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NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

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Abstract

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) has emerged as an interdisciplinary approach that integrates principles from linguistics, psychology, and communication to enhance learning, personal development, and behavioural change. This paper reviews the theoretical foundations, representative systems, classroom applications, and educational significance of NLP, with particular emphasis on English Language Teaching (ELT). It traces the historical evolution of NLP through the pioneering work of Richard Bandler and John Grinder and discusses its intellectual roots in Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar, Milton Erickson's hypnotherapy, and Fritz Perls' Gestalt therapy. The paper further examines the Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) representational systems and highlights their role in accommodating diverse learning preferences. Various NLP-based classroom strategies, including rapport building, mirroring, anchoring, pacing and leading, perceptual positioning, modelling, and flow maintenance, are explored as effective techniques for improving teacher–student interaction, learner motivation, communication skills, and classroom engagement. Additionally, the paper synthesizes recent empirical evidence demonstrating the positive influence of NLP on English language learning outcomes, including academic achievement, vocabulary acquisition, writing proficiency, self-efficacy, motivation, oral communication, reflective reading, and reduction of test anxiety across different educational levels. Although NLP continues to attract criticism regarding its empirical validity, the review suggests that many of its pedagogical principles align with contemporary learner-centred and communicative approaches to language teaching. The paper concludes that NLP offers valuable instructional strategies that can enrich English language classrooms by fostering meaningful communication, learner confidence, and active participation while encouraging further rigorous research to establish its educational effectiveness.



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Keywords: Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), English Language Teaching (ELT), Representative Systems, VAK Learning Styles, Classroom Communication, Language Learning, Learner Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Academic Achievement

Introduction

Neuro-Linguistic Programming emerged in the 1970s through the collaborative work of Richard Bandler, a computer science student, and John Grinder, a linguist. Their aim was to model the verbal and behavioural patterns of highly effective therapists to identify strategies that could be taught and applied in diverse contexts such as therapy, education, and communication (Bandler & Grinder, 1975).

The theoretical underpinnings of Neuro-linguistic programming draw from three major sources: Chomsky's linguistic theory, Milton Erickson's hypnotherapy, and Gestalt therapy developed by Fritz Perls (Rakami & Rokeman, 2023). According to Dolnick (2006), these influences shaped the foundational philosophy and methods of Neuro-linguistic programming.

Chomsky's (1957) theory of transformational-generative grammar introduced the concepts of deep structure and surface structure, which provided the linguistic foundation for Neuro-linguistic programming's Meta-Model. This model involves analyzing and restructuring vague or distorted language to reveal underlying thought processes (Grinder & Bandler, 1976). It is used in Neuro-linguistic programming to improve clarity in communication and to promote cognitive restructuring (Sharpley, 1987).

Milton Erickson, a renowned hypnotherapist, influenced the creation of the Milton Model, a set of hypnotic language patterns used to guide unconscious change. Bandler and Grinder (1976) closely studied Erickson's indirect suggestion techniques, metaphors, and storytelling approaches to develop Neuro-linguistic programming strategies that could bypass resistance and work at the subconscious level (Einspruch & Forman, 1985).

From Gestalt therapy, developed by Fritz Perls, Neuro-linguistic programming adapted techniques centered around experiential awareness, present-moment focus, and integration of conflicting internal "parts." These practices evolved into Neuro-linguistic programming strategies like parts integration and timeline therapy, which are used to help learners resolve internal conflicts and enhance self-awareness (Dilts, 1990; Andreas & Andreas, 1989).



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Dolnick (2006) encapsulates this synthesis by describing Neuro-linguistic programming as a convergence of linguistic analysis (Chomsky), hypnotic suggestion (Erickson), and experiential psychotherapy (Perls). This multi-disciplinary origin explains Neuro-linguistic programming's broad applicability and its psychological relevance in educational contexts, particularly in areas such as language learning and anxiety management.

Neuro-linguistic programming and its associated fields face scepticism, especially regarding their general applicability in classrooms and the commercial promotion of Neuro-linguistic programming as a self-improvement technique. Neuro-linguistic programming has been designated a 'quasi science' and criticized for its deficiency in empirical studies; however, there are compelling justifications for its compatibility with contemporary classroom practices (British Council, 2020).

Representative System of Neuro-Linguistic Programming

A representative system refers to the method of gathering and storing information, with sensory organs being the primary tools for this process. In Neuro-linguistic programming, the term VAK (Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic) is used to describe sensory representative systems, each with specific patterns called sub-modalities.

Visual Type: Visual learners are keen observers, often characterized by shallow breathing, clear voice, expressive facial gestures, and dynamic gestures above the chest level. They tend to prefer smart dressing and value order. Common words include “look,” “see,” “observe,” and “view.” They learn better through written content like texts, books, and visual aids, rather than oral instructions (Grosu et al, 2014; Younus, 2025).

Auditory Type: Auditory learners understand information better through sound. They are sensitive to pitch, tone, and rhythm in speech. Their gestures are less expressive, and they often speak monotonously. Common terms used include “speak,” “tone,” “hear,” and “listen.” These learners excel when reading aloud or participating in discussions (Grosu et al, 2014; Younus, 2025).

Kinesthetic Type: Kinesthetic learners experience the world through their bodies, with characteristics such as deep breathing, quiet speech, and a need for physical movement. They often use words like “feel,” “touch,” and “hold.” Learning through physical activity, practice,



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and movement, such as games or group activities, enhances their understanding (Grosu et al, 2014; Younus, 2025).

Neuro Linguistic Programming in the Classroom

Educators employing music to establish ambiance and foster creativity, or utilizing mime and drama techniques to enhance confidence and incorporate body language into verbal expressions, are already leveraging the Neuro-linguistic programming curriculum. Classroom activities explicitly based on Neuro-linguistic programming have only recently been developed by (English Language Teaching) ELT practitioners (British Council, 2020).

Neuro-linguistic programming provides a variety of methods for use in classrooms that have been well embraced by teachers and students in a number of nations (Suciu, 2017). Neuro-linguistic programming techniques are used in classroom management and teaching strategies to increase the efficacy and clarity of teacher-student communication (Begum et al., 2022).

Numerous activities also incorporate skills and serve as extensions or modifications of established techniques such as storytelling, guided imagery, role-playing, and simulation. Significant areas where Neuro-linguistic programming can exert a tangible influence include the examination of relationships among students and between students and teachers, as well as the facilitation of a healthy and positive learning environment which is very important for language learning:

- **Creating rapport:** Rapport is the sense of comfort that arises during interactions with familiar individuals, and it is crucial for effective communication to occur. Rapport is most probable when individuals with similar perspectives engage. In the classroom, mingling and 'getting to know you' activities, along with ongoing negotiations between the teacher and students, cultivate rapport, while communication gap exercises and collaborative work strengthen it (Siddique, 2018; Soethama & Sumaryana, 2023).
- **Mirroring:** Establishing effective rapport can be accomplished by mirroring the behaviours of those we seek to influence or be influenced by. Postural, gestural, facial, and respiratory mirroring can be easily implemented in the classroom, while fundamental drilling effectively yields comparable results regarding the phonological features of connected speech and key lexical phrases. Effective communication requires



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the combination of verbal and non-verbal components in communication efforts. Students may be directed to emulate the behaviour of television characters before imitating each other and the instructor (Siddique, 2018; Soethama & Sumaryana, 2023).

- **Creating positive states and anchoring:** This is about keeping yourself motivated to learn and having a good attitude about it. In Neuro-linguistic programming, a positive state is made by picturing yourself achieving something mentally or physically. This state is then anchored by a facial expression, gesture, or body movement that you do over and over to keep the state or remember it. The state can be made with guided fantasy, and a movement or sound can be chosen to show it. Some teachers choose different spots in the classroom to do different things, like give directions, teach grammar, or tell a story. This is often done unconsciously. In ELT, this is a way of anchoring that makes sure students know what will happen next in a lesson and are ready for it (Soethama & Sumaryana, 2023).
- **Maintaining flow:** Flow theory says that learning should flow like water and that people learn best when they don't have to think about anything else. Neuro-linguistic programming fits in well with this idea. When planning a lesson, flow is reached when there is a good mix of new challenges and skill building, as well as clear task goals and the need to focus. Students learn best when they are in charge of what is going on in the classroom, don't feel self-conscious, and get good feedback from both the teacher and other students. It seems like time goes by quickly in good lessons. Balance of activities, interest, how to deal with mistakes, building confidence, learner training, and independence are all clear messages in this. Games where people compete and work together, jokes, songs, and stories, as well as personalized and well-planned activities that fill in information gaps, all help to keep the flow going (Siddique, 2018; Soethama & Sumaryana, 2023).
- **Pacing and leading:** A set of techniques that require the listener to "tune in," accept, and correctly state the speaker's point of view (pacing) before putting forward a different point of view (leading). When someone agrees with an argument, they will act like the person who made the argument. To make people more aware of this process, activities



that involve listening without answering, taking turns, planning, and making decisions are helpful (Soethama & Sumaryana, 2023).

- **Perceptual positioning:** This is an extension of mirroring, which is used in Neuro-linguistic programming to solve problems and bring in a neutral third party to act as a mediator. One use for this in ELT would be in a lesson on reading or telling stories, where one person would be the author or storyteller, another would be a character in the story, and a third would be a reader or outsider looking in on the action (Siddique, 2018).
- **Modelling good practice:** Neuro-linguistic programming tells us to copy what other people do well. A lot of this in ELT is about training the students, like when they find out about each other's study strategies or pick up new ones to use for things like reviewing and getting ready for tests (Soethama & Sumaryana, 2023).

It is clear that Neuro-linguistic programming and ELT work well together, even if you don't follow Neuro-linguistic programming. This is because Neuro-linguistic programming learns by watching how people talk to each other, and ELT learns from what Neuro-linguistic programming says is the best way to improve communication and, by extension, learning. There is nothing in Neuro-linguistic programming that goes against current ELT methods when it comes to humanistic and communicative approaches to language learning.

Effect of Neuro-Linguistic Programming on Achievement in English

Primary level students (Chehabeddine et al., 2024; Ghanem et al., 2024; Manana et al., 2024; Taha et al., 2025), secondary level students (Pratama, 2019; Ismail & Al-Ajmi, 2024), EFL teachers (Moharamkhani et al., 2016; Shahmoradi et al., 2018), undergraduate students (Carrillo–Beltrán et al., 2024), university students (Jasim, 2026) can all benefit from neuro-linguistic programming as a pedagogy in terms of academic performance, self-efficacy, test anxiety, writing skills, job stress, motivation, and oral performance in English.

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