

Book Review

A Primer Text for ESL/EFL Methods Courses: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: An Introduction

Reviewed by Maitham Al Lami¹, Barry University, Miami Shores, Florida, USA

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: An Introduction. David Nunan. New York: Routledge. 2016. pp. vi + 204.

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: An Introduction is intended to offer teachers with the foundational knowledge required in the profession that involves the education of teachers who teach English language learners. The author of the book is David Nunan, an Australian scholar and English language educator, who has authored and co-authored many books in the field of TESOL. He is the Director of the MA TESOL Program at Anaheim University, California and Professor Emeritus at the University of Hong Kong. Nunan is also the former President of the TESOL International Association (1999-2000) and is well known for his ELT textbook series *Go For It!*

As suggested by its title, the book is an introductory self-study guide written for an audience of novice teachers and undergraduate TESOL students wishing to have basic understanding of key concepts and issues of teaching ESL/EFL learners. It is evident that the book addresses international TESOL contexts, but does not deal with country specific issues pertaining in the TESOL field.

The book exhibits an instructive format represented in the discussion of key issues and definitions of basic concepts. Implications pertinent to L2 learners' age, background, and settings of learning are not reviewed; therefore, the scope of the content is indistinctly covering issues and concepts in both K-12 and adult ESL/EFL teaching settings. Thus, a graduate level course or TESOL certificate program would require more focused and in-depth examination of the subject matter to provide a comprehensive study guide and foundational understanding.

The author, meaningfully, structured the book into twelve chapters on the following topics: language teaching methodology, learner-centered language teaching, the four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing), the four language components (i.e., pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse) and learning styles and assessment.

The book design, with its contextual and descriptive representation of English language education uses *vignettes* and *small group discussions* to allow for reflection upon key concepts and practices fundamental to the discipline of TESOL by providing the reader with a snapshot of the lesson in action and views of TESOL practitioners regarding specific topics online. The author, then, delivers the informative aspect of the book content in the

¹ maitham.allami@mymail.barry.edu

Issue in Focus and *Key Principles* sections, in addition to his observations and commentaries presented in subsections of each chapter.

After an introduction concerning the term “TESOL” and describing the book’s purpose, structure, and target audience, the author presents in Chapters 1 and 2 the debate of language teaching methodology, placing his work in a post-method context and focusing on learner-centered language teaching paradigm.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 focus on the four language skills. *Listening* (Chapter 3) defines “top-down” and “bottom-up” processing to serve as the framework within which such concepts as “comprehensible input” and “*i+1*” are explained. In Chapter 4 (*Speaking*), Nunan covers communicative competence, the distinction between “reproductive” and “creative” speaking, and “negotiation of meaning” through such classroom tasks as information gaps, role-plays, and simulations. *Reading* (Chapter 5) is presented through three models: “bottom-up”, “top-down”, and “interactive”, focusing on gradual expansion of vocabulary, comprehension, and reading skills. He also makes the distinction between “intensive” and “extensive” reading showing the merit of integrating both models. The author clarifies two positions of writing instruction approaches in Chapter 6 (*Writing*): the process vs. product debate and he advocates for an integrative approach. Nunan, then, explores meaningful feedback, authentic writing themes, and purposes of writing.

The language components are addressed in Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10. The chapter that examines *Phonology* (Chapter 7) provides definitions of basic concepts and a set of principles for teaching pronunciation. Chapter 8 (*Vocabulary*) offers strategies for teaching vocabulary, pointing out word lists, collocations, and lexical phrases with a final note about the use of technology. The *Grammar* (Chapter 9) chapter presents principles for teaching grammar, defines prescriptive and descriptive grammars, and explicates deductive and inductive approaches. Chapter 10 (*Discourse*) focuses on discourse analysis and modes of classroom discourse.

The next chapter *Learning Styles and Strategies* describes the affective and motivational aspects of learning. Finally, Chapter 12 (*Assessment*) defines and states the purposes of assessment and introduces its techniques.

In spite of Nunan’s emphasis on a post-method paradigm in his explanation of the methodology debate, it is clear from his comments in later chapters that his methodological stance is aligned with a comprehension-based paradigm. Additionally, a minor correctable limitation that I find somewhat dissatisfying is the text font size, which is slightly smaller than it should be expected. Also, since the book is instructive in format, I think the use of graphic organizers and visual representations of conceptual content could have been useful.

As indicated in the introduction to the book, users intending to study independently can find such practical guides as *goals*, *tasks*, *reflection*, *summary*, and *glossary* particularly helpful for self-study. The book is recommendable as a supplementary resource for teacher preparation courses and novice teachers willing to enhance their knowledge and skills of ESL/EFL teaching. It has such qualities such as accessible language, well-structured design, relatable examples, and an instructive style. I am confident that the readers will appreciate this work because of its clarity, conciseness and organization.