**Implementing global skills in ELT classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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**Abstract**

Contemporary life is characterised by continuous changes related to advances in IT technologies, greater diversity and mobility in general and social, economic and language changes related to the new global coronavirus pandemic in particular. Therefore, education needs to cover other than traditional issues, if learners are to be equipped sufficiently and are able to deal with the impact of the pandemic on their lives. If they are to benefit now and in the future, learners need to learn the skills – referred to as **global skills** - that are critical for lifelong learning and success in these difficult years. The article discusses the integration of global skills into English language classroom during the coronavirus pandemic, with its emphasis on the English language change with regard to essential global skills cluster called emotional self-regulation and wellbeing. From the linguistic point of view, the COVID-19 pandemic is connected with language expansion, as it was exposed to the adaptation to the newly emerged situation. Learners of all categories should be acquainted with these English neologisms in a relaxed atmosphere in an English class. Therefore, the article aims at presenting three shorter learning activities, which develop learners´ global skill focused on emotional self-regulation and wellbeing in English language classroom.

**Key words**: global skills, coronavirus, pandemic, English language teaching, emotional self-regulation, wellbeing, neologism, language dynamism

**Introduction**

By teaching our learners global skills, we are equipping them with life skills that go well beyond the language classroom. According to Mercer et al. (2019, p. 8), global skills can be grouped into the following clusters:

1. **Communication and collaboration** – the ability to use verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and to work effectively with others in order to achieve shared goals;
2. **Creativity and critical thinking** – generating new ideas and solutions and analysing information to form a balanced judgement;
3. **Intercultural competence and citizenship** – the social and interpersonal skills necessary for managing cross-cultural encounters in appropriate way, with respect and openness to others;
4. **Emotional self-regulation and wellbeing** – the ability to recognize and understand one´s emotions and the awareness of positive physical and mental health practises;
5. **Digital literacies** – individual technological skills necessary for working with digital communication channels.[[1]](#footnote-1)

All above mentioned global sills can be developed through communicative language teaching and learning. According to Homolová et al. (2017), in English language classroom it is necessary to teach traditional language skill such as reading, speaking, writing and listening. However, learners in the 21st century should be able to solve problems, use creativity, critical thinking and digital technologies, interact cross-culturally and be co-operative and innovative. (ibid.) As the coronavirus pandemic had a negative impact on lives on both adults and children, our article focuses mainly on developing global skills included in the fourth cluster: **emotional self-regulation and wellbeing**. Learning English in the “COVID times” should reflect dynamic changes in the English language, which occurred in recent two years. Therefore, an inseparable part of English language teaching and learning should be a sensitive implementation of new words and phrases, which occurred in English (as well as in other languages) in a relation to above mentioned pandemic.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**1 The impact of coronavirus pandemic on the English language**

As the subject of the article is the integration of global skills into English language classroom during the coronavirus pandemic, in this part we will focus on its impact on the English language. In one and a half year, coronavirus has remarkably changed our lives – it has closed businesses, schools, and transformed our working and studying routines. In the first half of the year 2020, we could observe an interesting paradox: while everyday life slowed down significantly due to necessary government measures (*WFH, lockdown*), dynamism in language was enormous due to many new coronavirus-related words and phrases, occurrence of which dominated in everyday discourse and media. New genuine metaphors, neologisms and lexical innovations we have seen in the past few months points to the fact that linguistic creativity is a key part of language, reshaping our ways of engaging with the world.[[3]](#footnote-3) A number of new lexical items were created (*COVID-19, coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, coronials*[[4]](#footnote-4)) and a number of words existing in the language-as-system acquired new meanings (key workers, *social distancing*[[5]](#footnote-5)*,* [*the Before Times*](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-before-time-a-sci-fi-idea-that-has-made-its-way-to-real-life-11592580133?mod=article_inline)*[[6]](#footnote-6)*). Some words and phrases were specific in the first wave of the pandemic (*face mask, stay-at-home, self-isolation, front-liners, lock down, quarantine*), the others dominated in the second wave (*vaccination, anti-vax,* *respirator*).

While established terms such as lockdown or pandemic have [increased](https://www.etymonline.com/columns/post/language-in-a-time-of-corona) in use, COVID-19 neologisms created via various word formation processes, namely blending, compounding, derivation or clipping, have been coined quicker than ever. These include [*covidiot*](https://www.1843magazine.com/upfront/brave-new-word/do-you-speak-corona-a-guide-to-covid19-slang) – someone ignoring public health advice; [*covideo party*](https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/stuck-for-something-to-do-during-coronavirus-lockdown-have-a-covideoparty-tonight-1.4204352) – online parties via Zoom or Skype, and [*covexit*](https://www.gransnet.com/forums/coronavirus/a1277257-Covexit-how-would-YOU-manage-it) – the strategy for exiting lockdown.[[7]](#footnote-7) Other terms deal with the material changes in our everyday lives, from [*Blursday*](https://lithub.com/days-without-name-on-time-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/) – an unspecified day because of lockdown’s disorientating effect on time, [*doomscrolling*](https://www.wsj.com/articles/doomscrolling-the-new-high-tech-way-to-slide-into-despair-11607640701?mod=article_inline) *–* obsessing over bad news online, *covidpreneurs* – individuals or businesses profiting from the pandemic, or [*zoombombing*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52392084) – hijacking a Zoom video call.[[8]](#footnote-8) These new expressions help us make sense of the changes that have suddenly become part of our everyday lives.

New abbreviations and acronyms used during COVID-19 include *WFH* – working from home, *PPE* – personal protective equipment, *ARDS* – acute respiratory distress syndrome, *ARI* - acute respiratory infection, or *PCR* - polymerase chain reaction. (ibid.) “There are already some initial collections of English COVID neologisms online, and the numbers are rising.” (Al-Salman – Haider, 2021)

Some COVID-19 related expressions are not genuinely new as they had been used for many years, for example *self-quarantine, social distancing, social isolation*. However, their being reintroduced shows that not only does social change bring about new words and terms in the form of neologisms or coinages, but it also reintroduces some pre-existing words that have gained new meaning in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. (ibid.) According to Hollett (2020; In Al-Salman – Haider, 2021), we have to face new circumstances, and with new circumstances, we learn new words. For instance, the expression *self-isolation* used to describe countries that kept themselves separate, but now if someone has or thinks s/he might have the coronavirus, s/he *self-isolates* and keeps him/herself apart from the family. (ibid.)

Such linguistic change and creativity is a universal property of language, which reflects global societal changes. The emergence of the COVID-19 neologisms, many of which have not yet become English dictionary entries, is attributed to the fast spread of the pandemic globally and the extremely powerful influence of media in general and social media in particular.

Al-Salman and Haider (2021) state that the terms such as *maintaining a safe distance, avoiding close contact, wearing a mask, using sanitizers* have become part of our everyday life. *Staying home* if you are unwell, *self-quarantine,* or *avoiding handshake* are abundantly used expressions, which have acquired social currency during the pandemic to shape and regulate social interaction in everyday life.

The new social practices caused by COVID-19 will probably influence learner’s social habits and daily interactions temporarily, if not permanently. Learners of the English language should know the above discussed COVID-19 related neologisms as they derive from global dimension of the pandemic, which makes it crucial for the entire international community to follow the latest developments concerning updates on coronavirus cases worldwide. (ibid.) This makes it necessary to have a constant follow-up and updates in ELT classroom as well.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought another interesting phenomenon. Younger learners perceive the meaning of the word "*negative*" as something favourable, as they know from parents, doctors or the media that if we are tested for COVID and are ´negative´, it means that we are healthy. Subsequently, they can also misunderstand the phrase "*positive thinking*" in the opposite way – i.e. negatively. For this to happen, learners of English should be acquainted with new words and phrases or their new shades of meaning, but as they relate to something which some individuals may perceive as trauma, all this has to be sensitively presented in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

**2 Presenting new COVID-19 related words in compliance with global skill: emotional self-regulation and wellbeing**

In the years 2020-21, the global crisis related to the new coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 affected negatively not only people´s physical and mental health and has undeniably affected all areas of human life and activities. As well as health care system and economics, one of the most affected sectors have been education, culture and sports, which have come to a complete halt for a few months and are currently continuing in a very limited regime. (Štulajter, 2020) As far as education in general and English language teaching in particular is concerned, the scope of lexical innovation in English in relation to coronavirus is enormous. This new vocabulary helps people articulate their worries about the biggest health crisis we have seen in generations. It brings people together around a set of collective cultural reference points – a kind of lexical “social glue”. In the absence of the regular social contact, shared talk is an important part of helping people feel connected to one another. [[9]](#footnote-9)

Learners with emotional self-regulation and wellbeing should be able to “recognize, identify and understand their own emotions, select healthy strategies for managing their own emotions, demonstrate awareness of strategies to promote well-being, take actions which contribute to a physically, mentally and social healthy lifestyle. (Mercer et al, 2019, p. 14) If we want to develop the above stated abilities, we can use the **following classroom activities:**

***1 Open-ended questions on selected topics***

**Aim:** Presenting and defending one´s opinion, developing critical thinking, discussion, cooperation (if learner work in pairs/groups)

We can encourage older learners to question and analyse COVID:

* *What is the most serious issue of these days in your society/school/school?*
* *What causes this issue? Who is responsible for it?*
* *What can we – as individuals – do about it?*

Younger learners could consider:

* *How can we help our grandparents?*
* *How can we care for older neighbours around us?*

***2 Matching***

**Aim:** raising awareness of word formation in English (and Slovak), using words in own sentences, expressing opinions/facts

We can ask learners to match the words and phrases in the left column with their definitions in the right column

*antivaxer* acne breakouts from wearing a face mask

[*covidiot*](https://www.1843magazine.com/upfront/brave-new-word/do-you-speak-corona-a-guide-to-covid19-slang) hijacking a Zoom video call

[*covideo party*](https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/stuck-for-something-to-do-during-coronavirus-lockdown-have-a-covideoparty-tonight-1.4204352) an unspecified day because of lockdown’s disorientating effect on time

[*covexit*](https://www.gransnet.com/forums/coronavirus/a1277257-Covexit-how-would-YOU-manage-it)obsessing over bad news online

[*Blursday*](https://lithub.com/days-without-name-on-time-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/) online parties via Zoom or Skype

*covidpreneurs* the strategy for exiting lockdown

[*doomscrolling*](https://www.wsj.com/articles/doomscrolling-the-new-high-tech-way-to-slide-into-despair-11607640701?mod=article_inline)individuals or businesses profiting from the pandemic

[*zoombombing*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52392084) someone ignoring public health advice

*maskne* a person who is opposed to vaccination

***3 If and then***

**Aim: g**iving advice, helping others, sharing feelings, expressing personal experience etc.

To help learners manage negative emotions, encourage them to develop an “*if, then*” plan. This means thinking about what they can do if they feel an emotion, such as fear of coronavirus, sadness because of isolation from friends and class-mates, and how they can manage that emotion. For instance:

* *If I feel worried about catching coronavirus, then I can take three deep breaths, count to ten and think of my pet hamster.*

To help learners express their feelings and emotions, you can provide them with necessary words and phrases, such as: *self-isolation, face-mask, stay-at-home, quarantine*, etc.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps one of the biggest factors in the spread of coronavirus terminology is the fact that we’re more digitally connected than ever before.[[10]](#footnote-10) Instant access to social media is now an integral part of our learners´ lives – and they can share content with friends and family through a variety of social media outlets. The scale of available online connections means that there are now far more opportunities for individuals to learn a new term and share it with relatives and friends. As the coronavirus pandemic had a negative impact on lives of our learners, article aimed at developing one particular global skill, which is focused on emotional self-regulation and wellbeing. This global skill is becoming an integral part of English language learning and includes a sensitive implementation of new words and phrases which occurred in English (as well as in other languages) in a relation to coronavirus pandemic.

**Resumé**

Okrem vážneho spoločensko-ekonomického dopadu pandémie koronavírusu je jedným zo sprievodných javov aj výskyt novej slovnej zásoby súvisiacej s koronavírusom a ochorením COCID-19 a intenzívne digitálne prepojenie ľudí viac ako kedykoľvek predtým. Okamžitý prístup k sociálnym médiám je teraz neoddeliteľnou súčasťou života našich študentov a učiteľov. Rozsah dostupných online spojení znamená, že v súčasnosti existuje oveľa viac príležitostí pre jednotlivcov naučiť sa nový termín a zdieľať ho s príbuznými a priateľmi. Keďže pandémia koronavírusu mala negatívny vplyv na život našich študentov, článok bol zameraný na rozvoj jednej konkrétnej globálnej zručnosti, ktorá je zameraná na emočnú samoreguláciu. Táto globálna zručnosť sa stáva integrálnou súčasťou výučby anglického jazyka a zahŕňa citlivú implementáciu nových slov a fráz, ktoré sa vyskytli v angličtine (ako aj v iných jazykoch) v súvislosti s pandémiou koronavírusu.

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3. https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-has-led-to-an-explosion-of-new-words-and-phrases-and-that-helps-us-cope-136909 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. amalgamation of coronavirus and millennial = babies conceived during lock down; (Oxford Languages, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In the middle of 20th century the meaning of the phrase ´social distancing´ was not limited to a specific situation, during the pandemic its meaning was connected with the reduction of the coronavirus transmission; [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. a term for the pre-pandemic era; [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-has-led-to-an-explosion-of-new-words-and-phrases-and-that-helps-us-cope-136909 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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10. https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-has-led-to-an-explosion-of-new-words-and-phrases-and-that-helps-us-cope-136909 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)