

From TENOR to TEIC: The English Teacher's Final "Say-So" in Reformulating Education Policies

Angeliki Ypsilanti^{1,*} and Ioannis Karras²

ABSTRACT

In Greece, the English language classroom in State school education is often identified as a Teaching English for No Obvious Reasons (TENOR) situation because the non-official status of the English language, in conjunction with the lack of exam-oriented motivation, disallows the possibility of a widely recognized proof of language ability. On top of that, the English teacher receives conflicting signals from the ongoing processes of transforming the national curriculum and is faced with the constant challenge of providing motivation. This paper launches the adoption of new methodological approaches for paralleling the establishment of effective oversight mechanisms regarding educational policy. To this end, the English language teacher at a Greek General Lyceum, based on the results of the Needs Analysis (NA) survey she conducted at the beginning of the school year, took on the challenge of acting as a mediator of change. More specifically, using her training in the New Curricula organized by the Greek Institute of Educational Policy (IEP), she explored how the "knowledge processes" of the proposed Learning-by-Design framework can benefit the cultivation of an intercultural mindset in students. In assuming the role of "knowledge creator" and "knowledge purveyor," the English teacher has created implications for Teaching English for Intercultural Communication (TEIC) as an alternative to TENOR.

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¹ Department of Foreign Languages, Translation, and Interpreting, Ionian University, Greece.

² Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics & Intercultural Communication, Ionian University, Greece.

*Corresponding Author:
e-mail: angypsilanti@ionio.gr

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at examining in parallel the potential implications of the non-official status of English language in Greece and the state-run practice of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in the General Lyceum of Plomari which, as Sifakis (2009) points out, usually borders on Teaching English for No Obvious Reasons (TENOR), a term used by Abbott (1981) to underscore the importance of prioritizing the students' needs. In the same line of thought, Yelland *et al.* (2008, p. 201) have directed their attention toward the possibilities for teachers "to document, evaluate and report on their reflective process in the pursuit of enriched learning opportunities for their students".

This paper ventures an insightful grasp of the TEFL rationale in the Greek State School. To begin with, the individual teaching circumstances of the English teacher at a General Lyceum with reference to the prescriptive

guidelines contained in the new National Curriculum for foreign languages, i.e., the New Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (Government Gazette, 2016), and the New Teacher's Guides accompanying the new teaching material for the General Lyceum are described. Then, the implicit updated variations of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language)–i.e., TEIL (Teaching English as an International Language), TELF (Teaching English as a Lingua Franca) and TEIC (Teaching English for Intercultural Communication)–are discussed in response to the contemporary requirements of intercultural communication development (Fay, 2008). Finally, the English teacher's potential combination of the principles of the above "alternative paradigms" (Fay, 2008) predicts the effective correspondence between current and prospective modes of teaching and learning.



2. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT)

2.1. *The Curriculum*

How English has been taught in the General Lyceum of Plomari (Lesvos) highly depends on how the teacher adjusts the lesson to reflect current policies and guidelines. As of the school year 2018–2019, the lesson is dependent on the English teachers' degree of conformance to the New Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (IFLC), which serves as the policy basis for the redefinition of the aims and objectives for the teaching of all foreign languages in the Greek educational system. The activation of a response teaching agenda has been made possible following her attendance at the Greek Institute of Educational Policy's (IEP) organized face-to-face training of Foreign Language Teachers in the New Curricula in Mytilene on October 5, 2018, and through the teaching material provided by the two new coursebooks for Grade A and Grades B & C of the General Lyceum.

With a view to promoting New Learning, the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) proposes the Learning-by-Design approach, which regards learning as an instructive journey that can be envisioned and designed from beginning to end to encourage students to build bridges between their old and new experiences. According to Kalantzis and Cope (2005), the trajectory comprises three phases corresponding to three different curriculum forms (i.e., the traditional, the progressivist, and the transformative). Their successive impact makes the final goal of "equity", mostly in terms of enhancing the sense of belonging to a learning environment, attainable (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). The new coursebooks favor the transformative form of the curriculum because they allow teachers the required freedom to be the "source of the curriculum content" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005, p. 62), which means by logical extension that they can plan their contributions into the course syllabus with the prospect of combining the students' diverse linguistic and cultural background with their English language needs.

2.2. *The Student Profile*

As far as the school's linguistic profile is concerned, for all students, Greek is the dominant language (L1). The same holds for first- and second-generation migrant children from Albania and Denmark, whose integrated lives have consolidated their simultaneous bilingualism. Most first and second-graders are certified B2 speakers of English, whereas many senior students are certified C1 or C2 speakers of English. The University of Michigan's Examination for the Certificate of Competency in English (ECCE) and the Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE) feature as the most popular EFL tests among the school's students as they provide respected international certifications specifying the level of command of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Considering that most of them have received exam-oriented private tuition, their expectations from state school English classes differ in terms of the varying degrees of willingness to immerse into the communicative use of language. To this end, they are allowed to identify their preferred sources of

motivation via a Needs Analysis questionnaire distributed electronically at the beginning of the school year.

2.3. *The Coursebook*

The introduction of the new course material by the Greek Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) has been the turning point in how English can be taught in the General Lyceum. More specifically, there is an explicit shift from the TEFL paradigm, which views language interaction taking place between NS (Native Speakers) and NNS (Non-Native Speakers), to the TELF paradigm, which gives priority to the interaction between NNS and NNS (Fay, 2008). In fact, both the online New Teacher's Guides encourage students to use English as a lingua franca for communicative purposes in the global society, underscoring the importance of English as a Lingua Franca as "a means of raising the learners' intercultural awareness" (Sifakis, 2009, p. 233).

Towards the achievement of the above purpose, the syllabus emphasis is on "meaning" instead of "structure," "multimodality", and "authentic interaction" (Institute of Educational Policy, 2018, p. 2). The need to move away from traditional literacy practices where written texts take the predominant role in the EFL classroom in order to explore the contribution of new media to the development of more authentic forms of communication is now more pressing than ever for transforming the way students relate to English as a school subject (Rincón & Clavijo-Olarte, 2016).

2.4. *The English Teacher*

The tenured English teacher at the General Lyceum of Plomari has been taught English with the TEFL paradigm by native-speaking teachers of English with the "cultural objective" of "understanding the target society" (Fay, 2008, p. 151). Therein lies the problem: As a non-NEST (non-Native Speaking English Teacher), can she embrace the prospect of replacing her heretofore teaching "target of a norm-providing native variety" with a "paradigm which is informed by a recognition of the value of EIL/ELF" (Fay, 2008, p. 165)? On a broader scope, the answer lies in "reconceptualizing what learning is not simply in terms of curriculum content, but also in interrogating more deeply [...] the purposes of learning" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005, p. 3), which should be more oriented towards getting more familiar with the channels of interlingual and intercultural communication. In current years, teachers and learners are becoming more sensitized, thus more responsive, to the issue of cultural difference, as dealing with relevant tensions in the classroom is also about reaching a fair middle ground that all involved parties can benefit from.

3. THE PARADIGM SHIFT IN TEACHING

3.1. *Greece in Kachru's "Concentric Circles"*

From a Kachruvian point of view, Greece is one of those countries that use English in the "Expanding circle" (Fay, 2008). This means that English is taught as a foreign language since "Greek is the dominant language of education" (Sifakis, 2009, p. 233), regardless of the student

population's cultural profile. Hence, the diachronic coincidence, viz. identification, of the TEFL status quo with the "large culture approach", which promotes prescribing rather than discerning between notions about English and non-English speaking cultures (Fay, 2008). The English varieties used are "dependent on inner-circle norms" provided by UK, Ireland, USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (Sifakis, 2009, p. 231) because the native English-speaking countries are considered the standard-setters as far as correctness and appropriateness are concerned. The question that arises is whether English could be taught as "a non-threatening medium of self-expression and as a means of raising the learners' intercultural awareness" (Sifakis, 2009, p. 233), in which case ELF would have to be activated as a harbinger of English for Intercultural Communication (EIC).

3.2. *Teaching English for No Obvious Reasons (TENOR)*

Taking into account the TEFL context in General Upper Secondary Education in relation to both the innovated foreign language curriculum, which treats all foreign languages in the same scope, and the new coursebooks, whose content is intended for readjustment by the teacher, it is self-evident that ELT is in a transitory period for the introduction of teacher-generated strategies to change mindsets and traditional roles. The prolongation of the existing TENOR situation due to the uncertainties of the new curriculum is nevertheless inevitable as arbitrary conduciveness to different courses of action is very likely to occur. Responsibility is passed on to the English teacher for the final say-so regarding the most appropriate teaching paradigm.

In the General Lyceum of Plomari, the English teacher has "engaged in reflective reviewing" (Sifakis, 2014). That is, she has recognized, in retrospect, the possible positive effect of certain characteristics of ELF. More specifically, she has initiated an implementable review of Phillipson's (2006, p. 8) terms of reference by recognizing "functional flexibility" as a differentiation strategy for discarding strict adherence to appropriacy constraints, "negotiable norms" as an alternative to rule-governed language behavior, the "lack of collective cultural capital" as an attempt to embrace universal cultural values and "non-native ownership" as every English language learner's incontestable right to use English as a vehicle for communication. In other words, internalizing the implications of theory has entailed a gradual switch-over to a newfound perception of EIC.

To the best of our knowledge, a prerequisite for EIC is the TEFL classroom's conversion into "a safe cultural space" for the ensuing exploration of "cultural diversity and multiculturalism" (Fay, 2008, p. 129). Therefore, what comes first is acceptance of cultural differences within a mutually agreed framework of rights and obligations, and what follows is hosting its practicality for bringing different cultures together in a structured environment (i.e., the classroom) where English is the regulating mechanism and the English teacher aspires to be the regulator.

3.3. *The English Teacher as a Mediator of Change*

Because of the Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum's gaps in the General Upper Secondary Education section, the pertinent paradigm selected by the teacher is contingent on the results of the NA questionnaire completed by all students per grade at the beginning of the school year. The outcomes of the NA questionnaire over the past couple of years have pointed towards incorporating New Technologies as an indispensable contribution to developing productive skills because they provide the virtual setting for "interactional authenticity" (Institute of Educational Policy, 2019, p. 3). From Kalantzis and Cope (2005, p. vii), who have been proactive about hailing new technologies as the teacher's best ally in their role "as learning designer and learning manager", to Laurillard *et al.* (2018) who have developed an online tool (i.e., "The Learning Designer") to support teachers in sharing and adapting learning materials it comes as no surprise that the focus of attention is the teacher's capacity-building initiatives in the field of online materials design and management.

As for fulfilling the requirements of successful interaction, the English teacher has gradually grown away from the traditional TEFL model whereby form takes precedence over meaning in order to draw students' attention to the ELF parameters of "intelligibility," "comprehensibility," and "interpretability" which constitute a meaningful step towards practicing the English language in meaningful contexts (Pickering, 2006, p. 220). For this reason, the variety recommended for use is neither the British nor the American one but a simplified variant through which learners are encouraged to linguistically assert their multicultural identity. From this point forward, the English teacher assumes an internalization-based attitude for integrating the Learning-by-Design approach whose "knowledge processes"—"experiencing," "conceptualizing," "analyzing," and "applying" (Yelland *et al.*, 2008, p. 201)—can lead students from self-awareness to real-life peer interaction. One way to achieve this is by helping them gain comparative insight into the terms "multicultural," "cross-cultural," and "intercultural" (Fay, 2008) with the prospect of adjusting self-reference concerns about their cultural identity development. A core issue in understanding the above concepts is identifying from a multicultural perspective, rationalizing from a cross-cultural perspective, and rising above from an intercultural perspective difference and compatibility among them.

3.4. *Toward a Real-World Definition of TEIC*

Smokotin *et al.* (2014) argue that English should not be treated as another foreign language to be studied like a school subject, which entails that experiential learning activities should be tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of language learning. It is worth noting that the General Lyceum of Plomari students had the Erasmus experience in their Junior High School years, which means that they have been through the "experiencing" and "applying" stages of their transformative journey as foreign language learners. They may have missed the two intervening stages—"conceptualizing" and "analyzing"—which are all about drawing meaning out of

an experience so that it can prove beneficial in the future under similar or different circumstances. This is why receiving preparatory training before linking theory to practice is important.

More specifically, their physical transfer to and short-term sojourn in the cultural space of another country compelled them to reintroduce themselves culturally to the contact language common to all EU citizens, English as lingua franca. This has constituted a "cross-cultural" experience that has enhanced the "cultural awareness" (Fay, 2008) of the students who exchanged cultural experiences but has not involved either "enculturation" or "acculturation" processes (Fay, 2008) since the space where communication took place was a safe "inter-cultural space". In that guarded space, the developed communication was primarily "a process of interpersonal communication between individuals from differing cultural backgrounds" (Fay, 2008, p. 139).

In the ELT classroom of the General Lyceum of Plomari, the washback effect of the Junior High Erasmus experience on the students' self-perception has been the subject of a positive feed-forward loop through follow-up activities (i.e., input provision for the prospective compilation of a digital bank of locally created learning resources for access within a wider student community through blogging and social networking tasks). Since they had never received "diversity training," that is, "preparation for the communicational challenges resulting from encounters with culturally different people" (Fay, 2008, p. 128), prior to their sojourning, the flexible TENOR context of the General Lyceum has entered the process of not only filling in the conceptual gaps but also of bridging the feedback gaps. In fact, through engagement in teacher-generated intercultural classroom practices, students have considered in retrospect that a decisive factor in achieving effective communicative exchanges is cultivating and maintaining an open and flexible mindset before exposure to cultural differences (Fay, 2008).

It is the above realization that the English teacher is in the process of showcasing through "capturing and sharing the phenomenal amount of excellent curriculum content that is created at the level of the learning institution" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005, p. 62). In accordance with Newton's (2016) principles of TEIC (i.e., "mining the social context of learning" and "focusing on intercultural learning objectives"), she is set on bringing in a fresh perspective on curriculum interpretation through "recognizing and connecting to learners' home knowledge, languages and practices" and "affirming intercultural learning achievements in tandem with linguistic and communicative achievements" (Newton, 2016, p. 165). In practical terms, she is securing constant input provision by making the most of prior experience in the form of a constructive recast to foster a sense of unmediated connection between students and the rest of the world.

3.5. Language Norms

The admittedly outdated policy document on ELT curriculum framework in General Upper Secondary Education in Greece is the 2002 Program of English Language Studies at the Unified Lyceum (Government Gazette,

2002), which identifies the aims and objectives of ELT concerning the acquirable by the learner skills and functions. All subsequent policy documents, especially those of most recent years (i.e., the IFLC), remove the focus from how English should be learned and emphasize how all foreign languages should follow the same pattern of learning instead. According to the ministerial circular dated February 14, 2019, no. 22706/Δ2, students are expected to be able "to meet their basic professional needs in the wider social context". At the same time, the New Teacher's Guides promote the "wash forward effect" (Institute of Educational Policy, 2019, p. 4), which is part of assessing learner's performance as a source of information for a change of direction in the adopted teaching approach.

In the General Lyceum of Plomari, the English teacher uses the NA questionnaire as a guiding instrument for articulating and methodizing learning goals and assessment as a verification indicator. Following this line of thought, the English teacher has opted out of a "norm-dependent" use of the English language following the Inner Circle's "norm-providing" usage (Fay, 2008, p. 160), at least as far as the oral skills are concerned. Moreover, instead of specifying the language norms to be taught, she has opted for teaching "linguistic and intercultural communication strategies" (Fay, 2008, p. 163) to help students modify their mindset in future face-to-face interactions. An example of such an employable strategy in spoken communication is Newton's (2016) "concept of You," the forms of address across languages and cultures.

4. SHIFTS IN CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGIC THINKING OR "REFLECTIVE REVIEWING"

4.1. Current and Future Student English-Language Needs

As it has been made clear, the TENOR context of General Upper Secondary Education has provided fertile ground for alternative paradigm experimentation so that ELT can be geared toward current and future student English-language needs. The shift from the traditional TEFL paradigm to the TEIC model takes time because teachers and learners must break free from the familiar to make space for the less tried and tested. A transformation in mindset happens when conceptualizing previous intercultural experiences to impart derived worldviews through open and constructive dialogue in class. Previous Erasmus experience features as a point of reference because it has provided the context of the situation for ELF or WE (World Englishes) to become the facilitating instrument for effective intercultural communication development. "Communication awareness" and the resulting "intercultural communication skills" (Fay, 2008, p. 165) acquired in a real-life context are the interactants' socio-cultural capital. The main thing to remember is that awareness is easier to initiate when it is connected to prior personal experience and current needs. Karras (2020) explains that in cultural terms, awareness is about "carrying" and not sagging with the weight of the accumulated "cultural baggage" (Dodd, 1998). In other words, one's "cultural baggage" should be communicated because it is part of one's cultural identity

development (Karras, 2020). The individual way of communicating one's cultural identity is what exploring and developing intercultural skills is all about.

4.2. Curriculum Requirements and Deficiencies

Whereas the policy document on ELT curriculum framework in General Upper Secondary Education in Greece (Government Gazette, 2002) expresses the aims and objectives of ELT in vague terms, the previous official document (Government Gazette, 1999) had described and prescribed in more definitive terms the notions and language functions to be taught for CLT (Communicative Language Teaching). Regardless of the above policy documents, progress has not been made on tracking the continuing line to make the necessary adjustments for improvement. On the contrary, the New Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum has deficiencies pending closer and more intensive consideration. The New Teacher's Guides ascribe to the use of English as a *lingua franca* without further clarification, and the new course-books only have sample tasks, making it the teacher's business to design further material. As a result, the English teacher is left in a theoretical vacuum as to how and why to teach what. Another curriculum complication is the lack of measurable and verifiable student learning outcomes, hence the TENOR context of Greece's General Upper Secondary Education. Although private education offers competitive language certificate programs, in public education, there are no school-based preparation classes for the Greek State Certificate of English Language Proficiency Exams (KPG). Finally, the incorporated into the New Teacher's Guides CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) descriptors add little to the teacher's guidance, given the textbook's high difficulty level and lack of resources for differentiated teaching opportunities.

4.3. Availability of Open Education Resources

Although the curriculum documents do not propose an appropriate teaching paradigm in line with the contained general guidelines, much less make any reference to the TEIC model, the new textbooks would be better taught from an EIC perspective. Their thematic units and multi-modal nature in their electronic form (i.e., interconnection of authentic sources of information via hyperlinks) facilitate the teacher's job to revisit curricular objectives through a critical lens that inserts different ways of developing and managing resources. Because TEIC is a strategically informed paradigm, the teacher can find recourse to the "intercultural communication solution" (Fay, 2008) to combat any inhibitions she may have about the effectiveness of her teaching methods. The digital teaching scenarios on the Advanced Electronic Scenarios Operating Platform (Aesop), where teachers design interactive educational material, can also serve as good "intercultural competence" triggers (Byram *et al.*, 2002).

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It should be emphasized that the study of the policy documents regarding curricula for teaching foreign languages

in General Upper Secondary Education is incomplete. When research was conducted, the English teacher did not include the most recent policy document (Government Gazette, 2023), which was in its pilot application phase in Model and Experimental Schools during the school year 2022-2023. However, moving along the same lines as the IFLC of 2016 -concerning the aims and objectives of the teaching of foreign languages- it follows that once again, ELT is examined on the same grounds as other foreign languages (i.e., French, German) in General Upper Secondary Education without any differentiated treatment. Putting all three languages under the same umbrella through general policy objectives and generalized policy updates for practical reasons, especially regarding assessment procedures, does not do justice to the theoretical background of ELT, which is filled with great breakthroughs on a global scale.

6. DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

An underexplored area for research is the simultaneous teacher's role as a committed learning materials designer. The stipulated freedom to first experiment with methodological approaches and then select the most suitable one is by no means the same as the curricular requirement to get involved with learning materials development and management. It could be that further official training in undertaking the specific role is required or that the concept and practice of open access to resources is reviewed to facilitate and strengthen the value of the "knowledge processes" of learning by design (i.e., experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, applying).

7. CONCLUSION

It is hoped that English teachers in the Greek educational system will find their way around shifting curricular directives and become agents of change. The challenge awaiting them in the years ahead is to either commit to giving prominence to the strengths of the curriculum or to undertake the individual responsibility of adjusting the syllabus to the students' needs. However, it should be noted that honoring this overall commitment to the rules and principles of the national curriculum under the present circumstances may be hindered by the lack of a specific framework regarding ELT.

As for moving from TENOR to TEIC, what cannot be ignored is the "intercultural dimension in language teaching" (Byram *et al.*, 2002, p. 6), which entails that "linguistic competence" and "intercultural competence" should be placed on an equal footing. Byram *et al.* (2002, p. 7) argue that "to be a successful intercultural speaker and the mediator does not require complete and perfect competence". Based on that, English language teaching should cater to the development of the learners' "attitudes, knowledge, skills and values" (Byram *et al.*, 2002, p. 14) by taking the pursuit-for-correctness load off their shoulders. A combination of a "lingua franca core" (Pickering, 2006, p. 223) assembled by the teacher in cooperation with the learners and an integrated intercultural training would be

a nice teaching suggestion of a "paradigm push" or "shift" (Fay, 2008, p. 172).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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