

## Current Issues On Tesol Field In Efl Context

Nurmala Elmin Simbolon

*Department Perikanan dan Kelautan, State Polytechnic of Pontianak  
E-mail: nurmala\_simbolon@yahoo.com*

---

**Abstract**— This article discusses several issues raised in TESOL field range from the variety of English to the technology application in language teaching. The term of English as an International Language, or EIL has been growing in TESOL field. And then, the issue about teaching focus is still fresh to discuss. The variety of cultures using English has stirred the language teaching to focus on the language use instead of the language form. Finally, technology implication such as online learning in TESOL classrooms is now increasing. To sum up, the issues link much with the importance of intercultural competence in second language teaching; therefore, some adaptations to the ELT teaching method in EFL context such as in Indonesia need to be adopted.

**Keywords**—EIL, Intercultural Competence, Online Learning

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

Several issues have emerged during the history of Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The issues of the debates are in the ideas of multiculturalism, linguistic imperialism, English as international English (EIL), English as a foreign language (EFL), computer-mediated communication, and classroom discourse. These matters mostly relate to the influence and role of culture on certain TESOL contexts. This essay will outline three most common debates in the writer's English teaching contexts, which are whether EIL or EFL should be taught, if language form or language use should be taught in EFL classrooms, and finally whether online learning is suitable for the English teaching system in the particular context. After outlining and discussing those debates, this paper will argue several ideas which bring about some recommendations for the teachers of TESOL teachers.

### II. DEBATES ON TESOL FIELD IN EFL CONTEXT

Being used in worldwide scope, English is known as the world language. This allows for the

expanding of the language in terms of geography and varieties. This, however, results in a debate in TESOL classrooms. It is stated that rather than EFL, EIL is the most convenient type of English to encounter a range of diverse cultures, especially for non-native English speaking settings. EIL introduces new approaches in English teaching which consider English as a lingua franca. Xu (2002) quotes Scott Thornbury's comment stating that language is not possessed, but people learn that language and live in it. In this sense, English is not owned by only English speaking cultures, but also any culture which needs it as the communication tool. In his article, Xu argues the reason why EIL should be applied in English teaching classrooms (2002). He states that this English enables the native speakers to understand the culture of non-native speakers, and the non-native speakers to understand the cultures of the native speakers and the other non-native speakers as well. By quoting Bickley's statement, Xu also strengthens this by saying that communicating in English will allow for cultural exposure because English does not belong to any particular culture and country. This is possible to be experienced because the goal of learning the EIL is not to

achieve the proficiency, but to understand and to be understood by the speakers due to its function as the global communication tool. In this way, Liddicoat (2005) recommends the involvement of intercultural competence in the teaching and learning of EIL with which learners will be aware that cultures are relative and be able to act in intercultural interactions. However, there are several challenges which need to be tackled in terms of using EIL in TESOL classrooms. One of them is how to decide which standards and norms of English should be used in EIL contexts as EFL does have (Wandel 2003). EFL considers British and American English as the standard ones by setting TOEFL and IELTS as the evaluation or skill standards. In this sense, with these particular standards, learners will find it easier to determine their objectives in learning the language because they just focus on either British or American English. In spite of the different cultures experienced during the learning, Liu (2005) suggests that EFL programs should be adapted to the upgraded Western language teaching approaches and include the cultural construct. But the Japanese study conducted by Suzuki Takao in 1996 showed that being exposed to western cultures, the use of English brings about a feeling of inferiority to the learners (McKay 2004). In this sense, this kind of feeling may result in the rejection of the language. Therefore, in specifying the standards and norms of English which is possible to apply in EIL, by quoting Trudgill and Smith's ideas, Xu (2002) suggests the written and spoken forms used by the educated people as the norms and standards of English because those forms are found similar to the users of the place where they are. This may lead to the potential to the expanding of varieties of the language in terms of genre, style and register. Yet, Xu argues that these potential features allow for the varieties of English to continue developing and also to avoid the varieties from leading to what he calls mutually unintelligent (2002).

The idea of applying EIL is suitable for the writer's TESOL context based on several facts found in her teaching setting. These facts are summarised in Kachru's findings about misleading myths (Xu 2002). Firstly, the aim of teaching and learning English is to attain the native models of English. This results in the second misconception which assumes that the non-native speakers of

English have to struggle with the inter-language to attain the native-like character. These fallacies have burdened both the non-native English teachers and learners as it is quite impossible for the non-native speakers of English to reach the level of native speaker-like because the learners have their own cultural identities in terms of using their native language (L1) (Barnett and Antenucci 2006). In this sense, learners' L1 will influence them in achieving the target language standard. Therefore, besides the language competence, intercultural competences will become students' problems during the learning. For example, some students in author's TESOL classrooms will struggle to practise using the word 'you' as there are some words to address the second speaker in terms of the social status. Instead of addressing 'you', a speaker will address him/her with Mr.../Mrs... For example in the following sentence 'Excuse me, can you help me with this words?', students will normally express "Excuse me, can Mrs Nurmala help me with this word?" Yet, when directly talking to someone of higher social status, a speaker also shows that with a certain body language like bending speakers' shoulders. Due to these linguistic and culture distances, it is predictable that learners will find difficulties during their learning. Dornyei (2001) warns TESOL teachers by stating that when learners feel frustrated with their attempts, this condition will influence their motivation in learning the language. Conversely, allowing for the diversity of culture in TESOL classrooms will encourage students' affection towards other learners of different cultures. Moreover, the learners of this author have the potential to meet different cultures, not only from the inner circle contexts like America and Britain, but also from the expanding circles like Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, China, Germany, and Holland. Each of these countries has their own sociolinguistic patterns. For example, in the writer's TESOL classroom, several students found it difficult to approach the standard spoken English besides the English structure. For example, in the topic of greetings and leave takings, students looked awkward when carrying out the role play. This is because it is not common in their culture to greet and say good bye in daily social interaction. Instead, people usually come with religious greetings. So, when a pair of students started

demonstrating the conversation with these particular religious greetings like this following expression 'Assalamualaikum( A common Moslem greeting in Indonesia), good morning, how are you?', the writer did not argue about that, but accepted it as their personal identities. Hence, the writing recommends English teachers to adopt this EIL approach as it does not teach the language proficiency, but communicative and intercultural competences. In this sense, there is no need to teach learners greetings for example, in the exactly same way as Western culture does because the way of extending the expression is not the same as in the learners' context. Instead, people usually say hello and directly ask about someone's activity like the following expressions 'Hi, what are you doing?', or 'Hey, where are you going?' In summary, this essay recommends TESOL teachers to adapt the topics and materials to the learners' culture and to expose more diverse cultures through discussions and make use of technology like movies, and internet as the sources of teaching and learning materials. However, the author realizes that there are a few hindrances which may be encountered during the teaching and learning process such as cultural differences; in addition, her context of the discourse still sets Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as the testing tools for educational and occupational requirements.

### III. LANGUAGE FORM OR USE

Author affiliation must be in 10 pt Italic. Email address must be in 9 pt Courier Regular font. The second issue in TESOL classrooms is whether focusing on language form or language use should be in EFL context teaching. EFL contexts usually consciously or unconsciously set their goal of language learning towards the American or British English (Wandel 2003). It is the fact that in the author's context where TOEFL and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) are set as one of the requirements for further study and career path. In this sense, learners are prepared to learn the form of the language as they need to attain the standard test score to be successful in study entrance and in achieving a job promotion. But the author finds lots of students cannot use the language even though they are good at describing the rules and forms of English

language. Consequently, in their article about spoken language, which is entitled 'Pragmatics and Communication', DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) argue that instead of focusing on linguistic competence, pragmatic competence will benefit to the interaction between intercultural distances. This particular competence will enable the learners to be competent speakers of the language. They will know what to do base on a certain expression, which is referred to as illocutionary competence. Furthermore, it will include the sociolinguistic competence, with which a language speaker will know how to respond to a specific spoken utterance appropriately. Every speech act has its cultural meaning because of language functioning as the social role. In this sense, each individual status is never fixed, but it changes depending on his/her ongoing situation and relationships. Kachru (1999) realizes this condition by stating that despite the shared language, the successful communication depends on understanding sociocultural factors. For example, a wedding invitation card in my TESOL context is various and influenced by religious values. So, it is very common for Muslims to use Arabic sentences in some part of the invitation, while in other ethnic communities, Batak, for example, both family of the bride and the bridegroom extend the invitation in their own way using different addressing styles, which is based on the cultural position in that community. It is understood, these examples are much different from the Western style in this particular genre. DeCapua and Wintergerst acknowledge the pragmatic competence is more difficult to learn as the cultural values are subconscious (2004). This competence ranges from the formality and informality, and the individual's age and gender as well. Both Kachru (1999) and DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) suggest similarly that in TESOL classrooms it is essential to expose the cultural differences through the materials used in classroom teaching. Pragmatic competence is taught to increase the pragmatic awareness in a range of cognitive awareness towards the productive use. By having this cognition, a language learner is expected to respond to expressions appropriately in the given context. Moreover, Ho (2000) suggests that through the literacy, values can be conveyed. For example including traditional legends like Malin Kundang,

in reading materials, a moral lesson about respecting parents, can be expressed. Hence, there will be several moral lessons which can be grasped by the students. But in terms of contrastive values, what Liddicoat (2005) calls as the intercultural competence can be applied, with which a language learner values his/her culture and others' cultures in balance.

Therefore, the author recommends for EFL-context teachers to include pragmatic competence in classroom teaching while working out with the grammatical competencies. Language is a part of social interaction (DeCapua and Wintergerst 2004). A learner learns a language not only to know the language, but also to use the language to serve his/her needs during the interaction. It is very possible to face a range of differences due to different values and attitudes during the social interaction. So, including this sociolinguistic competence in teaching practice will influence teaching methods, selective learning activities, and various materials applied in TESOL classrooms. For example, in reading class, when the topic is about Heidi, an EFL teacher can take other story from the literature of the L1 context, Malin Kundang, for instance. With these two readings, learners are led to a comparative and contrastive discussion so that learners attain the cross-culture understanding in terms of way of life, geographical scope, and values. Another example is how to RSVP an invitation is not necessary to set as one of the syllabus points in English program as it is not common in writer's culture. People normally are not supposed to RSVP for the host will prepare as many meals as the number of invitation cards which have been distributed. However, it is impossible to tackle the whole cultural views in a limited course of language learning. It means that miscommunication during the interaction is inevitable. DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) said that when misunderstanding occurs between two speakers, it is very possible that they share different linguistics and pragmatic competences. So, intercultural competence will enable learners to maintain the interaction by negotiating the meaning in such ways as asking for clarification and referencing to the closest meaning while maintaining positive attitudes towards the different cultures (Liddicoat 2005).

#### IV. IS ONLINE LEARNING RECOMMENDED?

The last issue to be discussed in this writing is the idea about online learning system applied in TESOL classrooms. As a result of technology, which introduces computers and mobiles to the youths and adults, the number of educational institutions applying online learning has increased. There are several conflicts in this system in terms of its social contexts. On one hand, some scholars think that this type of learning is helpful and quite effective in TESOL classrooms with some reasons. Firstly, the authenticity of the text (Carrier 1997) as cultural exposure is very possible through this system. An easy to access to internet has allowed for the introduction of more authentic material which can be applied in language teaching. And then, the system is effective because it has a range of services which facilitate learning to the target language learners such as providing students with practice of the four language skills. Tracey (2004) realizes that nowadays the main type of communication is technology application. In this way, she quotes Lacy's ideas stating that both spoken and written languages have become faster but less structured. In this sense, in addition to the cultural distances, there will be a much different meaning which will come up in the communication through this technology. This term leads to one of the drawbacks of the online learning system. The message which is meant to deliver can be different from the message received. It means that the objectives of the learning can deviate. The second weakness of this system is that the method will bring about negative effects on a particular pedagogy. Each context has its own pedagogy and theoretical principles in education. The on line learning influences the teaching and learning style of the TESOL context. Oxford, Massey, and Anand categorize and describe the three teaching systems, which are authoritarian, laissez-faire, and democratic-participatory (2005). In the author's context where the teaching style is authoritarian, the role of teachers is highly valued and considered as the source of knowledge. This condition affects and challenges the students' learning style as they are dependent on the teachers' roles and values. So, the online learning system, which requires the independence of the learners, can become an obstacle for them. This may lead to a feeling of being unmotivated due to a lack of self-efficacy (Dornyei 2001). Moreover,

this typical learning system allows for the free exposure to the world. It is considered that some websites destroy youths' culture in the author's TESOL context. That is why regulations against some websites such as pornography are being set up at this moment. In this sense, there will a censorship in websites, yet one type of communication in internet, Facebook is on lists of the regulations to consider. It means that some parts of the society of this particular context reject the system. In short, the online learning is not still recommended yet in the author's teaching setting.

However, instead of worrying about these terms, Zhao et al (2004) suggest selective types of technology, for example, when deciding particular software to be applied in TESOL classrooms, the teacher must be aware of the appropriateness to the culture of the context. Software about computer conferencing (CC) is helpful and successful in Japanese study (Skinner & Austin 1999). The computer-mediated-communication method has succeeded in motivating the students to interact, especially through the writing which was seen as the most difficult part to do during learning the language. This is possible because the learners are already motivated with the self-confidence they have, or what Dornyei (2001) calls self-efficacy (2005). But again, the system is not suitable for the author's context as her students mostly prefer personal interaction to keep them confident during the learning process. They feel comfortable when the teacher guides them directly. It is predicted that with the online learning system, only a few students will participate because of feeling uncomfortable and unsure. This is because of the uncommon style of communication; furthermore, it is due to a lack of capacity to use the language through the technology. Nevertheless, the author realises the importance of introducing learners to the development of technology, so this paper recommends that TESOL teachers of EFL context can apply the online learning in terms of assessing students' achievement; meanwhile the receptive and practical processes are best suggested to carry out in traditional interactions. The writer understands, applying the online learning, the students also need to be trained how to apply the technology tool. Also, within a range of technology tools, teachers can choose the best suitable types of technology suitable to their discourse context. This is to help provide more

updated materials. Finally, in terms of providing a model for the students, classroom teaching is highly valued.

To sum up, among a range of debates in TESOL classrooms, most of them are as a result of the impact of cultural contexts on learning and teaching English. Language is a social identity which needs to negotiate and encounter when dealing with cultural differences. In this sense, TESOL teachers should update their classroom teaching methods by relating them to the cultural issues while maintaining learners as the centre of the teaching curriculum.

## V. CONCLUSION

Each context has its own pedagogy and theoretical principles in education. The on line learning influences the teaching and learning style of the TESOL context. The computer-mediated-communication method has succeeded in motivating the students to interact, especially through the writing which was seen as the most difficult part to do during learning the language.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Barnett, J &Antenucci, R 2006, 'Learner identity and the professional standards for ESL specialists', in *Tales out of school: identity and English language teaching*, eds. Kate, C and Kerry O, Adelaide, South Australia.
- [2] Carrier, M 1997, 'ELT online: the rise of internet', *ELT Journal*, Vol. 53, No.3, July, pp. 279-309.
- [3] DeCapua, A &Wintergerst, AC 2004, 'Pragmatics and communication', in *Crossing cultures in the language classroom*, University of Michigan, Michigan, USA.
- [4] Dornyei, Z 2001, 'Motivation to learn a foreign/second language' in *Teaching and researching motivation*, Longman, Harlow, England.
- [5] HO, JWY 2000, 'Cultural transmission in literacy acquisition: a case study in Chinese', in *Teaching languages, teaching cultures*, eds. AJ. Liddicoat and C. Crozet, Melbourne, Victoria.
- [6] Kachru, Y 1999, 'Culture, context, and writing', in *Culture in second language teaching and learning*, ed. Hinkel, E, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- [7] Liddicoat, AJ 2005, 'Teaching languages for intercultural communication', in *An international perspective on language policies, practices and proficiencies*, eds. D. Cunningham and A. Hatoss, Federation Internationale des Professeurs de LanguesVivantes, Rumania.
- [8] Liu, G 2005, 'The trend and challenge for teaching EFL at Taiwanese Universities', *RELC Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 211-221.
- [9] McKay, SL 2004, 'Western culture and the teaching of English as an International English', *English Teaching Forum*, April, pp. 10-15.
- [10] Oxford, R, Massey, R &Anand, S 2005, 'Transforming teacher student style relationships: towards a more welcoming and diverse classroom discourse', in *The power of context in language teaching and learning*, eds. J. Frodesen and C. Holten, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.
- [11] Skinner, B & Austin, R 1999, 'Computer conferencing-does it motivate EFL students?',
- [12] *ELT Journal*, Vol. 53, No.4, October, pp. 270-279.
- [13] Tracey, I 2004, 'English Language', *EST*, September.

- [14] Wandel, R 2003, 'Teaching India in EFL-Classroom: a cultural or an intercultural approach?', in *Context and culture in language teaching and learning*, eds. M. Bryamand P. Grundy, Clevedon, UK.
- [15] Xu, ZC 2002, 'From TEFL to TEIL: changes in perceptions and practices: Teaching English as an International Language (EIL) in Chinese universities in P.R. China', in *Englishes in Asia: communication, identity, power, and education*, ed. A. Kirkpatrick, Melbourne, Victoria.
- [16] Zhao Y, Alvarez-Torres AM, Smith, B, & Tan, HS 2004, 'The Non-neutrality of technology: a theoretical analysis and empirical study of computer mediated communication technologies', *J. Educational Computing Research*, Vol. 30, No. 1&2),pp. 23-55.