Studies in English Language Teaching
ISSN 2372-9740 (Print) ISSN 2329-311X (Online)
Vol. 9, No. 5, 2021
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/selt

Original Paper

A Showcase Study on ELF-oriented Classroom Practices in a General English Course

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Received: November 27, 2021 Accepted: December 10, 2021 Online Published: December 17, 2021

doi:10.22158/selt.v9n5p61 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/selt.v9n5p61

Abstract

The lingua franca status of English in transcultural settings questions the orthodox pedagogical principles and mainstream approaches of English language teaching. To mirror the relationship between English as a subject matter and English as a globalised sociolinguistic phenomenon, some scholars call for revisiting the conventional approaches of pedagogy. Still, the response to the call for a transition from the monocentric methods of English language teaching is slow. Teachers have multiple concerns about how to incorporate a global dimension into a general English language course for undergraduates. The present study aims to address this gap by offering a practical example of how to address English as a lingua franca phenomenon in a general English language course. The study showcases classroom practices for raising awareness of today's complexity of English use as a worldwide lingua franca. Ten Saudi undergraduates at a Saudi university participated in the study. The study shares the participants' critical reflections on what they have learned from the course. Analysis of the participants' reflections reveal that approaches based on complexity theory increased their familiarity with English linguistic diversities, developed their transcultural awareness and improved their ability to cope with English functional and contextual diversities. It is hoped that this showcase study can provide some guidance for the further implementation of a global dimension in other contexts.

Keywords

classroom practices, complexity theory, English as a lingua franca, English language teaching, Global Englishes, transcultural awareness

1. Introduction

Conventional approaches to English language teaching (ELT) have assumed that the goal of learners is integration or communication with Anglophones. However, there has been an increasing shift in the motivation to learn English from integrative to international, instrumental and temporal (Al Asmari,

2014; Bukhari, 2019; Canagarajah, 2015). The sociolinguistic landscape shaped by ongoing globalisation has led to the emergence of different frameworks to conceptualise, research and teach English. 'Global Englishes' is used as an umbrella term to capture interests in such a sociolinguistic phenomenon. Some of these interests put pressure on education to adjust itself and manifest the complexity of English usages at a global level. This study adapts the expression "English as a Lingua Franca" (ELF) as a paradigm that views the ELF phenomenon as communication involving a number of interrelated complex systems that include individuals' mental representations of language, language as a social system, communicative strategies and English itself. This theoretical framework is suggested by Baird, Baker and Kitazawa (2014). It implies that all lingua franca communications exhibit dynamism and complexity more often than monolingual and monocultural communications do (Bukhari, 2019).

To reflect the worldwide status of English, ELT orthodox views of monocentric perspectives, mononormative approaches, monocultural emphasis and communicative competence need a revised understanding of translanguaging, contextual co-adaptation, situated performativity, transcultural awareness and identity-processed languaging (see Bukhari, 2019). Learners need to be prepared for the linguistic, cultural, functional and contextual diversities of transcultural communication in English. Bukhari (2019) has uncovered the willingness of Saudi university students to welcome the inclusion of English linguistic diversities, international communication skills and transcultural awareness into ELT. Still, many teachers are concerned about how to incorporate these dimensions into ELT (Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018; Rajprasit, 2021; Wang et al., 2021) and into the Saudi context specifically (Bukhari, 2019). Although research in Global Englishes is established in European and Asian region, recent studies have reported the scarcity of Global Englishes-related research in the conservative context of Saudi Arabia (Bukhari, 2019; Elyas & Mahboob, 2020; Elyas et al., 2021). The present study fills this gap in the literature, provides new understanding and contributes to the future development of Global Englishes research and pedagogy. The present study attempts to fill this gap by reporting a pedagogical practice that incorporates ELF-oriented dimensions into an English language learning course for university students in Saudi Arabia, and it reflects critically on the efficacy of the course from the students' perspectives. What distinguishes this showcase study from previous ELF-oriented showcases (e.g., Rajprasit, 2021) is its complexity theory-informed perspectives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ELF Linguistic and Cultural Diversities

Linguistics studies reveal that real-life usages of English are different from the constructed grammars prescribed in language textbooks (Jenkins, 2015; MacKenzie, 2014; Matras, 2020; Trudgill, 2002). According to emergentism and complexity theory approaches, language learning is a matter of creating infinite numbers of novel and meaningful constructions rather than reproducing sedimented and ready-made language usages. Thus, variationist perspectives and the idea of codifying a local or

international ELF benchmark (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 2007) are rejected by many ELF scholars (e.g., Baird et al., 2014; Baird & Baird, 2018; Baker, 2015a; Bukhari, 2019). Such a variationist approach ignores the fact that language patterns negotiate their diversity, adjust their practices and co-adapt with their other interactive parts, including the contexts (see Bukhari, 2019). The notions of "multilingualism", "translanguaging" and "transculturalism" in ELF interactions suggest diversity, fluidity, hybridity and complexity. As ELF users exploit multiple linguistic and cultural resources, linguistic practices function as markers of linguacultural identities (Wang, 2012) and across-cultural complex identities such as transcultural identities (Marotta, 2014). The views of language variants as codes relevant to speech communities, neatly defined cultural groups and fixed identities are irrelevant to global citizens (Bukhari, 2019; Pietikainen, 2021).

To succeed in ELF interactions, learners of English should be exposed to English linguistic and cultural diversities, should be ready to exploit multilingual and multicultural resources and should be prepared to employ different problem-solving communication strategies (e.g., comprehension checks, co-construction of expressions, adjusting aspects of speech, reflective echoing and negotiation of non-understanding, to name a few). This study aims to enhance these skills in the classroom. Communicative competence models (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980) and intercultural communicative competence models (e.g., Byram, 1997) seem problematic in ELF use when there is no one target culture. Macmillan has published the "English Unlimited" series and Cambridge has published its "Global" series. Both series describe linguistics diversities as "authentic" and "competent". They include texts about lingual and cultural diversities, recordings of non-Anglophone users of English and sections designed for various contexts of worldwide use of English. However, Dewey (2014) criticises both series for their bias towards British content and models. Baker (2015a) criticises the "English Unlimited" series for its focus on "native" communicative competence rather than intercultural awareness.

To prepare learners for ELF diversities, Baker (2015a, Baker, 2015b) suggests the notion of transcultural awareness. Baker (2015b) defines transcultural awareness as "a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of references can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in communication" (p. 163). Such an approach to transcultural awareness includes knowledge, skills and practices that are necessary for the success of ELF interactions. In the light of his model, there are three levels for transcultural awareness. Level 1 deals with the conscious understanding of one's own linguaculture, with how this understanding impacts behaviours, beliefs, values and communication and with the ability to differentiate between one's own linguaculture and others' linguacultures. Level 2 deals with complex understandings of diverse groups, with how to make predications for possible misunderstandings and with the ability to mediate between specific cultural practices. Level 3 deals with the complex interrelationships between language, culture and communication. It involves the ability to mediate between different frames of reference beyond national levels. This study aims to raise students' transcultural awareness.

2.2 ELF Functional and Contextual Diversities

Pitzl (2018) points out that the "Multiple Resource Pool" of a group of ELF users "is bound to vary considerably from context to context and will often only be discovered gradually by participants throughout an interaction" (p. 34). Pietikainen (2021) analysed language alternation practices in different ELF contexts. Her findings revealed that ELF practices are not only affected by users' repertoires but also by a complex web of individual, interpersonal, group-related and discourse environmental aspects. Through a complexity theory lens, competence is coupled with contextual performativity in a process of co-adaptation with each other and with other parts, including users, functions and timescales (Bukhari, 2019). This lens suggests that success in ELF communication is reached through feasibility, the appropriateness of communicative strategies, the effectiveness of achieving contextual functions and resource exploitation for achieving situated success. ELF-oriented ELT practices should prepare the students to exploit multiple functional and contextual resources, to co-adapt their multiple resources with each other and with their surroundings to achieve situated success and to move beyond assumptions, generalisations and stereotypes. The present study proposes to develop these skills in the classroom.

Furthermore, both divergence and convergence are to be expected in ELF settings because not everybody is willing to accommodate to others. ELF data referred to the possibility of misunderstanding and lack of tolerance (e.g., Jenks, 2012; Wang & Jenkins, 2016). According to communication accommodation theories (e.g., Giles, 2009) interlocutors may converge, neutralise or diverge their linguistic and paralinguistic behaviours depending on their motives, goals and contextual expectations. For instance, interlocutors may accentuate each other's differences to signal distance. Jenks (2012) investigates divergence and convergence behaviours in an online chatroom. Chatters' behaviours signalled disapproval by making fun of each other's linguistic and cultural differences. It was concluded that ELF interactions may highlight boundaries in the absence of tolerance and predefined roles. In contrast, ELF data that are collected from academic settings, business meetings or friendly gatherings enhanced convergence strategies by approximating each other's communicative behaviours to fulfil contextual functions (MacKenzie, 2014). The present study aims to raise students' awareness of ELF different contexts and functions.

2.3 Relevant Studies

Some scholars criticise the monolingual and monocultural approaches to ELT because they do not meet today's requirements for international interactions. Having knowledge about Anglophone English cultures or achieving Anglophone English communicative competence does not guarantee success in undertaking the role of a transcultural mediator (Bukhari, 2019). Seidlhofer (2011) comments that all well-established monolingual and monocultural ELT materials can be used as guidelines for what to learn and teach, but the way of using them should reflect the global use of English. In other words, ELT should prepare learners to engage in transcultural communication and deal with linguistic diversities in phonology, lexis, syntax, discourse and pragmatics. Thus, ELF research calls for giving a space for

diversities of ELF interactions within ELT (e.g., Fang & Baker, 2018; Jenkins, 2013; Mauranen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2010). In response to such a call, some pedagogical attempts have been made by scholars to mirror today's international use of English. Matsuda's (2012) book consists of a collection of the most pioneering studies on World Englishes and English as an International Language approaches to ELT. The collection includes Bayyurt and Altinmakas (2012), D'Angelo (2012), Hino (2012), Lee (2012), Matsuda and Duran (2012) and Sharifian and Marlina (2012). In addition, Dogancay-Aktuna and Hardman (2018) discuss how ELT teachers can integrate Global Englishes approaches into their own classroom pedagogy.

Another effort in this direction has been accomplished by Bayyurt and Akcan's (2015) monograph. The first section of this monograph is devoted to an ELF-informed pedagogy that can be incorporated into ELT classroom practices. It presents four pioneering studies on ELF-oriented ELT practices. These four studies are Flowerdew (2015), Hino and Oda (2015), Kohn (2015) and Lopriore (2015). Some studies (e.g., Wang & Jenkins, 2016) recommend introducing ELF corpora (e.g., VOICE, ELFA, ACE) for learners. In the light of complexity approaches to ELF, teachers are expected to inform learners that these corpora are not intended to codify a particular variety, nor to be used for the purpose of prescribing a new set of English norms, but instead are intended to be used for research purposes and to prepare the learners to be accustomed to diversities. Rajprasit (2021) highlights ELF-oriented practices on linguistics diversities for an English language classroom. Wang et al. (2021) incorporates critical intercultural literacy into an English language learning course. Cavalheiro (2015) proposes an ELF-oriented programme for teacher education and professional development that enables the teachers to design their own ELF-oriented materials and practices. Despite the fruitful efforts of these studies, none of them approach ELF-oriented ELT classroom practices within complexity theory approaches. The present study aims to fill such a gap.

3. Settings, Participants and Procedures

This study was conducted at a Saudi university. A Saudi ELT lecturer volunteered to implement ELF-oriented classroom activities in his 14-week advanced general English course. The course was taught 10 hours per week during the second semester of the 2021 academic year. Ten students were registered in the course. The course was designed for face-to-face instruction, but it was delivered exclusively online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The course aimed to improve listening, speaking, reading, writing and communication skills of the students. Each class was divided into two sessions. The first session focused on the textbook of the course and the second session concentrated on ELF-oriented producers. The procedures were designed by the author.

Each ELF-oriented session was divided into four phases. In the first phase, a 10-minute video was displayed to the students. The main language used in the videos was English. All videos were carefully selected by the author from YouTube and TED Talks. Speakers in the videos were professional users of English coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The videos showed how to cope in

different ELF contexts such as academic settings, business meetings, friendly gatherings and conflicts. The main aim of this phase was to expose the students to English linguistic, cultural, functional and contextual diversities in transcultural settings. In the second phase, the lecturer discussed with the students the linguistic and cultural diversities in the video. In the third phase, the lecturer discussed with the students the functional and contextual diversities in the video. In the fourth phase, a debate activity was developed to challenge the students to reflect critically on their experience. At the end of each session, students were asked to search for an article on a related topic and write notes about it. At the end of the course, students were asked to write a critical reflection report on what they learned from the ELF-oriented sessions. These reflections were the source of the present study's data. To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, participant names were not included in this study.

4. Students' Reflections

The analysis of the students' reflections revealed that ELF-oriented ELT broadens the students' knowledge of English usages and raises their transcultural awareness, as described in the following subsections. This section shows examples of the students' written reflections.

4.1 Linguistic Diversities

Students understood that Anglophone and non-Anglophone users of English do not conform to a stable model. Students became familiar with different accents and usages of English. They developed positive attitudes towards English linguistic diversities. Students appreciated linguacultural identities. These findings were revealed in reflections as follows:

- S1: *I thought there is only one American accent and one British accent…. This course informed me that American people have different American accents and there are many accents in the UK.*
- S2: *I used to find difficulties in understanding some English varieties…. The additional activities alleviate this difficulty for me…. I started to understand better.*
- S3: *I like the old prestige dialect of Received Pronunciation and the modern prestige dialect of Estuary English…. I don't like Egyptian English…. The videos and the daily homework raised my acceptance to all Englishes.*
- S4: *We can't control our feelings towards some Englishes…. We must show acceptance to differences.*
- S5: *Familiarity with the linguistic variations in English is important to facilitate intelligibility among international interlocutors.*
- S6: *Each country speaks English in a distinct way…. When an Indian person asks you about your "good name", he means your "full name"…. If you don't know these characteristics about Indian English, you would laugh, judge negatively the other and disturb the communication process.*
- S7: *French English and Italian English become more acceptable and understandable to me*

after knowing that some French and Italian people omit the /h/ sound at the beginning of words. They may say ave instead of have.… I can understand why some of them overcompensate by pronouncing the /h/ in words like hour.

- S8: *Slippercrafty in Chinese English means treacherously icy road.… such hybrid words are expected to exist in multilingual communications.*
- S9: *I couldn't stop myself from laughing when I heard the Canadian man pronounce the ou in the word (house) like the word (hose).… now, and without laughing, I can expect some Canadians pronounce the word (about) like (a boat).*
- S10: *This course increases my confidence in my Saudi English.… It shows who I am.*

4.2 Cultural Diversities

Students understood that communicative practices are influenced by users' cultural backgrounds. They acknowledged the role of pragmatic strategies in the success of ELF interactions. They also realised that the ability to cope and accommodate in a way that reflects understanding of cultural similarities and differences is important in transcultural communications. Students could move from a simple awareness of differences between cultures to the development of positive attitudes and the ability to mediate between the others' pragmatics and their own. These findings were reflected in comments as follows:

- S1: *As Arabs, we, but not all of us, tend to give excessive compliments.… These ways cause embarrassment in some cultures.… We should not confuse them.*
- S2: *Some cultures prefer indirect communications such as Japanese, Chinese, Indians and Saudi Arabians.… With these persons, I should be attentive to cues of implications, suggestions, body language, posture, expression and tone of voice cues.… Direct communicators such as African Americans, Northern Europeans, European Americans and Russians don't like this.… I can feel free with them to criticize, confront and say NO.*
- S3: *Older Saudi generations raised us to avoid eye contact out of politeness.… All these habits can be interpreted as impolite reactions by in Spain, France and Germany.… This knowledge helps us decide what to do.*
- S4: *Ignorance of communication styles across cultures leads to unfortunate misunderstandings.*
- S5: *Before travelling to a specific town or country, I will read about its communication styles.… I will respond properly.*
- S6: *Handshakes and hugs would be common among Muslims who have the same gender.… It could be mistaken for a romantic relationship.… Although most people from Japan, Canada, Australia, Britain and New Zealand are not Muslims, they prefer minimal physical contact.… Don't get so close.*
- S7: *Just like Saudis, Mexicans consider asking about health and family and using titles as communication etiquettes.… I can start the conversation with a Mexican greeting word like Hola*

followed by Señor, Señora, Don' or Doña.… It's ok with them to interrupt a conversation in order to greet somebody who has just arrived or who is passing by.

- S8: *Avoid swearing and discussing poverty, religion and politics with Brazilians.*
- S9: *You need to maintain patience if you don't get your answers on the spot and soften your statements.… Koreans, Indians and Pakistanis express unhappiness and disagreement vaguely.… Nor does "yes" necessarily mean "agreement".… You have to elicit meanings.*
- S10: *Acting causal with a stranger is considered rude in Russia.… Don't assume familiarity and call someone by a nickname.*

4.3 Functional and Contextual Diversities

Students understood that the success of ELF interactions requires adjustment and co-adaptation to fulfil contextual functions. Students could go beyond generalisations and stereotypes in their comments:

- S1: *Knowing what is expected is helpful for managing communications.… Know with whom why and where you are speaking and adjust your language accordingly.*
- S2: *It's ok to adapt our encounters' communicative techniques or justify yours to avoid misunderstanding.*
- S3: *The social setting of a meeting dictates what gestures and phrases are used to smoothen the talk.*
- S4: *We can't assume that all Saudis or people of a particular nation communicate in the same way.… Each person is unique.… We behave in a way that suits the situation.*
- S5: *You shouldn't use Arabicized English words unless with people who speak Arabic because non-Arabs will not understand.… or explain their meanings.*
- S6: *The joke which seems funny to Saudis may not seem funny to people who are not Saudis.… If you want to tell a joke, be sure it is considered funny for your peers in the conversation.*
- S7: *I adjust my language based on the situation and my encounters.*
- S8: *Formality of the situation impacts our language choices.*
- S9: *It is important to have the ability to adapt your communication techniques between different circumstances.*
- S10: *It's a good practice to customize the verbal and non-verbal ways that you want to speak with a particular audience.*

5. Conclusion

To mirror today's international use and status of English, ELF research calls for providing a space for diversities of ELF interactions within ELT (e.g., Fang & Baker, 2018; Jenkins, 2013; Mauranen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2010). This showcase study presents a practical example of how to implement ELF-oriented activities in an advanced general English language course for university students. The course was designed for face-to-face instruction, but it was delivered exclusively online because of the COVID-19

pandemic. Each class was divided into two sessions. The first session was dedicated to teaching the textbook of the course. The second session was devoted to ELF-oriented activities. Each ELF-oriented session was divided into four phases: displaying a 10-minute video, discussing linguistic and cultural diversities, discussing functional and contextual diversities and a debate activity. At the end of each session, students were asked to search for an article on a related topic and write notes about it. At the end of the course, students were asked to write a critical reflection report on what they learned from the ELF-oriented sessions. These reflections were the source of the present study's data.

Analysis of the students' reflections revealed that adding ELF-oriented activities raised the students' awareness of ELF, increased their familiarity with English linguistic diversities, raised their transcultural awareness and improved their ability to cope with ELF functional and contextual diversities. The activities helped the students get ideas about diversities on their own without being influenced. However, it was difficult to fully gauge this impact because students' knowledge about ELF was not tested before and after implementing the target activities. Therefore, future studies could incorporate a pre-test and post-test design to capture changes or administer in-depth interviews. Because what people say may not reflect what they do, future studies could conduct classroom observations or experiments. Despite the present study's limitations, it guided the students to "think out of the box", seek additional information apart from their textbooks, advance their language learning journeys, improve their international communication skills and acquire the skills of transcultural mediators.

This study can provide insightful implications for ELT, calling for the provision of a pedagogical space to address ELF-related topics. This space should expose students to ELF use, allow for the practice of communication and accommodation skills, develop transcultural awareness, encourage exploitation of multiple resources and underscore contextual purposes. Instead of placing emphasis on copying particular linguistic and cultural models, ELF-oriented ELT prepares learners to engage in transcultural communication and deal appropriately and effectively with diversities. This showcase study can guide the further implementation of ELF-oriented practices in other ELT contexts.

Acknowledgements

Thanks must go to the teacher and students who participated in this study.

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