

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution:	University of Northumbria at Newcastle
Unit of Assessment:	29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Developing language teachers' professional practice: 'own-language use' in English language teaching	
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Graham Hall's research has changed and benefited professional practice in English Language Teaching (ELT) in over 100 countries around the world. His reappraisal of the use of English language learners' own-language in ELT classrooms has impacted on: (a) the development of English language teachers' beliefs and values and their resultant classroom practices; and (b) ELT policy and teacher education/development programmes across a range of ELT organisations and stakeholders. As such, the research has influenced methodological development across the profession, as reported by key institutional stakeholders including the British Council and TESOL International. Impact, evidenced through changes in beliefs and teaching practices, is also reported by individual English language teachers working in 65 countries who participated in the research and in further dissemination activities.</p>	
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Research and subsequent impact activities were directed by Graham Hall (Senior Lecturer, 1998-present) between 2009 and 2013, and, from 2011, in collaboration with Professor Guy Cook (King's College London).</p> <p>A major challenge within ELT is to bridge the supposed 'gap' between researchers and theorists on the one hand and teachers on the other. Although there are regular calls for teachers to 'engage with research' as part of their professional development, there is a sense amongst many ELT practitioners that research is 'fine in theory, but not in my context'. Whether valid or not, these perspectives form a barrier which prevents many teachers from engaging fully with key theoretical and methodological debates within ELT.</p> <p>Hall has responded to this challenge in two ways. His monograph <i>Exploring English Language Teaching</i> (2011) identified key practical dilemmas faced by ELT professionals (such as how to reconcile pedagogic theory with classroom practice, or local pedagogic practices with ELT as a global industry), showing how these could be overcome through engagement by practitioners with contemporary research into language teaching and learning. The monograph challenged the theoretically-led, top-down approach of most professional development/teacher education texts by encouraging teachers to challenge the educational values and social assumptions that underpin their own professional practices and by prompting them to explore possibilities for their own practice in light of applied linguistic theory.</p> <p>Following on from this study, and in association with Guy Cook, Hall applied to the British Council for funding for a follow-up project specifically relating to own-language use in the ELT classroom. Throughout the twentieth century, professional and methodological wisdom has always insisted that English is best taught and learned without the classroom use of the students' own language(s): indeed, reference to own language use has been discouraged in the professional literature or even banned. The British Council agreed to fund research investigating the incidence of own-language practices internationally on condition that the findings of the project were fed back in an accessible way to the practitioner community (funding period October 2011-December 2012).</p> <p>Hall and Cook used interviews and questionnaires to collect information from teachers about the use of learners' own languages in their own teaching. Through this process they created a database recording evidence of the own-language use practices and beliefs of 2,785 English language teachers working in 110 countries and in a range of professional contexts (including primary, secondary and tertiary sectors). What chiefly emerged from the data were (a) the previously unreported widespread use of the learners' own-language in ELT classrooms around the world; (b) a range of own-language use activities, again previously unreported, which teachers</p>	

Impact case study (REF3b)

and learners engage in during lessons; (c) that teachers' beliefs about and attitudes towards own-language use in the classroom are more complex than usually acknowledged; (d) and that teachers' beliefs, attitudes and own-language classroom practices vary across different learning environments and between teachers with different professional experiences; in particular, more experienced practitioners hold more pragmatic, and less dogmatic, attitudes towards own-language use than less experienced teachers. The findings overall suggested a substantial gap between mainstream ELT literature and teacher education programmes and teachers' practice 'on the ground'.

Although the dogma about avoiding classroom use of English has been questioned recently by some methodologists, Hall's and Cook's research is the first to uncover the widespread resistance to the approach amongst teachers on the ground. In writing up their findings, the researchers expressly sought to raise the profile of own-language usage as a legitimate pedagogic method. The project as a whole can be seen as furthering the approach to teachers' professional development outlined in Hall's 2011 monograph, in which researchers work with, not 'on', practitioners, and teachers explore possibilities for their own practice in light of pedagogic theory but not under its domination.

3. References to the research

Hall, G. (2011) *Exploring English Language Teaching: language in action*. London, Routledge. Winner of the British Association of Applied Linguistics 2012 Book Prize. See: <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415584159/>. Available from Northumbria University on request.

Hall, G. and G. Cook (2012, commissioned article) 'The use of learners' own languages in language teaching and learning: state-of-the-art', *Language Teaching*, 45/3, pp271-308. DOI: 10.1017/S0261444812000067. Available from Northumbria University on request.

Hall, G and G. Cook (2013) 'The use of learners' own languages in ELT: exploring global practices and attitudes' *ELT Research Paper Series*. London, British Council. Available from Northumbria University on request.

Awards

Hall, G. and G. Cook, 'The use of learners' own languages in ELT: exploring global practices and attitudes'. Funding via British Council ELT Research Partnership (2011) scheme. Funding period October 2011-December 2012, £5,016. Principal Investigator G. Hall.

4. Details of the impact

The research makes a distinctive contribution both to the professional methodological debate surrounding own-language use and to the beliefs and practices of individual teachers around the world. Furthermore, by engaging with English language professionals worldwide in both data collection and dissemination activities, the research asks teachers to share their practices and beliefs about own-language use. Consequently, the research also bridges the perceived 'research/practice' and 'researcher/practitioner' divide within ELT: teachers engage with and reflect upon own-language use in theory and in practice. To facilitate this impact, Hall and Cook's 2013 ELT Research Paper has been posted online on the British Council's EnglishAgenda website (for ELT practitioners), and has received 3,246 page hits and 953 downloads (22/2/13 – 17/7/13) (source 7).

The impact of the research commenced in 2012 and is ongoing, acting upon, informing and influencing the field of ELT globally in two ways:

Impact on ELT policy

The research has impacted on ELT policy, curriculum design and classroom practice across a range of ELT bodies, organisations and stakeholders (e.g. the British Council), stimulating reflection, development and change across the profession. [text removed for publication].

In the United States, TESOL International's Professional Development Committee invited Hall to

disseminate his research findings via their virtual seminar series, through which *“ELT professionals develop leadership skills, improve core competencies, and stay abreast of the latest developments in the field.”* (source 2). It identifies the research as impacting upon a broad audience, *“including ELT teachers, teacher educators, and administrators worldwide.”* (source 2). TESOL International reports that 100% of participants in Hall’s virtual seminar, working in over 20 countries, recommended Hall’s research to their ELT colleagues [text removed for publication] (source 2).

Furthermore, the research has impacted upon curriculum development and language teacher education elsewhere in the world. [text removed for publication]. In Spain, the research findings have been incorporated (from 6/2/13) into [text removed for publication] teacher development programme, *“being presented by practitioners to colleagues within the organisation as a stimulus which led to change in classroom practice.”* [text removed for publication].

Impact on ELT practitioners

Those individual ELT practitioners who participated (a) in the research, and (b) in subsequent dissemination activities, have re-appraised their own professional practice, resulting in either classroom innovation or the confirmation of existing practice. A post-research sample (source 5) of 200 participants in Hall and Cook’s ‘own-language use in ELT’ project (i.e. 7% of the original cohort) confirmed the impact of the research on ELT professionals in 65 countries (including African, Asian, European and South American contexts) and across primary, secondary and tertiary sector institutions. 157 teachers (i.e. 79% of the post-research sample), working in 48 different countries, confirmed that their knowledge of own-language use in ELT was increased by either participating in the research and/or reading the research findings; 106 ELT professionals (i.e. 56% of the post-research sample), working in 47 countries, confirmed that their beliefs about own-language use in the ELT classroom were impacted upon as a result of the research; 98 teachers (i.e. 49% of the post-research sample), working in 40 countries, confirmed that their own use of the learners’ language in their day-to-day teaching had been impacted upon as a result of the research; and 102 ELT professionals (i.e. 51% of the post-research sample), working in 46 countries, confirmed that their approach to learners’ own-language use in their day-to-day teaching had been affected by the research. Furthermore, 154 teachers (i.e. 77% of the post-research sample) confirmed that participating in the research and/or reading the research findings had benefited their own practice by confirming their current approach to own-language use (evidence of impact collected 24/2/13 - 17/7/2013).

Summarising the impact of the research on their beliefs and practice, individual ELT practitioners (source 5) reported *“profound”* and *“significant”* changes in their thinking (e.g. in Uzbekistan, Spain), changes in classroom tasks and overall levels of own-language use (e.g. in DR Congo, France, Iran, Montenegro, Russia, Saudi Arabia), discovering that own-language use is not *“taboo”* (e.g. France) and feeling *“less guilty”* about own-language use (e.g. in Bahrain, Japan, Netherlands, France, UK), and *“feeling validated”* in their practice (e.g. in Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Switzerland). As a Japanese teacher noted, the research *“certainly affects my confidence as a teacher and practice as a learner.”* (evidence of impacts collected 24/2/13 – 17/7/2013).

Hall and Cook were invited to present the research in the British Council Seminar Series (2013), attended by 55 senior ELT practitioners from the UK, including school Directors of Study, ELT curriculum developers, British Council staff, English language teacher educators and senior teachers. Consequently, 19 ELT practitioners (i.e. 100% of those sampled) confirmed (source 6) that the research benefited the way they perceived own-language use, with seven noting a change in their views about own-language use and likely subsequent practice (*“[own-language use] is a resource in the classroom”, “it should not be taboo”*) and eight suggesting that the research validated their existing views (*“it confirmed what I suspected”, “I’m now more prepared to stick up for my views”*). The subsequent online video (source 8) of this seminar on the British Council’s EnglishAgenda website has received 250 hits between March and July (source 7).

These activities have positioned the research focus, the use of learners’ own languages in the ELT classroom, as a mainstream issue within ELT professional practice, evidenced by both invitations

Impact case study (REF3b)

themselves and the practitioner feedback from both events. [text removed for publication] practitioners (source 5) have reported the impact of the research as “*opening the door*” for follow-up practitioner research activities” (Oman) and “*action research*” (China); as having impact on teacher training (Greece); and as “*pinpointing what needs to be done in future*” (Portugal).

The research therefore clearly informs and influences ELT professionals’ perceptions of own-language use in language teaching, illuminating and challenging their assumptions about what is ‘common’ and/or ‘best’ practice. It has a global reach and takes account of English language education delivered to any age group in any part of the world. Ultimately, it will influence the design and delivery of curriculum and syllabi in schools, other HEIs or other educational institutions.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. **Stakeholder feedback:** Potential of research for global impact by research funder (British Council), measured against their specific criteria for project funding - ‘Impact’.
2. **Testimonial:** Director of Education Programmes, TESOL International Association, USA, corroborating claims about impacts on ELT practitioners.
3. [text removed for publication]
4. **Testimonial:** ELT Consultant/Senior Teacher Young Learners, British Council Valencia, Spain, corroborating claims about impacts on the British Council (Spain) Teacher Development programme and subsequent pedagogic practice. Corroborator is now freelance consultant.
5. **ELT practitioner feedback (1):** 200 teachers who participated in the research (published as Hall and Cook 2013) corroborating claims about impacts on teachers’ beliefs and practice, via a subsequent evaluation survey (Spring 2013). Available on request.
6. **ELT practitioner feedback (2):** British Council Seminar evaluation by 19 UK-based ELT practitioners, corroborating claims about impacts on their beliefs and practice. Available on request.
7. **Testimonial:** Web Editor, British Council *EnglishAgenda* website (<http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/>), corroborating claims about online page hits and downloads for Hall and Cook’s 2013 research publication and Hall and Cook’s 2013 British Council Seminar online video.
8. **Online Resource:** Graham Hall and Guy Cook, ‘Own-language use in ELT: exploring global practices and attitudes’ online video of British Council seminar (2013) <http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/seminars/own-language-use-elt-exploring-global-practices-and-attitudes>.