a phrase from the activist and filmmaker Michael Moore, it could be a mini slacker uprising.

Chris Tribble searches the words of the Guardian Weekly

A very bankable bad-news word

To say that money has been in the news recently would be an understatement, but it is a word that preoccupies us even when we're not experiencing a global banking crisis. While *sex* has only been mentioned 4,790 times in the Guardian Weekly archive, *money* has been used a whopping 12,387 times, putting it into the same high-frequency league as *Europe*, *book*, *death*, *rights* and *family*.

The other top money-related words are *cash* (3,102), *credit* (2,020), *shares* (1,682) *assets* (1,190), *loans* (946), *savings* (814), *debts* (740), *stocks* (778), *investments* (434) and *bonds* (411).

So how does *money* get into the news? One reason is that people and organisations have to *raise* money, *make* money, or don't have *enough*

money. Another is our interest in how *public* money and *taxpayers'* money are managed. The biggest reason, however, seems to be *money laundering*, way ahead of more respectable topics such as the *money supply*.

Looking at the other money words, many of these are also related to a variety of bad news. Cash stories focus on *cash strapped* organisations (those without enough money), *cash payments* and *cash crops* (often negatively reported as distorting local ecologies), with far fewer comments on *cash injections*, *cash flow* and *cash dispensers*.

Shares and *share prices* are in the news more often when they *fall*. *Bonds* can be *government* or *treasury* but also often *junk* (lower grade corporate bonds that carry higher risk).

Assets can be *state* or *financial*, but they are more newsworthy when they are *frozen*. *Savings* seem to be more neutral (being *life*, *offshore* and held in *accounts*), but *debts* are most often reported as *bad*, *huge* or *unpayable*.

And what of the most topical money word at the moment? As you would expect, *credit* is most strongly linked with *card* and *cards* but it is also associated with *crunch*. The *credit crunch* combination first came into the Guardian Weekly as far back as June 1998 at the time of the credit crisis in Japan. However, of the 83 instances of *credit crunch* in this newspaper in the last 10 years, 68 have occurred since July 2007. I suspect that we will continue to see this particular combination of words for some time to come.

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