

English Language Teaching Today: Linking Theory and Practice: A Book Review

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Abstract: *This paper is a book review of 'English Language Teaching Today: Linking Theory and Practice, which is edited by Willy A. Renandya, and Handoyo Puji Widodo. The content analysis approach is the specific qualitative design used in analyzing the various chapters of the book. This edited book provides a broad outline of various theories, principles, and practical issues about English language teaching in this contemporary cosmopolitan society. Among other issues, the book aims to provide a broad overview of current thinking and scholarship on second and foreign language learning with a specific emphasis on English language teaching (ELT) in various learning situations. The book also seeks to provide a source of readings and discussions that can be used in undergraduate and postgraduate TESOL programmes, and in other language teaching centres that teach English as an international language (EIL). This review, therefore, seeks to highlight and summarize the key concepts presented by the various authors of the chapters. We hope that this review paper would conscientize our readers, especially those who teach the English language at various centres about the need and how to link theory to practice. The paper is segmented into three sections – the introduction, the contents, and the conclusion.*

Keywords: Book Review, English Language Teaching, Language Studies, Second Language Acquisition

Introduction

Over the years, English language teaching has been so zestful and multifaceted than it was before. Consequently, different theories, and strategies have emerged. The complexity of the teaching of the language is a result of the increasingly expanding scope of users from different disciplines. 'English Language Teaching Today: Linking Theory and Practice' is one edited book that treats diverse topics from varied perspectives. The book is segmented into two main parts. Part one, which focuses on theories, research and principles, consists of seven chapters written by different authors. The thematic areas of chapter one are: English Language Teaching Today, Student-Centred Learning in ELT, Using Local Languages in English Language Classrooms, and Applying Language Learning Principles to Course books. The rest are Current Issues in the Development of Material for Learners of EIL, Assessment in ELT, and Does Writing Promote Reflective Practice? Part two consists of thirteen chapters on pedagogical practices in diverse ways. The chapters in this segment are Extensive Reading and Listening, Teaching L2 Listening, Teaching Reading and Viewing to L2 Learners, Teaching Speaking, Teaching English for Intercultural Spoken Communication, Teaching Writing, and Teaching Academic Writing in Context. The other chapters in this part are Teaching English in Asian Contexts, Teaching Vocabulary in the EFL Context, Teaching Pronunciation, Language Learning with ICT, Teaching English for Specific Purposes, and Facilitating Workplace Communicative Competence. The copyright information of the book is as follows:

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The Book Contents- Part One:

English Language Teaching Today: An Introduction

The introductory chapter is written by the editors – Willy A. Renendya, and Handoyo Puji Widodo. The chapter focuses on the foundations, objectives, theoretical underpinnings, and the sequence of the book. In this chapter, the authors present key challenges that have fundamental consequences on English patronized by diverse people around the globe and subsequently present possible solutions to be appropriated locally. Again, the authors underscore the background of ELT, the dramatic revolution of the English language, the change in teaching and learning, and the rising usage of modern equipment in English language teaching and learning among other issues.

Student-Centred Learning in ELT

The second chapter in part one is authored by George M. Jacobs and Wily A. Renandya. This chapter uses three sections to discuss student-centred learning (SCL) in ELT. Section one places students at the centre of learning and part two reviews some of the stocks of student-centred learning, and the last section delves into ten elements of student-centred learning and how to apply them in learners. The authors define SCL as a learning process that shifts focus from the instructor/teacher to the student. Consequently, they outline the backgrounds of SCL in four corresponding theories – progressivism, humanistic psychology, constructivism, and socio-cultural theory. The chapter ends by proposing ten pedagogic elements of SCL. These are Students and Teachers as co-learners, Student-Student Interaction, Learner Independence, Focus on Meaning, Curricular Integration, Diversity, Thinking Skills, Alternative Assessment, Learning Climate, and Motivation.

Using Local Languages in English Language Classrooms

Written by Ahmar Mahboob and Angel M.Y. Lin, Chapter Three of part one examines the responsibilities local languages can play in English language classrooms. The authors underscore the gap that is eminent in teacher training programmes, and explore why the use of indigenous language is not unified in the majority TESOL concept and practice. The first reason is related to the history of English Language teaching and teacher education. The other reason is that approaches to teaching the English Language were developed and inherited by only inner circle speakers in the early twentieth century. The stance (i.e., using local languages in English language classrooms) of Mahboob and Lin has been re-echoed by some authors (i.e., Anyidoho, 2009; Owusu et al., 2015).

Applying Language Learning Principles to Course Books

In Chapter Four, John Macalister examines classroom practices concerning course books, which is followed by a brief investigation of the connection between course book publication and research-based principles. This chapter equally discusses principles teachers can apply to ensure that their classroom

practice is better informed by research and theory. The principles outlined here are fluency, interference, frequency, and the principle of the four strands.

Current Issues in the Development of Materials for Learners of English as an International Language (EIL)

In Chapter Five, Brian Tomlinson criticises the inefficiency of global course books for learners. He does not only criticise but also offers proposals to remedy the gap. The proposal centres on the approaches to selecting content, using texts, and devising tasks. He stresses the need to use authentic texts and authentic tasks to provide motivated exposure to English. According to him, learners can be assisted to increase their pragmatic awareness of how non-native speakers achieve their communicative purpose through interaction with each other.

Assessment in ELT: Theoretical Options and Sound Pedagogical Choices

In Chapter Six, the author, James Dean Brown, discusses assessment in ELT from theoretical and pedagogical perspectives. Theoretically, he examines 12 assessment options that are available for language teachers for assessing the knowledge and skills of their learners. These assessment types are classified into four divisions. They are receptive-response (i.e., true-false, multiple choice, and matching items); productive-response (i.e., fill-in and short-answer items, and performance assessment); personal-response (i.e., portfolios, conferences, and self/peer assessment); and individualised-response (i.e., continuous, differentiated, and dynamic assessment). In fulfilling the pedagogical implication aspect of the topic, Brown answers four questions:

1. How do content issues compare for the assessment types?
2. How do logistical issues compare for the assessment types?
3. How do scoring issues compare for the assessment types?
4. How do communicative characteristics compare for the assessment types?

Does Writing Promote Reflective Practice?

In Chapter Seven, Thomas S.C. Farell states that critical thinking is a key constituent of language teacher education. Hence, teachers should consciously and critically examine (reflect) their teaching and learning principles, be responsible in the classroom and improve teaching practices. To support his argument, he uses a case study of how three EFL teachers in Korea met for 16 weeks to reflect on their work. The chapter ends with suggestions and cautions for language teachers on reflective practice.

The Book Contents- Part Two:

Extensive Reading and Listening in the L2 Classroom

Part two begins with Chapter Eight. In this chapter, Willy A. Renandya and George M. Jacobs talk about extensive reading and listening in the L2 classroom. They discuss extensive reading (ER) and extensive listening (EL) and ways of implementing the two together. The authors conclude by addressing problems and concerns in the implementation process.

Teaching L2 Listening: In and Outside the Classroom

Anna C.S. Chang uses Chapter Nine to discuss the teaching of L2 listening: in and outside the classroom. She examines the use of theoretical background and empirical evidence in teaching second or foreign-language listening. She introduces some spoken language features, and examines previous research on second language. Based on the findings of her study, she designs a three-phase listening lesson format: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening. Finally, to help ensure the effective development of

second language listening, three outside classroom listening practice activities are recommended: narrow listening, repeated listening, and simultaneous reading and listening.

Teaching Reading and Viewing to L2 Learners

In Chapter Ten, teaching reading and viewing to L2 learners, Lawrence Jun Zhang provides a roadmap to instructional designs which brings to the fore a hypothetical viewpoint on strategies for teaching reading and viewing. These strategies are activating schemata, previewing, predicting, skimming, scanning, reading and linking, and viewing.

Teaching Speaking

The eleventh chapter of the book, which is written by Christine C.M. Goh, deals with teaching speaking. Here, the author draws on considerable research to discuss key areas in teaching speaking that can develop language learners' accuracy and complexity, and fluency. These areas could also help learners deal with mental and affective learning procedures holistically. The author also highlights three processes – pre-task planning, task repetition, and metacognition enhancement – for enhancing second language speaking performance.

Teaching English for Intercultural Spoken Communication

In Chapter Twelve, Jonathan Newton discusses teaching English for intercultural spoken communication. In his delivery, he outlines why we need to focus on intercultural issues in spoken communication. Finally, the author proposes some principles to guide the instruction of English for intercultural spoken communication. He outlines the speculative basis and justification for each of the three principles:

1. Taking cognizance of the social context of learning
2. Centring on intercultural learning objectives
3. Espousing intercultural classroom practices

Teaching Writing

Teaching Writing is the focus of Chapter Thirteen. Here, Yin Lin Cheung presents a short historical overview of different approaches to teaching writing. These include the controlled approach, process approach, and genre approach. Again, she discusses the guiding principles and pedagogical implications of the approaches. Drawing from the literature on writing research, she also highlights strategies for enhancing the quality of second-language writing.

Teaching Academic Writing in Context

In Chapter Fourteen, teaching academic writing in context, Zhichang Xu reviews the literature on World Englishes, Teaching English for Academic Purpose: Academic Writing in Beijing, Teaching English as International Language (EIL): Research Thesis Project in Hong Kong, and Teaching EIL: Writing Across Cultures in Melbourne. This chapter ends with some pedagogical principles for teaching English academic writing:

1. Advanced topics and practices about the development of English should be treated
2. Philosophies of accuracy and standards should be problematized
3. Importance of context for writing should be stressed
4. Learning to write and writing to learn should be combined
5. Students' written texts should be assessed both as a product and as a process

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6. The boundaries of writing communities, including English writing classrooms should be open to negotiation and appropriation

Teaching English Grammar in Asian Contexts

Grammar is essential in language studies (Owusu, 2022). Chapter Fifteen of the book is dedicated to teaching English grammar in Asian Contexts. In this chapter, Helena I.R. Agustien, the author, uses the Systematic Functional Grammar Tradition to expound her position on grammar. The author argues that texts, instead of secluded structures, should be used as a means of teaching grammar. Thus, to her, texts offer meaningful and fitting situations of reliable language use. The chapter has two main thematic areas – the English mood, and the use of information technology.

Teaching Vocabulary in the EFL Context

Chapter Sixteen explores teaching vocabulary in the EFL context. Since teaching vocabulary in the English as a foreign language (EFL) situation is difficult, the authors, Anna Siyanova-Chanturia and Stuart Webb discuss how to optimise vocabulary learning in the EFL context by responding to some questions. These questions are: Which words should be taught? How should vocabulary be taught? How many words do EFL learners need to know? What should a vocabulary-learning programme include? How can vocabulary learning be fostered, given limited classroom time? Which activities might be useful in indirect vocabulary learning? The responses to these questions form the main thematic areas of the chapter.

Teaching Pronunciation to Learners of English as a Lingua Franca

In Chapter Seventeen, Cathy S.P. Wong discusses teaching pronunciation to learners of English as a Lingua Franca in four main themes. These are Introduction: The Changing Landscape of English, New Approaches and Goals, The Sounds of English as a System, and Crucial Elements in Pronunciation Teaching Methodology. The main argument of this chapter is that as the world grows into a global village, the importance of using English as a lingua franca is increasing. Therefore, the classical goal of using one 'standard' pronunciation for English will not suffice since learners increasingly communicate with different speakers of English with diverse varieties: British, American, Australian, Indian, Ghanaian, etc.

Language Learning with ICT

In Chapter Eighteen, Mark Wilkinson, the author, assesses the hypothesis linking to ICT and examines ideologies for selecting tools and avenues that can enhance language learning. This chapter further discusses the encompassed Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) materials, platforms, and approaches. On the contribution of ICT to L2 development, the author examines some classical and modern theories. These are: Input and Interactionist theories and CALL, Cognitive theories and CALL, Constructionist theories and CALL, and Flipped learning.

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP): English for Vocational Purposes (EVP)

In Chapter Nineteen, Handoyo Puji Widodo discusses teaching English for specific purposes (ESP), and English for vocational purposes (EVP). This chapter provides ESP practitioners with theoretical and practical guides in implementing EVP instruction. In ESP studies, there are a lot of challenges. One of them is the growing issue of whether ESP teachers should teach either content or language, or both content and language. In responding to this challenge, the author discusses key elements of teaching EVP. Thus, the main rationale of the chapter is to provide ESP practitioners with both theoretical and practical guidelines to designing and implementing EVP teaching in the context where English is learned as an additional language.

Facilitating Workplace Communicative Competence

In Chapter Twenty, the final part of the book, the authors, Radhika Jaidev and Brad Blackstone, discuss facilitating workplace communicative competence. That is, the authors examine the synergies of skills that students need to have to possess communicative competence holistically. The authors further examine the theory of the Proposal Communicative Project (PCP) and its constitutive elements. These elements are inquiry-based pedagogy, Twenty-first-century values and skills, workplace communication, and others. This inquiry-based PCP is designed to equip first-degree university students with communicative competence in the workplace.

Conclusion

It is common knowledge that the English language is the most-spoken language in the world. Because different communities of the world have different cultural beliefs, the teaching of the English language in this 21st century has become very complex. However, one English language teaching book that discusses varied topics from various standpoints is Renandya & Widodo's (2016) edited book. Each of the twenty chapters of the book addresses a need in English language teaching. The chapters are written with abstracts, main sections, conclusions, and references. Our decision to review this material is based on the fact that our synopsis would guide readers, especially English language teachers to imbibe the useful tenets of the chapters of the book simply.

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