

Outreach

An interim report on the CAMELTA Teacher Association Research project

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Earlier this year, a report was presented by Harry Kuchah and Richard Smith in Issue 236 of IATEFL Voices about the first steps of a Teacher Association (TA) research project jointly developed and run by the Cameroon English Language teachers' Association (CAMELTA) and IATEFL Research SIG. The notion of TA research, formulated by ReSIG coordinator Richard Smith, emerged from a range of problems, needs and opportunities that became apparent in teachers' interactions during CAMELTA's 12th Annual Conference and TESOL Symposium in August 2013 in Yaounde, Cameroon (see Issue 236 of *Voices*, pp. 22-23 for details of how the idea developed as well as of the processes involved in the project). This report provides an update of what CAMELTA and ReSIG have been able to do since the first report on the project.

As reported in issue 236 of *Voices*, the first steps of the CAMELTA research project included collating and categorising all research questions written by CAMELTA teachers during their August 2013 conference as well as designing a questionnaire which would be distributed to teachers around the country. Between October 2013 and February 2014, questionnaires were distributed to teachers during CAMELTA regional chapter events. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section 'A' sought to identify the current teaching situation of each respondent and gathered information about the type of institution (primary, secondary or tertiary) within which they worked as well as the location (urban, semi-urban or rural) of their schools and also the average number of students in the classes they taught. Section 'B', the main part of the questionnaire, consisted of three open-ended questions, each requiring respondents to provide as detailed information as possible. The three questions were as follows:

1. Please tell the story of a recent successful experience in your teaching - what was successful and what made it successful, do you think?

2. What are the major problems you face in your teaching situation - what is problematic and why?
3. Please describe anything you have done to address (some of) the problems in (2) above. Was this successful? Why / Why not?

In the last part (Section C) respondents were invited to add any comments about the questionnaire as well as provide their names and contact details if they wanted their names to be quoted alongside their statements in subsequent reports on the research project. This was mainly because, being a project by/with members of a community of practitioners, it may be useful to encourage further communication and collaboration amongst members even beyond the research.

In all, a total of 504 questionnaires were returned to CAMELTA's Vice-President for Research and Projects, who arranged, with £200 special funding from ReSIG, for all responses to be typed and recorded in electronic form. At the 48th IATEFL annual conference in Harrogate ReSIG committee members met with representatives from CAMELTA and set up a team of volunteers to analyse the data collected from CAMELTA teachers. The team - made up of Richard Smith, Mark Wyatt and Sian Etherington (for ReSIG) as well as Harry Kuchah and Gladys Focho (for CAMELTA) - agreed to undertake a preliminary analysis of a data set of 12 responses.

Preliminary findings from the data analysis show a range of problems faced by teachers, from school-based to family and community/cultural factors. Despite the wide range of problems encountered, the evidence from just these 12 responses is that English teachers in Cameroon may be employing a variety of pragmatic strategies to motivate and facilitate learning. Their accounts of successful experiences and reasons for their successes involved diverse classroom techniques and activities including amongst other things the following practices (with sample excerpts from teachers' responses:

1. Strategies for student motivation

'Recently I used motivational assessment to move a group of slow learners in form four to developing interest in English language. Because I gave exactly what I had taught and did in class as an exercise in a test. They were able to score good marks and now believe in themselves and are participating actively in class.'

2. Selecting relevant and familiar materials

'What made this lesson a success is the fact that students could identify themselves with some accident scenes. At the end of the day they are able to [different ways in which they can] take precautions. How they walk along the road, when the board a [motor] bike they ask the rider to ride gently with care. With fire and

sprains they had to really be careful. With this, I say the lesson was actually the most successful since students have participated or seen their parents, friends and relations suffer from accidents.'

3. Group work/peer support/peer feedback:

'At the practice stage, students were shared in groups to write articles of their choices and they were given fifteen minutes to do so. At the end of this stage, various groups read their articles for comments and corrections to be made [by their peers]...Most of the students were eager to read their articles to the hearing of everybody and some were even disgruntled when I did not call them up to read.'

4. Classroom management strategies

'From the outset, it was quite an arduous task facing a class of about 200 students for the first time. There was the atmosphere of lousiness with me shouting "stop noise", "sit down", "come here", "go out", "kneel" etc. Strategically, I arrived at numbering or according each student a number meant for identification. These, I used to ask them questions during lessons, given that a student never knows when the teacher will surprisingly call his/her number to answer a question, all stayed focused and very alert during the lessons.'

5. Teacher and student creativity

'I grappled with the lesson preparation until an idea of a picture came to mind. I decided I will introduce the poem and call my students to draw boats, canoes, big ship and all the locomotives of the sea as best as they could. This they did in all excitement. Seeing the entire chalkboard covered with boats, ships of all kinds and sizes, I kick-started reading the poem. Whatever we saw [which] was present in the poem but was lacking on the board, the students, 'my artists in class' added on the board. At the end the hitherto considered difficult poem was clear in the minds of the learners.'

Conclusion

The team of volunteer analysts will be bringing together their different individual analyses of the data and mapping out a coherent way of presenting the findings from this first phase of the data analysis. CAMELTA's input is vital at this point, given that the findings of the study will have to be presented in ways that are relevant to their membership. So far, preliminary analysis shows that a bottom up approach to developing and disseminating good practice can benefit grass roots communities of practitioners working together, albeit with support from other professional groups like IATEFL ReSIG, to identify their own problems and seek solutions from within their membership through systematic procedures of sharing proven solutions. This might be a practitioner-centred way of engaging teachers working in difficult circumstances in the process of finding solutions to their day-to-day challenges rather than depending on top-down directives from Ministry of Education officials who may

not be up-to-date with the actual classroom realities that teachers and learners encounter.

RICELT: Creating a research community in Chilean ELT

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This is a report about a new association of ELT researchers in Chile – RICELT – whose early development was supported by IATEFL Research SIG. The report was written collectively by the committee of RICELT.

Empirical knowledge about the English Language Teaching (ELT) reality in Chile is scarce. There are few accessible articles on ELT in Chile and these have little impact on teaching practice, consistently evidencing a mismatch between theory and practice. Similarly, there is a clear need to promote teacher-research initiatives in the Chilean context, where local expertise (that of both academics and teachers) is undervalued.

In this context, in 2012 a group of Chilean EFL teachers requested the IATEFL Research SIG to support ELT research in Chile by promoting all kinds of research, from relatively academic to more teacher-friendly. As a result, IATEFL Research SIG provided space on their website to share an ELT bibliography about the Chilean context. This gave a great platform for more Chilean teachers to know about ELT research in Chile.

In April 2014, five Chilean researchers got together at the IATEFL International Conference in Harrogate, UK, and decided to further share their concerns and motivation to promote ELT research in Chile. This meeting gave life to RICELT (Red de Investigadores Chilenos / as en ELT -- the Network of Chilean ELT Researchers). Currently, we are over two hundred members in Chile and abroad who are interested in promoting a Chilean-based community interested in ELT research and knowledge.

RICELT aims at creating awareness of the need and the relevance of creating a knowledge community in ELT in Chile. Consequently schoolteachers, university teachers, professors and researchers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and staff from the English Open Doors Programme (EODP) from the Ministry of Education are involved in this network.

Further main aims of RICELT include:

1. To make ELT Chilean research more visible and accessible.
2. To bridge between Chilean ELT researchers and governmental institutions (EODP) and associations / agencies like IATEFL Chile, TESOL, American Embassy RELO, British Council, etc).
3. To promote dialogue and collaboration among different ELT actors in Chile.
4. To promote and share teacher-research initiatives.

RICELT was officially launched and presented to its potential members at the IATEFL Chile conference at a discussion panel titled "RICELT: Building an ELT Knowledge Community in Chile" in July 2014. This panel was chaired by Dr Paula Rebolledo (RICELT) and Dr Richard Smith (Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick) and it aimed at raising awareness of the relevance of creating a knowledge-based community in ELT in Chile. The panel was composed of Andrea Robles (school-based teacher-researcher), Liliana Castillo (undergraduate student, PUCV), Katharina Glas (university-based teacher, PUCV), Nicolas Araya (post-graduate student, UMCE) and Alicia Paez (Ministry of Education, EODP). The audience (50 people) and the panelists engaged in a fruitful discussion about the need for:

1. greater accessibility to research that has been done by university-based academics, school teachers and undergraduate students in the area of ELT
 2. connecting key actors e.g. schools and universities
- and
3. a more bottom-up, contextually oriented approach to research to bridge a perceived theory/research vs. practice divide.

Last October, and sponsored by ChileGlobal Seminars UK, RICELT organised the 7th ChileGlobal Seminar UK, titled 'EFL in Chile', at the Institute of Education, University of London. The event aimed at sharing current research in EFL in Chile. The topics reflected the diversity of research, as well as the need to keep

working for our project and network. The programme included five presentations of Chilean postgraduate students, all RICELT members in the UK, and the insightful comments of Dr Richard Smith. Over 30 attendees participated in the seminar discussion; most of them were Chilean teachers of English studying on postgraduate programmes in the UK.

Currently, RICELT and EODP are working together to create a database of the current research carried out in Chile in English Language Teaching, by involving scholars in Chilean universities. Similarly, we keep updating our database related to different ELT research projects carried out in the country.

RICELT's upcoming projects include the 1st Meeting for Chilean ELT Researchers, as well as seminars aiming at empowering local expertise and promoting research in Chile.

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