

Analysis of “Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Global Perspectives and Local Realities” by Fiona Copland, Sue Garton, and Anne Burns

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This article of F. Copland, S. Garton, and A. Burns appeared in the journal TESOL Quarterly in 2014. It may be inferred that in their study the authors deal with the following research questions: a. What do teachers think about the challenges of teaching English to young people? b. What are the challenges we can experience globally and locally in teaching English?

The evidence that the authors showed to answer the research questions was collected through a mixed-methods approach, including a survey, which was completed by 4,459 teachers worldwide, and case studies, including observations and interviews with teachers, in five different primary schools in five different countries. A great number of challenges emerged as factors affecting large numbers of teachers in different educational contexts,

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namely, teaching speaking, motivation, differentiating learning, teaching large classes, discipline, teaching writing, and teaching grammar.

The authors provided evidence in the article to answer the first research question. Training in new language teaching methodologies is the aspect ranked as the most important globally. Smaller classes, better access to new technologies, and more hours of English attracted similar numbers of responses and were also considered important by teachers. On the other hand, fewer tests and examinations is considered the least important factor in improving learning and teaching to a noticeable extent.

In addition, the specific challenges which were perceived by teachers as most important were speaking, discipline, motivation, differentiation, writing, grammar and class size.

The second question of this study was: What challenges are experienced by teachers of young learners globally and locally?

Regarding the evidence presented in the article in response to the second research question, we can mention that results from quantitative data were in line with global responses, and that teachers across all five countries indicated that fewer tests and examinations were least likely to improve learning and teaching. Also, relatively compatible was the importance given to training in language teaching methodologies. Italy, the UAE, Colombia, and South

Korea all ranked this factor as first or second. For teachers in these four countries, better access to resources such as textbooks and materials was similarly ranked to the global response. The exception was Tanzania, where teachers ranked this factor second, probably because even basic resources are scarce in many primary classrooms.

Teachers in Italy, the UAE, and Colombia show similar attitudes to better access to new technologies, ranking it either second or third. Also, the small classes' factor shows considerable variation against the global survey and among the five countries. In the global survey, improvement to one's own level of English was ranked sixth, whereas three of the five countries (South Korea, Tanzania, and Colombia) ranked it third and Italy ranked it first.

The results from case studies show that in Colombia, teachers highlighted developing speaking as the greatest challenge. In Italy, teaching speaking was reported as the greatest challenge, with 52 responses global trend. In South Korea, differentiation attracted most comments, which overwhelmingly focused on proficiency level. In Tanzania, speaking was again identified as the greatest challenge. In the UAE, differentiation attracted most attention.

Let us now focus on the weaknesses and the strengths of the study. The cross-sectional survey drew on non-probability convenience sampling (non-probability sampling represents a group of sampling techniques that help researchers to select units from a population that they are interested in studying). A core characteristic of non-probability sampling techniques is that samples are selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher, rather than random selection (i.e., probabilistic methods), which is the cornerstone of probability sampling techniques. In relation to this study, opportunistic sampling is a disadvantage; opportunity sampling or convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling where participants are selected based on naturally occurring groups. For example, let's say you want to study sharing behavior of preschool children. Instead of taking a random sample of preschool-aged children, you decide to visit your local preschool and select a class of preschoolers as your sample.

The survey reflects reported practices only and cannot claim to be representative because of the unevenness of responses across countries. This non-probability convenience sampling also does not provide a standard ratio of respondents to the number of employed primary school teachers in a country.

As to strengths, this study clearly shows why some language teachers have different difficulties and weaknesses when teaching a second language in schools at the beginning of

their lives as working professionals. Also, countries with diverse cultures and teaching models were used, allowing for a comprehensive and comprehensive study.

Teachers should learn about language teaching methodologies; through this study we have learned that universities are not preparing teachers with enough methodologies for teaching language. It is important that teachers are supported in developing skills and confidence in teaching parts of the curriculum, because this study identified the productive skills of speaking and writing of students as problematic.

Teacher education programmers should include basic classroom management skills in setting up, monitoring, and giving feedback on pair and group work; the kind of speaking and writing activities that are most effective with particular age groups and levels; and peer teaching that practices implementing speaking in the classroom. All of this will facilitate the teaching-learning process of a foreign language and will make the educational work easy, interesting and fun.

Training in teaching writing skills should also consider the kind of writing young learners should do. We learned through this study that students present many difficulties in writing the language they are learning and that is why we must seek new teaching- learning strategies for this area of the knowledge.

Teacher education should also focus on strategies for maintaining discipline, managing large classes, and developing motivation since these are problems that are affecting the teaching of a foreign language at a global level according to the findings of the study of Copland, Garton, and Burns.

How to work with mixed level students, with students with learning difficulties, and with learners who are from challenging backgrounds should be part of any primary teacher training, since through this study we learned that there are teachers who do not know how to teach a foreign language to children with special educational needs. They also find it difficult to teach mixed-level students and students from challenging backgrounds.

REFERENCE

- Copland, F., Garton, S., & Burns, A. (2014). Challenges in teaching English to young learners: global perspectives and local realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(4), 738-762.