

# Lifelong Learning in the VUCA World: What English Educators Should Know to Adapt to the New Era

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The world in which we will be living in the near future is called VUCA, which stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In the VUCA world, we are required to have the skills that had not been significant or necessary before. In light of the change, more people are in need of learning new skills or upgrading the skills they already have, and it is safe to say that more people will choose to learn English as reskilling or upskilling. In this paper we discuss essential skills for the VUCA world and how they are incorporated in English classrooms and materials.

Over the past few decades, the world has witnessed many significant changes led by development of IT at an unprecedented rate. These changes have affected how people live and think. In the past, people's lives were less diverse and they had fewer options for schools and jobs. However, today people live in a completely different world; "Exploding technological developments, dramatic demographic growth, immigration, ecological disasters, and geopolitical trends disrupt our lives at an ever increasing pace and breadth. These circumstances, accelerated by globalization, are termed VUCA." (Harder et al., 2020). In the VUCA world, what used to be taken for granted may no longer be a norm.

Especially in the job market, some jobs are newly created and others are replaced by technology such as AI. In order not to be left behind and to actualize the desired career and life in the VUCA world, most people need to either upskill or reskill; upskilling is to learn and acquire the skills that are relevant to their current occupation and that expand their possibilities in their expertise, while reskilling is to learn

new knowledge and skills to take on a completely new career path (Li, 2022). The VUCA world requires not only people with jobs that can possibly be replaced with AI and robots in the near future but also people already in higher-up positions or with lucrative careers to continue learning; and as Li (2022) states, this drastic change has made life-long learning necessary for many people. With more people in need of reskilling and upskilling, the number of people learning English as part of their reskilling and upskilling will presumably increase. Therefore, it is important for English educators to understand the VUCA world and have the students equipped with the skills to survive the VUCA world.

### **Including VUCA Elements in Classroom Activities**

As the world and the society change, the skill sets that are valued in the job market also change. According to a report from the World Economic Forum, self-management skills such as active learning, resilience, stress management, and flexibility are listed as top skills for 2025, while cognitive skills such as active listening and emotional intelligence are ranked high on the 2015 list but have disappeared on the 2025 list (Li, 2022). In other words, in the VUCA world, it is crucial for us to be able to understand ourselves deeply, overcome difficulties in a way that is comfortable for each one of us, and adjust ourselves to the situation that is constantly changing.

Teachers can equip their students with the skills that are significant in the world today by introducing VUCA elements in the classroom activities. In the investigation by Yaccob et al. (2023), teachers who included VUCA elements such as real-life situations, authentic materials and problem-solving projects, as well as collaborative learning, had positive views on the integration of the VUCA element into their lessons; and the integration allowed the students to seal the gap between the classroom and real life (Yaccob et al., 2023). It is especially pivotal for the students to nurture their own stance and views on current social, environmental or geopolitical

issues. For classroom activities, for instance, using controversial topics such as environmental issues and animal rights can stimulate students' higher-order thinking skills.

In addition to the activities that are related to real life scenarios, materials and classroom activities for the VUCA world should give students opportunities for deeper understanding about themselves. The key to survive in the VUCA world is to be able to make their own decisions; and in order to make their own decisions, they have to know what makes them satisfied and content. Therefore, it would be helpful for the students if the teacher provides them with the materials and activities with which they can reflect on their views and values, either implicitly or explicitly.

It is also important to note that the teachers themselves should also be equipped with the skills that are significant in the VUCA world. Teacher's stress and burnout has a great impact on students' stress level in the classroom (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016); if the teacher is stressed out and burnt out, it could affect the students' motivation and their learning. Thus, with the world becoming more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, it will be pivotal for all of us to develop skills such as resilience, stress management and flexibility. Educators need to nurture these skills for themselves as well as their students.

## **Conclusion**

Because of advancements in technology, globalization and recent geopolitical circumstances, the world is changing drastically at a fast pace. It is said that the world we are living in, or will be living in, is called the VUCA world. To prepare for the VUCA world, there is an urgent need for reskilling, which can bring more people into English learning as English is now an international language. Therefore, English teachers should prepare for the VUCA world and also assist their students in being equipped for the VUCA world by including authentic real-life tasks and activities that require higher-thinking and

self-reflection. It is also important that the teachers themselves are equipped for the VUCA world to be able to help their students.

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