

BOOK REVIEW

ELT Research in Action 2024. Critical Conversations: Aligning Research and Practice in ELT



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IATEFL, 68 pages.

Online edition available at:

[https://resig.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/3/6/26368747/elt_research_in_action_2024 - critical conversations aligning research and practice in elt.pdf](https://resig.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/3/6/26368747/elt_research_in_action_2024_-_critical_conversations_aligning_research_and_practice_in_elt.pdf)

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As a member of an international teacher-research mentoring community, MenTRnet (<https://mentrnet.net/>), I have often wondered how far our experiences are tied to our local context or if there are ideas and experiences that might resonate with other ELT practitioners. While reading *ELT Research in Action 2024: Critical conversations aligning research and practice in ELT*, I felt a strong connection with many of the contributors who addressed the issues of language teaching from both research and classroom perspectives. The book is truly captivating because it opens up the space for various voices and subjects, such as teachers' identity building, inclusion, and the growing concerns around artificial intelligence (AI) in pedagogy and assessment.

Building on earlier editions, the new volume of *ELT Research in Action 2024* carries on with the goal of the series, namely, linking research with classroom teaching in useful ways. All three previous books (Mackay et al., 2018; Mackay, et al., 2020; Mackay & Wogan, 2023) focussed on connecting researchers and teachers in ELT by highlighting how these two communities of practice can work together on shared goals. They emphasize collaboration and reflection as key ideas, showing that working together helps teachers and researchers make a stronger impact.

This latest edition follows the same path by providing new ideas, creative methods, and research-based practices that further connect theory with what happens in classrooms to support a growing number of global reflective educators. The volume also addresses key issues like inclusivity, digital change, and sustainability in education, which have gained special importance after the pandemic. Overall, it addresses a reflective ELT community that adapts its practice to language learners and the needs of a changing world.

The book is arranged in three key sections with 11 chapters, each offering a unique viewpoint from the field. The first section, "Views from Research: Insights from Practice," presents research studies focused on classroom practices and their implications for teaching. The second, "Views from the Classroom: Insider Perceptions," highlights the reflections of teachers and learners through relatable stories offering a more personal account of ELT experiences. The last section, "Views from the Conference: Personal Perspectives," consists of

reflections and narratives from attendees of the ELTRIA conference, emphasizing professional growth and collaborative learning. The present book review centers on three main themes: teacher identity and inclusion, innovative teaching methods, and professional development for educators. These themes encapsulate the central concerns that run across the 11 chapters and represent key dimensions of contemporary English language teaching.

One of the strengths of *ELT Research in Action 2024* is how it raises awareness of teacher identity and the associated emotional, social, and ethical aspects. Chapter 7, authored by Christopher Richards, discusses the real-life experiences of gay male English teachers, and even though the author's analysis may not be very finely-grained, it describes how the work environment around LGBTQ+ teachers, whether it is supportive or hostile, can affect their identities. The examples cited clearly demonstrate how hard and unnerving it can be for LGBTQ+ teachers to work in places where they don't feel safe or welcome. One of the interviewees recalls that he felt safer walking around the streets of Damascus, often perceived to be a dangerous city, than going to his university campus in Western Europe, where he used to teach. In my own teaching context, I found that students have become increasingly accepting of LGBTQ+ identities. Some LGBTQ+ colleagues in Ecuador have shared experiences of intolerance and rejection, especially in strongly religious settings. Such discrimination often silences teachers, forcing them to hide who they are. Are institutions truly supporting diversity, or still reinforcing silence and exclusion? Richards concludes the chapter by sharing the desire to expand the scope of his project. He points out the necessity of future research to be intersectional and collaborative to better reflect the diversity and complexity of queer experiences in the ELT profession.

Inclusivity comprises the use of inclusive language, and there are examples when it is the students themselves that are pushing for change, as they are often more open-minded and accepting than their school's teaching staff and administration. Some students are helping their peers and teachers learn to use inclusive language (Årman, 2021; Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2023). This change in classroom culture poses some important questions: Are we, as teachers, ready to support this new generation and serve as the role models they need? This challenge seems to be closely related to Jim Fuller's ideas in Chapter 5 and Sampson and Pinner's in Chapter 6, which underline that a teacher's identity is shaped not only by what they teach and how they teach it, but also by how they think, feel, and interact with students every day. These chapters remind us that teaching is much more than instruction and also presenting our authentic self in the classroom can create a learning environment rooted in mutual trust.

The volume also invites us to reconsider how we teach, as several chapters highlight innovative teaching methods to make language learning more meaningful, collaborative, and welcoming. In Chapter 1, for instance, Piri Leeck outlines specific innovative teaching strategies implemented in the classroom to promote meaningful learning. Leeck looks at how young learners in Germany were able to bring to class what the author calls "extramural English," in which students were asked to include English words they picked up outside of school. She recounts a project in which students were encouraged to share words they had learned from games, social media, or any context beyond the class. Leeck discovered that through these types of activities, in which teachers acknowledged and valued their students' personal experiences with English, the latter felt more motivated to learn. As Leeck notes, "students feel appreciated when teachers acknowledge their contributions" (p. 18), especially when those contributions are connected to their lives and interests. Ultimately, it is crucial to give students opportunities for dialogue and recognize that language learning is not only about mastering grammar or vocabulary, but also about supporting who the students are becoming.

In Chapter 2, Saif Al-Baimani and Nadia Mifka-Profozic describe how genre-based instruction and collaborative writing can assist EFL students in improving their writing skills. The study shows that writing not only helps people learn a language, but it also makes them more interested in the process, as well as in meaning-making, collaboration and teamwork. Jodi Wainwright's Chapter 3 describes how blended learning affects older adult learners and results in emotional, cognitive, and social benefits. Wainwright stresses that learning isn't just about getting facts; it's also about making connections, building confidence, and being part of a community.

Another theme discussed in the volume is the role of research and reflection in professional growth. Erzsébet Ágnes Békés and Jodi Wainwright, in Chapters 9 and 10, narrate personal experiences from the ELTRIA conference and how these helped them grow as researchers and educators. Békés, an experienced teacher educator, states that maintaining meaningful conversations with other teachers at the conference about aspects of teaching such as teacher intuition, AI, and inclusivity have helped her reflect on how complex it is to teach English these days. Her account illustrates that teachers can continue to learn by engaging in honest conversations and challenging themselves to exceed their limitations. These ideas show that ELT conferences, such as ELTRIA, are spaces where teachers' professional identities can change and where educators can learn to think critically and share knowledge. Exploring the issue of how research and practice are often intertwined, Wainwright (Chapter 10) reflects on her experiences at three ELTRIA conferences, beginning in 2019 when she gave her first presentation. Over time, she developed increasing confidence as researcher and academic speaker, culminating in the presentation of her doctoral study's final findings in 2024. Her story shows how such communities of practice in academia have the potential to assist teachers' professional growth.

Echoing these ideas, in Chapter 11, Richard Smith presents a powerful argument for research conducted by practitioners. He clarifies that effective teaching does not come just from following external "best practices," but rather from educators choosing what is most effective in their classes. He argues that instructors' own "sense of plausibility" (p. 64), namely, experience-based understanding of what works in their contexts, should be valued. He also mentions that Exploratory Action Research (EAR) is a well-designed and empowering way for teachers to research the issues that arise in their classrooms. I found the last three chapters (9, 10, 11) especially resonant with me as they emphasize that improving as an educator means more than acquiring or experimenting with new knowledge. It involves remaining interested, taking risks, and thinking critically about what we do in class. The chapters of this slim volume show that meaningful, contextually grounded research may occur in any setting, including under-resourced schools when teacher-researchers are deeply engaged.

The volume combines stories of research and practice and narrates the challenges that teachers encounter. It also provides alternatives for educators to overcome these problems by examining them, generating new ideas, and working together. However, readers could have benefited from a deeper exploration of otherwise compelling topics, both descriptively and analytically. For instance, a more in-depth analysis of Chapter 7's important issues related to LGBTQ+ educators, could have enhanced its impact and relevance, particularly by including theoretical perspectives that explore how identity and teaching intersect in different institutional contexts.

Similarly, Chapter 4 shares interesting experiences about collaborative teacher-research in multilingual classrooms, but it focuses more on describing the teachers' experiences rather

than expanding the analysis on how they understood and dealt with complex issues like language ideologies, translanguaging, or the teachers' own beliefs about language use. It would have been great to learn more about how teachers dealt with the problems of working with children who speak different languages, what they thought about language use, and how they made decisions in the classroom. Likewise, Chapter 1 could have included more concrete examples from classroom interactions or student responses. The absence of children's voices or detailed classroom moments makes it harder to understand the real impact of the research on learning. Such deeper reflections could have made the chapters stronger and more instructive for teachers in similar situations.

That said, the book as a whole is a valuable addition to the field and a useful tool for teachers that want to connect theory and practice. Ultimately, this book makes the reader think of the importance of constant learning and the positive effect of accepting diverse points of view to make learning more meaningful and inclusive. A reminder to us, teachers, that even in places with limited resources, carefully accomplished research and hard work can have an impact and its results are well-worth sharing.

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The Reviewer

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