

## Rebuilding the Interest in Learning English

By *Nicolás Hidalgo Román*

[nhidalgo@corporacioncolina.cl](mailto:nhidalgo@corporacioncolina.cl)

It is 2022, and my 8th graders have just had their graduation ceremony, receiving the documents that guarantee their successful promotion to high school. At the same time, 4th-grade students are being promoted to 5th grade. However, what if I told you that, in reality, the 2022 8th-grade generation is essentially at a 5th or 6th-grade level at most in terms of academic achievement? Even worse, the 2022 4th-grade generation is actually performing at a 1st-grade level.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused more damage than we could have imagined. Although the repercussions may seem evident to some, the majority of the Chilean population fails to realize the profound impact the pandemic has had on students' learning processes.

Undoubtedly, the fulfillment of students' learning stages has been incomplete. Many of them have forgotten how to perform in mathematics and write effectively, and even socialize with their peers and faculty members—all as side effects of two years of lockdown.

As a TEFL teacher, I am certainly not alone in experiencing these setbacks. You must have encountered these challenges as well throughout this year (2022). A percentage of students did not study during the pandemic but relied on the Internet to complete their tests. There was a lack of interest in the language, leading to copying and pasting information from the web, along with excessive cellphone use before or during class.

I understand that I may come across as a complaining teacher who would prefer students to always be engaged, ask significant questions, and display a strong interest in learning English. However, the reality is much more complex than that.

Once you have identified all the teaching issues in your specific context, it is important to consider possible solutions. In my experience teaching in Colina, a town north of Santiago, which is plagued by prejudice, particularly because of the penal institutions located there, and discouragement when pursuing higher levels of education due to personal dilemmas. The key beliefs are discouragement, a lack of connection or a sense of belonging to the school, immature behavior, a lack of interest in the subject itself, and a lack of vision while studying.

Instead of overwhelming learners with an abundance of platforms, my advice is to create a clear plan of action that incorporates two methodologies and perhaps two or three virtual platforms or devices to support the learning process. By doing so, you can ensure that your lesson plans are more consistent, which will be noticeable in your students' performance as well as your own.

As a personal recommendation, when trying to reach common ground in students' interests, I have been using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to connect the language to tasks that may or may not align with their individual interests. Additionally, the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Expeditionary Learning (EL) helps students recognize problems related to their social background and become more aware of the role they play in their schools and how that impacts society.