

COACHING AS AN INDIVIDUALIZED TEACHING STRATEGY

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The results of several surveys conducted by numerous projects launched regarding the transitional skills that seafarers consider most important indicate that respondents have valued the knowledge of the English language and communication skills (oral, aural, and written communications) as the most important over the next ten years. Indeed, the accidents and multiple investigations have shown that effective interaction in the English language can make the difference between safety and an emergency onboard. The effectiveness of teamwork depends significantly on the ability of the individuals involved to negotiate and find better solutions in complex situations, as well as persuade others to follow a mutually agreed-upon decision (SkillSea Project, 2023).

Based on the project findings, industry experts have recommended several solutions to ensure an adequate level of communication skills. Among these, language courses are designed to upgrade seafarers' communication and language skills, and embed new instructional strategies to promote active learning and communicative interaction.

As there is no one-size-fits-all approach to follow, the author shares their experience in teaching Maritime English courses to young adults online. Offering numerous benefits, the most significant of which is wide and easy access to learning resources, studying online has some limitations, particularly in terms of student interaction choices. By adopting coaching as a learning strategy to enhance intrinsic communication and language mastery and improve language knowledge when teaching online courses, the author has observed increased student engagement, greater linguistic autonomy, and improved communication skills (Kudryavtseva, Barsuk & Frolova, 2023).

The aim of the current study is to investigate how online language coaching, as an instructional strategy, can be utilized to enhance students' learning motivation, increase online interactivity, and, consequently, improve overall language proficiency.

Initially emerging from the realm of sports, the coaching technique has subsequently found its way into the business sector and has also been adopted within the field of education, demonstrating its versatility and effectiveness across various domains. Since the early 2000s, coaching in education has seen significant growth, particularly accelerated by COVID-19 and the shift towards online learning, resulting in heightened recognition from educators and researchers. The growing body of research on the evidence of embedding coaching into educational settings over the last two decades provides valuable academic support for education practitioners.

Determining educational coaching as an act of giving special classes in a school subject, especially to one person or a small group (Cambridge Dictionary), with the aim to unlock people's potential to maximize their own performance (Whitmore, 2009; van Nieuwerburgh & Barr, 2016) through structured conversations (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014).

Parsloe, E., and Wray (2000) have proposed the generic coach-mentoring process characterized by four stages: 1) analysis of the trainee's needs; 2) sharing responsibilities for the learning progress and encouraging self-study; 3) introducing relevant learning techniques to develop skills required; 4) evaluating learning outcomes (Parsloe & Wray, 2000).

The variations between coaching, teaching, tutoring, and mentoring have been a subject of study for many authors. Bresser and Wilson (2010) have determined the role of a coach as both an assistant in revealing a trainee's own knowledge and skills, and a facilitator introducing relevant learning techniques. In his research, van Nieuwerburgh (2014) has differentiated mentoring and coaching, focusing on the criteria of the knowledge transfer. Thus, he has determined mentoring

as sharing knowledge and expertise with less experienced learners, and if “the purpose of the relationship is self-discovery, then this is coaching” (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014, 510-512).

Consideration has been given to the critical role of solitary and productive engagement between coach and coachee, along with the acquisition of crucial skills. Scholars have addressed leadership, active listening, provocative questioning, and constructive feedback as essential competencies for fostering encouragement, motivation, and autonomy in learners (Parsloe & Leedham, 2009; Lofthouse, Leat & Towler, 2010). Practitioners have emphasized the importance of building rapport and, thus, establishing a “coaching culture” among participants, as well as shaping learning expectations (van Nieuwerburgh & Passmore, 2012; van Nieuwerburgh & Lech, 2015).

Another recognized coaching component is an ongoing process of language goal-setting, with follow-up evaluation. It should be organized as a repetitive cycle of establishing short-term and long-term realistic targets, then making progress towards those goals, accomplishing them, and setting new goals to help individuals become aware of their learning style and strive for personal development (Paling, 2017).

Substantial research has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching as an instructional approach in online courses (Knight, 2022; Gamage, Perera & Wijewardena, 2021).

When we think about language learning, the typical association that comes to mind is a group of students engaged in various learning activities, accompanied by a teacher who shares their knowledge, facilitates and monitors the process, and assesses their performance. Language mastery with a coach, focused on filling knowledge gaps in grammar, enriching vocabulary, and improving communicative skills, has long been provided as educational assistance by language experts to meet individuals’ needs. Focused on individual training, coaching is directed toward achieving definite results and, in our case, is based on tailored training courses created by a coach to meet a trainee’s expectations.

Typically, a language learning environment consists of a group of twelve students, presenting individuals with different levels of language proficiency, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, some students experience negative feelings or might be embarrassed or anxious about making mistakes. As a result, they are prone to avoiding active participation in the learning process. Having been directed on preventing unproductive practices and adapting the learning style as much as possible to the learner, language coaching is essential to boosting students’ confidence and empowering better performance.

The efficient coaching process is characterized by its spiral structure. It begins with determining the students’ motives for studying language and setting personal goals relevant to the individual learner. To identify self-motivators, a discussion should be organized first in break rooms on Zoom, followed by an ideas exchange with the entire group to create a list of factors that will encourage students to improve their language skills. The bank offers students the opportunity to choose their motivation, which will drive learners’ active engagement.

After learners have recognized their motives, they need to become aware of individual areas for improvement. A continuous evaluation of knowledge and skill deficiencies, followed by a goal-setting procedure, represents another essential aspect of coaching. It can be structured as a self-reflection activity in the Forum on Moodle, where individual learners outline their strengths and weaknesses, while their peers respond with practical strategies to address particular barriers. The coach guides the evaluation process with challenging and facilitative questioning and supports learners by introducing them to various learning strategies. The coach's leadership skills, active listening, and guiding questioning, along with providing constructive feedback skills, have become a primary instrument for coaches.

Peer coaching is another important component of a coaching approach, which can be organized into various techniques. The simplest way is to divide students into non-homogeneous pairs, where a more experienced student shares their knowledge and expertise with a less

knowledgeable one to complete the assigned task. Examples of tasks can vary from controlled grammar activities, such as completing sentences with the proper form of verbs, to more sophisticated tasks that develop critical thinking, like finding a solution to a problem that emerges from a case. Inquiry techniques or project tasks can also be organized as peer coaching in small groups, where responsibilities are divided among the participants, and one of them acts as a manager to monitor and facilitate the group activities. When completing the task, “a manager” should be encouraged to assess the performance and provide constructive feedback on the peers’ contributions. Another way to promote peer coaching is to use a Forum on Moodle, where the teacher submits a provocative question to trigger group discussion. Individuals first reflect on previous responses and then provide their own. Despite the differences in language expertise, all students benefit from such cooperation, as they engage in genuine interaction and develop language mastery. They are trained to reflect on their involvement, thereby gaining a better understanding of their own learning style and taking responsibility for their learning outcomes.

Language learning can be seen as a never-ending process, so when the goal has been accomplished, the student is directed to define a new one. By employing the coaching approach, the teacher organizes a learning environment where students are driven by their personal motives and design their own learning path. Students are regularly encouraged to reflect on their performance and skills development, sharing responsibilities for their learning progress. A coaching strategy requires a teacher to be flexible and creative, focusing on developing skills, responding to students' needs, and tailoring learning materials rather than strictly adhering to the course content.

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