Exploring the Lecturers' Experiences in Teaching English in TESOL Classroom

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Abstract

In Aceh, English is still taught as foreign language and its teaching practices have experienced a rapid growth in the last decades. This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the complex experiences of TESOL lecturers, examining their perspectives towards this issue, exploring teaching methodologies used, and challenges faced in contemporary language education contexts. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with five experienced lecturers at English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry Aceh, this study explores the multifaceted nature of English language teaching. The study reveals that successful TESOL instruction transcends traditional linguistic pedagogy, requiring sophisticated, adaptive strategies that integrate technological innovations, cultural sensitivity, and personalized learning approaches. Key findings highlight the critical importance of flexible teaching methodologies to empower the students in English communication, technology integration to maintain students' motivation in English learning, and continuous professional development in addressing the dynamic needs of language learners. The study demonstrates that effective TESOL lecturers navigate complex educational landscapes by continuously adapting their pedagogical practices to meet evolving student needs and global communication challenges.

KEYWORDS: *Language Education, Pedagogical Approaches, Teaching Experiences, TESOL Lecturers*.

Introduction

The world of English language teaching has developed each day that educators are required to be more competitive in creating inspiring materials in the classroom. In Aceh, the use of English as foreign language has experienced a rapid growth, especially in the level of higher education (Trisnawati et al., 2023). Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), therefore, provides educators and practitioners in Aceh with a variety of experiences (Habiburrahim et al., 2022). This situation allows them to enclose particular competences in order to enable the students in mastering English language skills (Raza & Coombe, 2021). Since the students are from the non-English speaking university, the demand of the lecturers' proficiency becomes higher (Chen,

2018; Trisnawati et al., 2023). This point states that the skill of understanding the second language development should be accomplished by the lecturers (Ellis, 2006). In order to enable the students in studying English, especially the aspect of English language, profound strategies must be applied as well. Ellis (2006) emphasizes that the experience of second language learning can be obtained from formal learning like classroom, as the learners may complete special tasks during their learning activities.

As can be seen recently, the lecturers' pedagogy has been improved to reconcile the gap between the language study context and the requirement of students in TESOL background. The supportive components in teaching learning process like curricula and media, are linked together in order to achieve the aims (Habiburrahim et al., 2022; Park, 2012). The use of technology is also considered as the locomotive of today-media that its existence is undeniable in succeeding the teaching learning process (Solikhah, 2023). The key point in this case is how the lecturers and the students build the smooth communication and interaction in the context of study. The lecturers as educators, therefore, continually seek innovative and effective teaching methodologies that facilitate language proficiency development, enhance student engagement, and ensure long-term retention of language skills, even though, within the realm of TESOL, different methodologies have emerged as potential solutions to address the complexities of language teaching (Alhajiri & Alshuraiaan, 2023).

The lecturers' experiences in teaching English in the context of TESOL, therefore, are essential to be explored in order to gain more understanding and deep investigation on this issue. In higher education level, this context of teaching still requires great attention and motivation in order to encourage the lecturers in developing their ability in teaching as well as in empowering the students in English learning (Hadi, 2019). As Nguyen and Dao (2019) report that it is crucial to enrich the teachers' experiences and prepare them for better developing their teacher selves. As has been mentioned, teaching in the context of TESOL obliges the teachers to recognize the characteristics of the students and also the environment they are teaching well (Fan & De-Jong, 2019).

This study is potentially significant in several ways. In general, the study produces and provides lesson study experience as professional development approach that could be used by the government to prepare and educate teachers/lecturers especially the ones teaching English as second language with compulsory knowledge and skills. It is believed that if teachers are equipped with the fundamental knowledge and skills to perform the teaching, then the expected outcomes will be achieved. This study also provides significant information about how the designed instruction helps teachers to shape and improve their teaching practices. It is hoped that this research can lead to having valuable insights into improving English language teaching in the context of

TESOL in Aceh.

The main focus of this study is the experiences of lecturers teaching in the English Education Department, where English is still widely used as second language learning. This study, accordingly, aims to investigate some issues regarding the lecturers' experiences including their perspectives related to teaching English in TESOL context, their challenges and obstacles in teaching English in TESOL context, and the strategies and methodologies applied by the lecturers in teaching English in TESOL context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A variety of research in the context of TESOL has been conducted by experts. Since the use of English has widely spread in every part of the world, the quality of the lecturers as educators should be balanced with it. Discussing the language teaching, in addition, it is inseparable with the learners' cultural background due to it impacts the ability to identify the text (Kabir, 2011). In spite of having this important issue, numerous factors are identified in the classroom since both teachers and students encompass similar interest. In terms of their relationship, Alshuraiaan (2023) contends that the teacher plays an important role in engaging the students in meaningful interactions supporting their language improvement and overall learning experiences. On the other words, teachers act as facilitators assisting the students to achieve their developmental potential.

Teaching English in a TESOL context, in addition, presents unique challenges and opportunities for lecturers, particularly in an era of rapidly evolving educational paradigms. Recent studies have highlighted the complex interplay between pedagogical approaches, cultural considerations, and technological integration in TESOL classrooms (Chen et al., 2023). Lecturers must navigate these multifaceted demands while maintaining effective teaching practices and ensuring positive learning outcomes for their students. Professional identity development among TESOL lecturers has emerged as a crucial area of focus in recent research. Nainggolan (2021) found that lecturers' teaching philosophies and classroom practices are significantly influenced by their own language learning experiences and cultural backgrounds. This finding is particularly relevant as it suggests that personal narratives and lived experiences play a vital role in shaping teaching methodologies and student engagement strategies.

The integration of technology in TESOL instruction has been increasingly important, especially following the global shift to online learning. A comprehensive study by Djafri et al., (2024) revealed that while many lecturers have successfully adapted to digital teaching platforms, others continue to face challenges in effectively implementing

technology-enhanced language learning (TELL). These challenges often stem from limited technical support, inadequate training, and varying levels of digital literacy among both instructors and students. In terms of cultural issue while teaching in non-native English-speaking classroom, Ebersole et al. (2016) and also Nurbata and Masyhud (2022) conducted an extensive qualitative study regarding the application of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in order to enable the teachers to understand the students' diversity in understanding the topic given. In this case, the successful educators actively incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices into their curriculum. Their research emphasized the importance of understanding and respecting students' cultural backgrounds while promoting intercultural communication competence.

Assessment practices and feedback mechanisms in TESOL contexts have also evolved significantly. Effective feedback strategies that combine traditional assessment methods with innovative approaches, such as peer assessment and portfolio-based evaluation, have shown promising results in improving student performance (Lopez, 2023; Xie et al., 2022). The study particularly emphasized the role of constructive feedback in building students' confidence and motivation in language learning.

In addition, Alshuraiaan and Almefleh (2023) also conducted the research related to the most effective approaches and strategies applied by the teachers teaching in higher education institutions in Kuwait, especially in TESOL context. Considering that optimal language learning outcomes should be prioritized; their research aims at developing the teaching learning process in the context of TESOL. Warford and Reeves (2003), similarly, complete their research about teaching English language by using interview, and the findings suggest that novice TESOL teachers, like their more experienced counterparts, have a system of metaphors to conceptualize teaching.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study employs qualitative methods to ensure comprehensive understanding of lecturers' experiences in TESOL contexts. The primary data collection method consists of in-depth semi-structured interviews, which was conducted with 5 participants individually (for so-called p1-p5). The interview protocol includes open-ended questions designed to explore participants' teaching experiences, challenges, successes, pedagogical approaches, and their perspectives on professional development. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' explicit consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis (Luthfiandana, et. al., 2024; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Participants were provided with structured prompts to guide their reflections, but they were also encouraged to include additional observations they deem relevant. These

journals can be maintained either digitally or in traditional paper format, based on the participants' preferences. After conducting the interview, the obtained data then were analyzed qualitatively by describing in details the participants' information.

In selecting the samples, purposive sampling was employed to recruit five lecturers from English Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry Aceh, a sample size that Memon et al. (2020) suggest is sufficient for reaching data saturation in phenomenological studies focusing on teaching experiences. The selection criteria have been carefully designed to ensure rich and diverse data collection. Participants must have a minimum of three years of teaching experience in TESOL contexts, as this ensures they have developed substantial professional knowledge and encountered various teaching situations. To achieve maximum variation sampling, participants were selected to represent different educational backgrounds, and teaching contexts. The selection process also considered gender balance to ensure a representative sample, in which in this research the participants consist of 2 (two) male and 3 (three) female lecturers. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. This approach to sample selection aligns with best practices in qualitative research and ensures that the study captures a comprehensive picture of TESOL lecturers' experiences while maintaining methodological rigor.

RESULTS

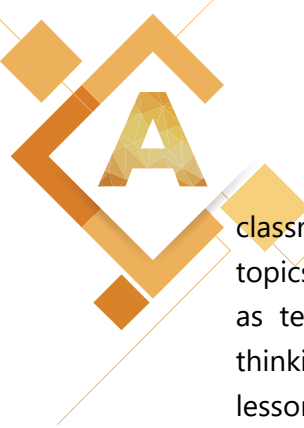#### *Teachers' perspectives on teaching English in TESOL classroom*

After conducting the interview with the lecturers-participants related to their experiences in teaching English in TESOL classroom, a number of points can be highlighted as their perspectives to enrich this study. The answers were classified into 3 (three) main categories, namely:

1) Cultural Awareness and Inclusivity

Various arguments emerged related to this issue as P2 stated that teaching in TESOL context should emphasize on cultural awareness and he also consistently highlighted the importance of creating inclusive learning environments:

> *"Understanding students' cultural backgrounds is crucial. I incorporate materials and examples from different cultures, which not only make learning more relevant but also help students feel valued and represented." (P2)*

In addition, many participants described specific strategies for promoting cultural exchange as P1 reported that she organized cultural exchange activities where students can share aspects of their own culture while practicing English. This approach has significantly improved students' engagement and motivation. In line with this, other participants believe that empowering the students to be actively involved in the

classroom is easy since they are able to organize the group and provide interesting topics to be discussed. Another innovative approach involved using local news events as teaching materials, helping students develop both language skills and critical thinking about their own culture. Some participants created "culture capsules" - mini-lessons that connected English language learning with explorations of different cultural practices, beliefs, and values. A particularly effective strategy was the implementation of "cultural ambassador" roles, where students took turns presenting aspects of their cultures in English.

2) Challenges in TESOL

In terms of challenges, the participants identified several nuanced issues and creative solutions. A significant concern was student anxiety in speaking English and communicating with others in the class. P4 said that he developed a gradual exposure technique, beginning with small group discussions and progressively moving to larger group presentations to assist the students in developing their speaking competences.

> *"Managing different proficiency levels in one classroom is probably my biggest challenge. I've developed a system of tiered activities where students can work at their own pace while still participating in group discussions." (P4)*

Another challenging aspect was maintaining students' motivation in mandatory English courses as P3 stated. She addressed this through real-world application projects, such as collaborating with local businesses for English-language marketing materials or organizing English-language community service projects like in the museum and tourism spots. P5 even highlighted the challenge of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) without specialized knowledge in the students' fields. An innovative application of technology beyond basic digital tool is another obstacle faced in teaching in TESOL context. In this case the students should learn various vocabularies and scan objects in their environment to learn relevant English terminology.

3) Teaching Approaches and Methodologies

Encountering this topic, the participants offer distinguish strategies employed in the class since the results show sophisticated adaptations of teaching methodologies among them. Several participants emphasized the effectiveness of project-based learning, particularly in advanced classes. P2 described implementing semester-long projects where students created English language podcasts about local cultural topics, which significantly improved both speaking skills and cultural awareness. Similar idea was also conveyed by P3.

> *"I've found that combining communicative approaches with real-world tasks yields the best results. For instance, I often use role-playing activities based on authentic situations, which helps students develop both linguistic competence and practical communication skills." (P3)*

Another significant finding was the importance of differentiated instruction. P5 highlighted how she adapts the teaching methods.

> "*Each class is different. Some students respond better to visual aids, while others need more hands-on practice. I constantly adjust my teaching style based on student feedback and performance.*" *(P5)*

Another innovative approach involved the use of literature circles, where students took on different roles (discussion leader, vocabulary finder, cultural connector) while analyzing English texts. The participants reported success with the flipped classroom model, providing grammar and vocabulary materials for pre-class study while dedicating class time to interactive speaking activities.

Assessment and Feedback Practices are also interesting strategies used to encourage the students in learning English. The result exposed that innovative assessment methods adapted to modern TESOL contexts can increase the students' enthusiasm in learning English. Some participants implemented digital portfolios where students collected evidence of their language use in real-world contexts, such as email exchanges with native speakers or recordings of public speaking events. Others developed peer assessment systems using rubrics that students helped create, increasing their understanding of language learning objectives. A particularly innovative approach was the use of learning contracts, where students negotiated their learning goals and assessment criteria with the lecturer. Some participants reported success with project-based assessments that required students to solve real community problems using English, combining language assessment with civic engagement.

DISCUSSION

The lecturers in this study expressed a strong commitment to fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment for their students. Many emphasized the importance of making English instruction relevant and accessible to diverse learners. Teachers viewed TESOL not merely as language instruction but as a vehicle for cultural exchange and intercultural communication. This perspective aligns with contemporary TESOL theory, which emphasizes the integration of language learning with cultural understanding. The lecturers also highlighted the significance of student-centered teaching, where the learners' needs and interests shape the teaching approach as stated by Saad (2023). These views reflect an increasing awareness in TESOL research about the importance of adapting teaching to meet the individual learning styles and backgrounds of students.

Despite their dedication, TESOL lecturers face numerous challenges that complicate their teaching practices. One of the most significant difficulties identified was managing

diverse classrooms with varying levels of English proficiency. Teachers reported that catering to students with different language backgrounds and abilities required a considerable amount of differentiation in lesson planning and classroom management. This finding resonates with previous studies, such as those by Tigert et al. (2021), who noted that varied learner proficiency often forces teachers to adopt multiple instructional strategies, which can be overwhelming. Furthermore, lecturers highlighted the challenge of student disengagement, particularly in large classes, where individual attention becomes difficult to provide. In line with previous research on TESOL classrooms, Altun and Khdhir (2024) found that the difficulty of maintaining student motivation and engagement remains a pressing concern for educators, particularly when learners are from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Another major challenge was the limited resources and lack of technological tools, which hindered effective teaching. Many lecturers expressed a desire for more access to digital platforms and learning resources to enhance the language learning experiences. This concern echoes findings from similar studies, where inadequate technological integration was identified as a barrier to effective language instruction (Elmahdi & AbdAlgane, 2023; Liang, 2021). While some teachers in this study employed technology creatively, others found it difficult to incorporate these tools consistently due to resource constraints, reflecting the ongoing digital divide in many educational settings.

In terms of teaching approaches, lecturers in this study generally adopted communicative and task-based methodologies, which prioritize interaction and practical language use. These approaches are in line with modern TESOL theories, such as those advocated by Alshuraiaan & Almefleh (2023), who proposed that language learning should be focused on communication and real-world use of language. Teachers in this study reported that task-based language teaching (TBLT) and communicative language teaching (CLT) were effective in encouraging students to engage actively with the language, facilitating language acquisition through practical use in real-life scenarios.

However, while these methods were widely favored, some lecturers mentioned the difficulties of implementing them in large, diverse classrooms, where individual needs could be overlooked. Teachers expressed a need for more training in differentiated instruction to better address the varied levels of proficiency and learning styles present in their classrooms. This is consistent with the challenges identified by Ojong (2023), who found that, although communicative and task-based approaches are highly effective, they often require a higher level of teaching skill and flexibility, which some

lecturers may not always have due to time constraints or insufficient professional development opportunities.

Moreover, many lecturers acknowledged the growing importance of integrating technology into their teaching approaches, particularly in the context of blended learning environments. The use of digital platforms, online resources, and language-learning apps was seen as an effective way to supplement traditional teaching methods, enhancing student engagement and facilitating independent learning. These findings support the work of recent studies by Basri (2020), Almusharraf (2020) & Tsai (2019), that emphasize the positive impact of technology on language teaching, particularly when it comes to enhancing learner autonomy and providing more individualized learning opportunities.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have several important implications for both TESOL practice and future research. Firstly, the challenges identified by lecturers, such as managing diverse learner proficiency levels, maintaining student engagement, and overcoming resource limitations, highlight the need for targeted professional development programs. These programs should focus on equipping TESOL instructors with effective strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management, and fostering student motivation in large, mixed-ability classes. By addressing these challenges, institutions can support lecturers in enhancing the overall learning experience and improving language acquisition outcomes for students.

Additionally, the study underscores the growing importance of integrating technology into TESOL classrooms. The lecturers' perspectives suggest that, despite the barriers of limited resources and technological training, the strategic use of digital tools, online platforms, and language apps can significantly enhance student engagement and facilitate more personalized learning. Therefore, educational institutions should prioritize investing in technology infrastructure and provide lecturers with the necessary training and resources to integrate these tools effectively into their teaching practices. This would not only address current resource gaps but also align teaching practices with the evolving needs of digital-age learners.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the relevance of communicative and task-based teaching methodologies in promoting real-world language use and fostering student engagement. However, given the challenges associated with implementing these approaches in diverse and large classrooms, there is a need for more support in developing flexible, adaptive teaching practices. Encouraging lecturers to adopt a blended approach that combines traditional and innovative methods could help them

cater to the varying needs of their students more effectively. Teacher education programs should include modules on these contemporary methodologies, ensuring that future TESOL professionals are well-prepared to handle the complexities of diverse classroom environments.

Lastly, the findings of this study contribute to the ongoing conversation about the importance of intercultural competence in TESOL education. As classrooms become increasingly multicultural, TESOL lecturers must develop skills in intercultural communication and understanding, which will enable them to navigate the diverse cultural dynamics of their classrooms. Future research could further explore how intercultural competence can be integrated into TESOL training programs and teaching practices to better support lecturers and students in a globalized education context.

CONCLUSIONS

The study presented the complex and dynamic nature of TESOL lecturers' experiences, highlighting the multifaceted challenges and innovative approaches in contemporary language teaching. The findings expressed that successful TESOL instruction requires a holistic approach combining flexible pedagogical methods, cultural sensitivity, technological integration, and continuous professional development. The research underscores 3 (three) main points: Teachers' perspectives related to teaching English in TESOL classroom including cultural awareness and inclusivity, challenges and teaching approaches and methodologies. Each participant had dissimilar ways in organizing and managing the class by employing the interesting strategies in empowering the students in English learning.

These findings contribute significantly to understanding TESOL education's contemporary landscape, emphasizing the need for flexible, innovative, and student-centered approaches. The study highlighted that successful language teaching is not merely about linguistic instruction but about creating meaningful, engaging learning experiences that prepare students for global communication. Future research therefore should continue exploring emerging technologies, cultural integration strategies, and innovative pedagogical approaches to further enhance TESOL education.

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