



## Tracing contextual realities in TESOL

Fiona Xiaofei Tang

Kaplan Business School, Australia

Shashi Nallaya

University of South Australia, Australia

Julie Choi

University of Melbourne, Australia

Sue Ollerhead

University of the South Pacific, Fiji

### Introduction

Every issue of *TESOL in Context* reflects the many places in which our field lives: classrooms, communities, policy environments, digital spaces, and the interpersonal worlds of learners and educators. As we worked through the contributions in this volume, we found ourselves repeatedly drawn to the idea of contextual realities, namely, the histories that shape current practice, the policies that structure opportunity, the instructional choices that influence learner development, and the culturally situated ways in which multilingual individuals communicate. Established research underscores that individual and contextual factors are inextricably intertwined in language learning and teaching (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2022), and the current issue brings that insight into vivid relief.

To honour the coherence of these contributions, this editorial groups them into several thematic clusters. These are not fixed categories but points of resonance that help trace the dynamics of TESOL's evolving landscape.

### Histories, policies, and the conditions that shape learning

A meaningful understanding of TESOL requires attention to the conditions under which language education is enabled, supported, or constrained. The historical account of multilingual and multicultural work in regional Australia demonstrates how sustained collaboration and

#### Correspondence

Fiona Xiaofei Tang

[fiona.tang@kbs.edu.au](mailto:fiona.tang@kbs.edu.au)

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community commitment can produce decades of innovation far from metropolitan centres (*Feez and co-authors*). This regional history offers more than a retrospective; it reminds us that TESOL's intellectual foundations are distributed, relational, and deeply contextual.

In contrast, another contribution turns towards national educational policy and reveals how recent funding and governance reforms have reshaped specialist EAL/D provision in schools (*Michell*). The insights resonate with broader critiques in language policy studies, particularly analyses of decentralisation and its impact on equity and specialist services (Howard, 2024). Taken together, these works highlight that historical legacies and policy contexts function as structural determinants of what teaching and learning can become.

### **Writing, feedback, and the development of academic voice**

A second cluster in this issue draws our attention to writing as a space where learners negotiate identity, accuracy, disciplinary expectations, and rhetorical control. Research comparing mediation-based interaction and direct corrective feedback provides nuanced perspectives on how different methods support different dimensions of writing development (*Özturan & Uysal*). This complexity mirrors recent observations on feedback literacy, which emphasise learners' ability to interpret, engage with, and act upon feedback as critical to improvement (Lu et al., 2024).

Similarly, another study in this issue investigates how multilingual secondary students adjust their writing in response to disciplinary purposes and teacher expectations (*Yaylali*). Such work aligns with contemporary perspectives in L2 writing research that consider writing as socially and contextually situated rather than merely an accumulation of skills (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2022). By analysing how learners mobilise linguistic resources to meet contextual demands, the study articulates the need for teacher capacity building that supports both linguistic and disciplinary awareness.

Altogether, these works foreground a central contextual reality of TESOL: writing is both cognitive and social. It develops not only through feedback techniques but through the interplay of genre, audience, identity, and participation in disciplinary worlds.

### **Pragmatics, intercultural communication, and learner agency**

A third thematic cluster extends notions of context into intercultural communication, focusing on how learners navigate meaning when cultural norms and communicative intentions intersect. The comparative exploration of Vietnamese and Japanese university students' pragmatic strategies shows that learners rely on culturally grounded preferences for directness, indirectness, clarity, or *face-saving* in ways that evince their identities (*Koseki & Nguyen*). This framing aligns with some important research on L2 pragmatics that examine the integration of

pragmatic understanding into language teaching and the need to recognise learner agency (Attardo & Pickering, 2021).

More broadly, studies on technology-enhanced pragmatic development note that digital tools can enhance pragmatic competence when embedded in appropriate social and cultural settings, yet also present challenges when contextual cues are limited (Qi & Chen, 2025). These results reinforce the idea that successful communication is inseparable from the contexts in which it unfolds.

## **Digital practices and the realities of 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning**

The final thematic cluster switches to digital learning contexts, specifically for adult migrants with interrupted formal education. The study reported by Julie Choi and Yvette Slaughter looking into how such learners engage with digital technologies, uncovers that access to digital tools does not guarantee meaningful linguistic development. Learners variously resort to speech-to-text tools, translation functions, and other affordances, sometimes in ways that bypass deeper language learning processes.

This echoes broader work in digital literacies, which suggests that digital literacy involves critical understanding and purposeful use of tools rather than just access (Darvin & Hafner, 2022). More recent studies in SLA confirm that learning environments, including digital ones, fundamentally inform what learners can achieve and how they participate in communicative practices (Howard, 2024). While viewed through this lens, digital engagement becomes another contextual reality that educators must work out with careful pedagogical design.

## **Reconsidering foundational concepts in TESOL**

The issue wraps up with a review of a recently published collection on authenticity (*Sarkeshikian*). Instead of defining authenticity through static notions of “real-worldness”, the reviewed work positions authenticity as a negotiated, identity-driven, and context-dependent concept. This reconceptualisation is consistent with current research in translanguaging, which underscores dynamic, context-sensitive communication practices in multilingual education (Mendoza et al., 2024).

Throughout this edition, such perspectives suggest that authenticity is not a property of tasks or materials alone but of learners’ lived experiences and the contexts they traverse.

## Concluding remarks

Across historical and policy contexts, writing development, pragmatic agency, digital engagement, and evolving understandings of authenticity, the contributions in this volume illuminate TESOL's contextual nature. They show a field framed by legacies, structures, relationships, and choices – and by the agency of learners and educators who move through these worlds.

We would like to pay our sincere gratitude to you as our readers, authors, and reviewers for continuing your support to *TESOL in Context* and your work within ever-shifting landscape of this field.

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