

Chapter 19

Incorporating Socially–Relevant Teaching Strategies in the Online TESOL Classroom

Ziqi Li

University of Southern California, USA

ABSTRACT

Conducting online TESOL class is always both a challenge and opportunity for teachers to effectively support English language learners. Specifically, this study explores socially relevant teaching strategies to facilitate an engaging and equitable online classroom for educators with ELLs with diverse backgrounds. This research contains online language teaching strategies in the context of multicultural environment. Overall, three strategies are elaborated. One strategy is organizing whole-class discussion and various activity based on learners' cultural background. The second strategy is choosing and using socially relevant teaching materials with online technology, including neutral and authentic materials and giving learners timely prompts. The third strategy is counteracting inequitable relationships in society and in class, managing student emotions to create supportive relationships among students and the teacher. These strategies expand literature on how to conduct online program that are relevant and sustaining for culturally and linguistically diverse adult language learners.

INTRODUCTION

Socially relevant teaching strategy falls under the broad umbrella of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which advocates learner-centered instruction and critical analysis of students' sociocultural, sociopolitical, and linguistic contexts (Paris & Alim, 2014). This chapter advocates applying socially relevant teaching strategies in online TESOL classrooms to ensure that online students fully develop their English language skills, critical thinking, and culture knowledge. The context of this strategy is the multicultural or multilingual online classroom, with students coming from diverse sociocultural, racial, ethnical, and linguistic backgrounds.

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Literature on culturally sustaining pedagogy includes socially relevant teaching strategies. However, ensuring social relevance in online classes is an emerging area of focus among scholars and practitioners. It is beneficial for educators to conduct online English language teaching to have the awareness of being socially relevant and applying related strategies. Therefore, this chapter offers socially relevant teaching strategies for the online English language class with examples of these strategies used in practice. This chapter is organized around the following sections, present evidence-based practices, learning activities, portraits of practice, discussion, and additional resources.

CONCEPT

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Multilingual Classrooms

Language learning is a process of social practice (Murrey, 2018), it involves broad influences of sociocultural, sociopolitical, and sociolinguistic factors in a community or society context. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) as well as socially relevant teaching strategies are getting more attention from educators in bilingual and multilingual classrooms. CSP seeks to perpetuate and sustain linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism through education to challenges of social justice and change. This pedagogy helps teachers, learners, and researchers incorporate social justice into their practice (Paris, 2014). CSP calls for critical engagement of language learners about the impact of their words, and the range of their knowledge and background that are along with learners (Paris, 2014). Developing cultural and linguistic flexibility is central to CSP because multilingual and multicultural practice are closely related to power and access (Alim, 2017).

Socially Relevant Teaching Strategy in Multicultural Classroom

Along the same line, socially relevant teaching strategy pays attention to the application of various teaching instructions relating to diverse backgrounds of learners involved (Malebese, 2017). This strategy also considers the learning needs for learners with different backgrounds, as well as their learning capacities and learning styles (Armstrong, 2011). In addition, to ensure social relevance, the concepts of power and relationships in the classroom are included, which requires adopting values of mutual respect and care, working on different sociocultural factors and learners' ideological diversity (Malebese, 2016). In this learning environment, learners should feel equally valued, both of the educator and learners are encouraged to come up with and solving real-life questions, discuss real-life situation (Mahlomaholo 2013), where reality is viewed as contextual and changeable (Lee, & Smagorinsky, 2000).

Andragogy and Related Online Teaching

Some features are unique for adult language learners. In 1973, Malcolm Knowles explored andragogy and defined simply as the 'art and science of helping adults learn' (Knowles, 1980). In 1997, Mezirow noted adults are usually goal-oriented in their language learning and their focus is on practical and short-term objectives. As a result, adult learners usually require immediate value and relevance for their study (Gary, 2013). Besides, they come from varied learning backgrounds and expectation of teacher role also vary. Therefore, using different tools and strategies is crucial for differentiation and scaffolding; student-

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