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Framing English language teaching



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ABSTRACT

English language teaching (ELT) can be characterized in different ways, considered as specific frames or framings. ELT work can be conceptualized as *instruction*, *business*, *service*, *profession*, and *disciplinary field*. ELT has further framings in terms of *sociocultural context*, including an *internal* framing determined by the types of people involved in ELT practice and an *external* framing by larger institutions and social structures. The latter type of sociocultural context incorporates an interactive dynamic of global and local forces impacting ELT and its sites of practice. Viewed through these diverse frames, ELT is revealed as a complex, hybrid enterprise incorporating rather different, sometimes conflicting, goals and priorities. The complex work of ELT and its many contextual factors require a balancing of priorities and innovation within an evolving social and educational ecology, and the multi-faceted and changing nature of ELT work can be examined through practice-based inquiry questions. The discussion addresses potential conflicts across the different facets of ELT work, issues of disciplinary positioning, and the academic status of ELT. It is argued that recognizing the types of expertise underlying the diverse frames of ELT can lead to a stronger positioning within higher education.

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1. Introduction

English language teaching has a long history that intersects with other kinds of language teaching. The field that is referred to as ELT, or sometimes as TESOL, was largely consolidated in the 20th century and specifically since the 1940s, through such influences as “[l]arge-scale movement of people through immigration as well as the internationalization of education since the 1950s...[a]nd in more recent times, globalization, the rise of the Internet, and the global spread of English” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 3). Since the 1960s, ELT has become a focus of teaching and learning at all levels of education as well as a major industry connected to globalization and the use of English as a worldwide lingua franca. The history of the field has created different and sometimes competing demands and forces impacting English language teaching.

Both the ELT field and the individual teaching units and sites where ELT takes place make up multiple communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), such as those teaching ELT in different countries or at different levels of education; those who work in ELT and affiliated academic units as teachers versus non-instructional staff, administrators, or researchers; and those centers, programs, or departments that function as self-supporting or autonomous units versus those

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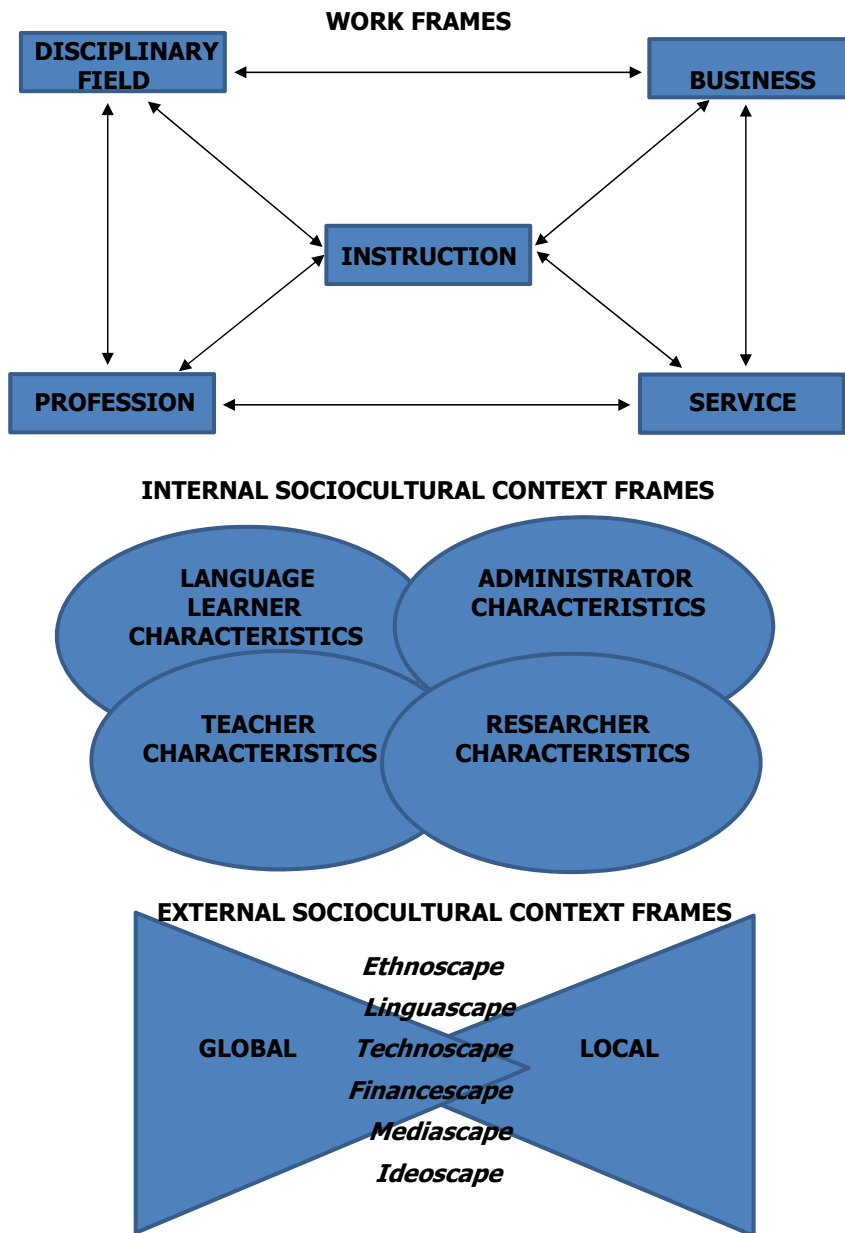


Fig. 1. Frames of ELT.

are within larger units and do not have an independent budget or program control. ELT practices are sometimes also found within an integrated classroom containing significant numbers of immigrant or international students; and, increasingly, such practices are advocated for any educational context of diversity, which in the present day is often the norm. In a community of practice approach, each site where ELT takes place has its own unique set of values, understandings, and practices, which include both formal and informal understandings and practices shared among instructors as well as non-instructional staff and administrators (Hoekje, 2013). In addition, the knowledge base of each individual site of practice informs the ELT field.

In what follows, we explore the nature of English language teaching (ELT) and attempt to characterize its significance and richness as a field, while also raising some issues of importance to the field, through an application of the notion of *frames* or *framing* to the description and analysis of ELT work. A frames perspective makes it possible to analyze the field in terms of the various facets or elements which compose it and the sometimes competing tendencies these have introduced, and then to consider their differential impacts and interactions within the field as a whole as well as in specific sites of ELT practice.

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