

# EFL Motivation through Vision: Role-plays, Narratives, Projects and Reading Tasks

Sureepong Phothongsunan  
Assumption University, Thailand

**Abstract**—This paper looks into some interactive, proposed ways in helping an EFL learner to develop an identity as an EFL learner in learning English to achieve language learning goals. First, vision theory is discussed, reflecting on the increased importance of envisioning oneself to create a self-image for the EFL learner in order to enable, acknowledge and enjoy his/her EFL identity. The second part presents the use of how conscious role-plays can make a difference in terms of shaping one identity. The next part supports the interlinking of image as a confident EFL learner and an effective individual in the future through personal narratives. The final section addresses how projects and reading tasks can be used as activities which can support the building of identity in EFL.

**Index Terms**—vision, role plays, narratives, projects, tasks

## I. INTRODUCTION

Becoming an achieving speaker/learner in a foreign language engages the whole person as a cognitive, emotional and physical being. Hadfield and Dörnyei (2013) currently place vision at the core of learners' motivation in the area of foreign language learning. Seeing oneself as an L2 or in this very context, an EFL learner can help design a guideline to achieve the learner's personal goal. As Dörnyei (1997) indicates, goal-setting theory is well-suited with expectancy-value theories as commitment is seen to be enhanced when people believe that achieving the goal is possible and important. Vision, comprising imagination and imagery, represents the mental demonstration of the sensory experience of a future goal condition. It is currently at the forefront of motivational innovation, and it has recently been seen as the motivational implement of EFL teachers. Vision is seen as a strong motivational force. Motivation has traditionally been viewed as stationary. Nevertheless, any EFL teacher would argue that this is simply not the case. Levels of motivation seem to move up and down throughout the course of a lesson, a day and even over longer periods of time. As a result, vision perceived as a strong motivational force, relates to a long-term effort, which is able to overrule these rises and falls. In viewing student motivation in this way, vision can be seen as "one of the most reliable predictors of their long-term intended effort" (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014, p. 9)

The vision of a learner's future self includes a strong physiological element. In fact, a series of these physiological elements are needed to help the learner to create a self-image where he or she exists through the learning of the English language. The challenge is how EFL teachers can implement multi-physical based classroom activities that could engage the learners in the need of seeing, accepting, and enjoying a self as an EFL learner, in other words, their L2 identity. Four activities will be discussed from the standpoint of building and retaining an EFL self-vision. These include role-plays, personal narratives, projects, and reading tasks.

## II. MINDFUL ROLE PLAYS

Role-plays are considered a basis for performing a communicative task. They are thought to enhance student interaction and place classroom practice in a real-like context. There appear many benefits of utilizing role plays. Furness (1976) claimed that an EFL learner can enjoy a role play experience with regards to enriched communication skills, creativity, better social awareness, autonomous thinking, expression of opinions, and improvement of values and appreciation of drama. Moreover, Ladousse (2004) pointed out that a role play is a great communicative method which develops fluency in EFL students, promoting classroom interaction and increasing motivation. A role play also inspires peer learning and sharing learning responsibility between the teacher and the student. Role plays can help EFL teachers meet an unlimited range of needs. According to Stern (1983), role playing helps the student to be more flexible and cultivate a sense of mastery in various situations which can help the student to apply the language more easily to new circumstances.

Despite these assumed advantages, many language teachers would agree that not every student enjoys role-plays. Some students cannot engage in their roles. Some don't feel like acting out in front of the audience due to their personality and characteristics. Some lack enthusiasm during the activity and they will not necessarily take away a memorable learning experience of an activity where they had to be a front office personnel at a hotel, for instance. In the writer's EFL context, some students explicitly question the validity of using role plays as part of formal learning assessment. They point out that it takes more than just acting out their roles: preparation of scripts, pair/group dynamics

and cooperation, material and audio-visual arrangement and rehearsals to deliver a role play successfully.

Stanislavski (1937) speaks against mechanical acting and requests that actors/role-players approach their role from its inner content because as a theatre director he holds that a role which is built on truth will grow whereas one which is built on stereotype will wither. Thus, actors /role-players need to enter their role with their true personality. They have to build it from the inside and nourish it with their past experiences and future aspirations. This actually resonates with Dornyei and Kubanyiova's (2014) argument that learning an L2 or EFL involves a struggle to forge a new identity that is true to the self. From this perspective, Stanislavski's view on acting is similar to what Zimmermann (1998) defines as transportable identity as opposed to discourse and situated identity.

In the traditional way of using role plays, students are engaged through their discourse identity. In other words, they assume roles as speakers or listeners in a dialog. Their situated identity is their role in the situation such as tourist, housekeeper, and flight attendant. However, their transportable identity is not taken into consideration. Transportable identity involves their gender, past experiences, beliefs, and preferences (what they like and do not like). This is actually when their personality becomes part of their language, often known as personalizing the activity.

Therefore, it is suggested that role plays be introduced by a pre-task which focuses on EFL learners' transportable identity. Sorting or helping cards can be used with questions about their personality and multi-sensory past experiences. These details will help them create their role identity in a self-conscious way, and their English speaking role identity will be positively more active and uninterrupted.

### III. PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Seeing oneself in a future situation can be developed into whole-life scenarios. Teenagers are in a period of their lives when they construct a vision of their possible future selves. This is undoubtedly a natural aspect of their personal development. By this means, interweaving the vision of being an assertive EFL student and a successful entity in the future comes as a very natural thinking process. Hadfield and Dornyei's (2013) proposal of mental imagery or image streaming as used in learning motivation and sports psychology can be effective with this group of teenage.

In fact, the guided imagery activity so called "My Future L2 Self" as described by Hadfield and Dornyei (2013) can be applied to EFL. It can serve as the starting point for a visionary platform with a small group of teenagers. This begins with a sequence of questions read out by the EFL teacher, revealing multi-sensory experiences, which describe the experience of the world involving a number of senses, including sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. These senses usually work together, providing a vigorous and rational awareness of the environment. For example, when entering a decent restaurant: a person sees the decoration and the other clients, smells the scents of cooking from the kitchen, hears the enjoyable music and sound of conversation, feels the coziness of the seating, and, finally, enjoys the taste of the food. Students, then give a detailed description of their lives in the next 10 years. They are able to visualize themselves in the future, see their goals achieved, and realize that they have become capable EFL users. This vision narrative activity engages all five language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as culture. The last skill as Pylyshyn (2006) puts it; language is a way of communication and it carries the culture with it. The concrete outcome of this activity can be a printed magazine with students' stories and photos.

### IV. PROJECTS

Through vision, EFL learners can also be given projects that enhance their active imagination and correspond to the certain purpose of learning English. In English for Specific Purposes Courses, for instance, students should be assigned work that let them work together as groups to develop projects that are visionary in nature. At the same time, entrepreneurial spirit can be promoted.

A travel agency project where students have to develop their own travel agency based on new ideas/input only happens to be effective and copying is not allowed at any stages. Also, students are seriously warned that if copying work from other sources is found, the whole group will be automatically given zero. They have to present the historical background of their agency, its objectives, the significance of the agency and their expected outcomes. Target customers are to be discussed next as to it is going to be for the niche or mass market, so they need to justify prudently. Then, the slogan and the logo of the agency must be invented to reflect the agency's entity. After that, they have to present their marketing strategies to achieve their sales. Presenting two promotional packages in detail with the itineraries is required next, promoting how they can strategically attract others to buy their products. They then carry out SWOT analysis in depth, elaborating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the existence of their agency. They are asked to submit their virtual advertising brochure to be attached to the report. Benchmarking or competitive analysis with other existing agencies would be required as well to see where their agency posits/stands among their competitors: which areas their agency is stronger and which is weaker so as to see room for improvement. Next, any useful information for potential tourists before joining a trip based on their group hands-on actual experience is to be discussed so that it would help tourists to be prepared. They are highly encouraged to plaster relevant photos of primary, secondary and temporary destinations used as target destinations in their report. The students are explained clearly as follows:

Primary destinations are places that attract people from the mass market who may come from a great distance, from all over the world. These primary destinations can create a heavy accommodation demand especially during high season.

Some examples of primary attractions are celebrated religious and health related destinations, mega theme parks, notable casinos, megamalls and certainly those world wonders. Generally, a primary attraction demands quite considerable numbers of services. Secondary destinations, alternatively, attract people from vicinities nearby or persuade people to stop on their way by. Sport centers, zoos, aquariums, museums, sanctuaries, regional theme parks, local shopping arcades, and provincial casino gambling centers are good illustrations of secondary attractions. These secondary settings may attract as many visitors as those primary ones and at times even more. For temporary attractions or destinations, they also play an important role. They are considered a long-lived type of attraction. These attractions mainly comprise fairs and festivals. Fairs here may be a type of entertainment in a park at which farm animals and products are shown and take part in competitions.

The length of the project report is set at a minimum of 30 pages with related pictures and the deadline of submission is given usually at the end of the term so as to allow them time to work as a group throughout and the project itself serves as one of the most important requirements for the course. The students are also well informed that each group (about 6 -8 members) has to present their imaginative travel agency using the PowerPoint by the time they submit the project report.

For in-class presentation, it would take the form of grand opening of the travel agency. They would then have to bring in snacks, drinks or other refreshments, creating such warm, lively atmosphere. Each group is required to present one best holiday package during the presentation. The purpose is to successfully persuade the audience (classmates) to buy it. The marks to be given depend on how effective they can convince the audience with their best package. All in all, this project can help them envision themselves as travel agency operators/ owners simultaneously with the opportunity to practice the use of English in a specific context.

Another project worth discussing is presenting an imagery hotel business where students create an important part of learning about English for hotels. As group work, students are reminded to delegate various tasks within their team properly and it is significant that every member in the group contribute to the production of the project report and the delivery of the presentation to the whole class. They are also warned that they have to come up new ideas/input only and copying is not allowed at any stages. If copying work from other sources is found, the whole group will not be given any marks.

The overall task is to devise a hotel establishment using their creativity and existing knowledge about hotel operations and functions (or to discuss about it in detail in case they claim that they have already devised one). As they write up their project, they must break it down into important elements in running a hotel business. They are free to create these components in a way that would make their hotel most appealing and interesting. First, the background of their hotel must be presented together with its objectives, followed by the significance of the hotel and their expected outcomes from establishing this innkeeping business. Next, they indicate what type of hotel is created according to the level of service and target market. Target customers must be discussed and justified. The slogan and the logo of the hotel thus follow. Then, they provide information about the main departments in their hotel. As there are many kinds of facilities provided in hotels, they are suggested to present their hotel's main facilities and services that are the highlights. Main personnel working in their hotel require elaboration as well. After that, they have to present their marketing strategies to succeed in their sales of hotel rooms and facilities. Presenting two hotel promotional packages meticulously is required next, supporting how they can tactically interest others to come and stay in the hotel. They then make SWOT analysis in depth, elaborating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the existence of their hotel. They are also requested to hand in their virtual hotel advertising brochure by attaching it to the report. Benchmarking or competitive analysis with other existing hotels would be required as well to see where their hotel posits/stands in comparison to their competitors in the market: who the competitors are, which areas their hotel is stronger and which is inferior so as to see room for any development. They are next to include relevant photos of hotel facilities, services, etc. in their report. They are actually allowed to loan pictures from open sources as long as they give photo credits in the reference section of their project report.

Like the travel agency development project, the length of the hotel project report is set at a minimum of 30 pages with related pictures and the deadline of submission is given usually at the end of the term so as to allow them time to work as a group throughout and the project itself serves as one of the most important requirements for the course. The students are also well informed that each group (about 6 -8 members) has to present their imaginative hotel using the PowerPoint by the time they submit the project report.

For in-class presentation, it would take the form of grand opening of the hotel. They would then have to bring in snacks, drinks or other refreshments, creating such fun, dynamic atmosphere. Each group is required to present one best holiday package during the presentation. The purpose is to successfully persuade the audience (classmates) to buy it. The marks to be given depend on how effective they can persuade the audience with their best package. On the whole, this creative project can help students visualize themselves as hotel managers/owners along with the opportunity to practice the use of English in a specific context of hotel management and operations.

## V. READING TASKS

In our daily lives, we often create images to enhance or add to information. For instance, if we see a picture of a beautiful flower, we might imagine its fragrance. The pungent smell of milk cookies reminds us of their taste, and a

vivid description of a lake will produce a picture of it in our minds.

In fact, as readers, when we create images as we read, the text becomes more alive. Thus, when we read with vision in mind, we try to add the sensory images of sight, sound, touch, smell, and hearing to improve the understanding of what we read.

One of the reading tasks that the author often uses with EFL university students is 'Breakfast', a short story by John Steinbeck (1902-1968). John is considered one of the greatest American writers. The author would normally introduce this particular writer to the students as Steinbeck is a well-known writer of *Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath* who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1962. This way, it normally gets their attention because EFL university students majoring in English in the author's context normally find work of famous writers predominantly appealing and appreciative.

Indeed, "Breakfast" is a short descriptive sketch. This kind of sketch doesn't have to tell a story. Rather than having a central plot, a descriptive sketch is used to awaken images in the reader's (or student's) mind. In order to prepare the students for reading "Breakfast", they would be asked to discuss the reason why an author would like a descriptive sketch. Also, from the title of "Breakfast", the students would have to consider what they are able to predict from the story. Another question is for the students to think of the word, 'breakfast, and use their imagination to see, smell, and taste a breakfast.

Before the students actually start to read "Breakfast", they would then be prompted to note the way Steinbeck describes people and settings and to what extent his words help them to form clear images. Later, the students would be given time to read the story and react upon the prompts. Then discussion would be made to see how well the students can create images from the story.

As the students have read the story, they would have noticed that the author uses 'color' words in his short story. For example, in the beginning of the story, the color words 'black-blue' and 'washed red' appear. It would be quite easy to guess that black-blue is a mix of the colors black and blue, but what is washed red?

With their classmates in small groups, the students would be asked to think of other adjectives describing the color red which produce a similar image. Using the chart called "Adjectives and Images", the students write these adjectives in the column marked "Adjective". Then, they think of each adjective as they form an image in their mind: what words describe this image? Then they write these words next to the adjective in the column marked "Image". Thus, they are able to come up with the differences in the images they formed from the adjective. This activity is presented in Figure 1 as follows:

Adjective	Image
<i>Example: Washed</i>	<i>Weak, faded</i>

Figure 1: Adjectives and Images

After that, the students think of adjectives that give the opposite image to 'washed', as in 'washed red'. Using the chart in Figure 2, Adjectives and Images: Part II, the students write these adjectives in the column marked "Adjective". Once again, they think about each adjective in the first column as they form an image in their mind and think of words to describe this image. Then they write these words next to the adjective in the column marked "Image".

Adjective	Image
<i>Example: vivid</i>	<i>bright, strong</i>

Figure 2: Adjectives and Images: Part II

The next continuous phase concerns how the students can put what they have learned into practice. They would be asked to look around the room to find items they can describe with the words from either list (Figure 1 and Figure 2). They can do this by adding one of the words from the 'Image' or "Adjective" column of either list to a common color and then writing the name of what they are describing. For instance, if they are describing a teacher's yellow shirt, they might take the word 'vivid' from the "Adjective" column in Figure 2 plus the color "yellow" and the object "shirt", producing the phrase "vivid yellow shirt". Likewise, if they are trying to describe a blue sky, they might take the word "faded" from the "Image" column in Figure 1 plus the color "blue" and the object "sky", creating the phrase "faded blue sky". Subsequently, they would have to write these descriptive terms out clearly in a note or paper. The students would learn that their descriptive terms actually become more lively when they think of the image they wish to convey. This can help them learn about using colors to create images successfully.

In relation to the story "Breakfast", EFL teachers can further ask the students to identify paragraphs in the story which are mainly devoted to describing people. As a group, they have to decide which paragraphs are the most appropriate. After they have come to agreement, EFL teachers read the chosen paragraphs while the students close their eyes. The students would have to describe the images they experienced. Then, they reread the paragraphs and recreate the images in their mind. Generally speaking, it would be useful for readers to create mental images as the writer supplies words and phrases. These images can then be used to help sharpen understanding of and set an emotional tone for what is being read. This way, creating images through reading tasks can be applied to help EFL learners to develop their identity in EFL as well.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Through the combined, innovative process of the mindful role-plays, personal narratives, projects and reading tasks, EFL learners can benefit from a positive learning experience and establish coherence between their ideal EFL self (what one would like to be in learning English as a Foreign Language) and the ought to EFL self (what others expects one to be in learning English as a Foreign Language) in their vision. In fact, vision alone is not necessarily adequate to inspire motivated action to determinedly create a motivational surge of energy, which can focus action towards a specific target in the future. Therefore, the two or more activities can be integrated as a series in a way that EFL learners play the role of their future EFL selves developed through the vision narrative activity in several imaginary situations/ scenarios or by means of assigned projects and tasks.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Dörnyei, Z. (1997). Psychological processes in cooperative language learning: group dynamics and motivation. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, p.482-93.
- [2] Dörnyei, Z., & Murphey, T. (2003). *Group dynamics in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [3] Dörnyei, Z., & Kubanyiova, M. (2014). *Motivating learners, motivating teachers: Building vision in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Furness, P. (1976). *Role-play in the Elementary School: A Handbook for Teachers*. New York: Hart Publishing Company, Inc.
- [5] Hadfield, J., & Dörnyei, Z. (2013). *Motivating learning*. Harlow: Longman.
- [6] Ladousse, G. P. (2004). *Role Play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [7] Pylyshyn, Z. (2006). *Seeing and Visualizing: It's not what you think*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [8] Stanislavski, C. (1937). *An actor Prepares*. London: Bloomsbury.
- [9] Stern, H. (1983). *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [10] Zimmerman, D. H. (1998). Discoursal identities and social identities. In C. Antaki & S. Widdicombe (Eds.), *Identities in talk*. (pp. 87-106). London: Sage Publications.

**Sureepong Phothongsunan** has a doctorate in TEFL from the University of Exeter, UK. He completed both a Master of Arts in TESL and a TESL Graduate Diploma from the University of Cental Missouri, U.S.A. Currently serving in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Arts, Assumption University, he has published books, articles, and research in the field of English language teaching.