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Training 'clerks of the [global] empire' for 21st-century Asia?

English for Research Purposes [ERP] in Vietnam

Thuc Anh Cao Xuan and Kate Cadman

1. Introductory background

Recent global escalation of English language [EL] teaching has led to increasing concern, especially in Asia, about the most appropriate ways to teach English and to conduct and publish anglophone research in Asian contexts. Established Western assumptions about the huge benefits of international research are now spreading globally at an accelerating rate: 'the research carried out in universities, in industry, in government laboratories, and in independent research organizations touches the lives of almost every one of the world's billions of people' (Kulakowski & Chronister, 2008, p. 3). As a consequence, government policy reforms in many Asian countries now demand that academics and research students carry out globally acceptable research in order to advance their own country's capacity to access and contribute to international knowledge repertoires.

1.1. Development of ELT and research training in Vietnam

This political trend towards the prioritising of research has been notably evident in Vietnam with accelerating emphasis since the innovations of the reform period of the 1990s. During the periods of warfare in Vietnam in the late 1940s and 1950s, Vietnam's education system was influenced by conflicting models, one of which followed the philosophies of other Socialist countries while the other was under the control of the

Southern government and reflected Western values when the first prime minister of the south put its education 'in a faithful translation of the French education program' (London, 2011, p. 14). After the end of the war, North and South Vietnam reunited and, in 1986, the new government led the nation through a period called *Đổi Mới* or 'Renovation'. Nguyen (2014) shows that marked changes in educational priorities started during the *Đổi Mới* period, in which the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training [MOET] actively opened up opportunities for innovation, asking for capital from many sectors, even from foreign countries, and strategically sending educators abroad to learn about international trends in education.

These developments were especially significant in the field of English language teaching [ELT]. Prior to *Đổi Mới*, French and Russian had been the dominant foreign languages in Vietnam, but as a result of the rapid globalisation of English, English has taken over to become the required and most sought-after language right across primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Tran et al., 2014). Significantly, changes in teaching approaches have accompanied these policy movements. Learners in the mid- and late 20th century in Vietnam rarely practised English communication and there was very little language interaction among both students and teachers, as English was primarily learned through grammar-translation tasks. Since Renovation, however, the Vietnamese government has gradually put stronger focus on making English more interactive and 'usable' in communicative contexts. It is now felt that young people have to know how to communicate in English in order to work effectively with scholars and capitalise on flowing investments from foreign trade. Nevertheless, without targeted research to better understand the characteristics, constraints and opportunities relevant to specific Vietnamese contexts of learning, it is still not clearly apparent exactly how these goals may best be achieved.

Intertwined with this new focus on EL communication is the Vietnamese government's recognition of the need to expand the country's research capacity. The fundamental role of research in developing educational practice is generally recognised: 'No one would think of getting to the Moon or of wiping out a disease without research. Likewise, one cannot expect reform efforts in education to have significant effects without research-based knowledge to guide them' (Shavelson & Towne, as cited in Phye et al. (p. 68), 2005). Consequently, research methods are increasingly being taught to students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. In Vietnam, according to Nguyen (2014, p. 3), government policy is now beginning to recognise that 'emphasis should be placed on expanding the role of research in universities' as a crucial step in implementing its reform goals. However, an in-depth study by Tran and Marginson (2014) reveals that, compared to other countries in the region, training in English language research skills and writing in Vietnamese tertiary contexts is only developing slowly. Pham (2006) provides a range of local, institutional reasons for this, including a lack of effective English language research training opportunities.

1.2. Dilemmas in teaching English for Research Purposes [ERP]

The on going dilemmas facing research training and English for Research Purposes [ERP] in Vietnam are rooted in Vietnamese traditional approaches to education. The first and perhaps the most challenging issue lies, as in many contexts in Asia, in the appropriateness of student-centred pedagogy for the diverse contexts that Asia represents. Recurring questions centre on how far, and how, a research skills teacher should *direct* a learner towards appropriate decisions on research topics, methods, analysis techniques and language — or, alternatively, whether the teacher should rather stimulate learners to experiment creatively and critically evaluate their own work, while s/he *facilitates and guides* the process.

In Western contexts, tertiary teachers tend to emphasise the importance of helping their students to be independent learners (Hunt & Chalmers, 2013). Chalmers and Fuller (2012, p. 3) cite Dawkins to argue strongly that universities should 'increase individuals' capacity to learn, [and] provide them with a framework with which to analyse problems and to increase their capacity to deal with new information' , rather than simply providing them with new content material. Undergraduate students are now perceived as being able to develop their own critical minds without the need for a teacher to hold their hands and show them how things should be done. Nevertheless, this approach has been described as historically very common in Asia, where educational change is gradually taking place at a slow pace (Law & Miura, 2015). In Vietnam specifically, Doan (2004, p. 146) identifies the 'widespread practice of "learning" by memorizing a lesson sample that closely resembles the final exam, so as to maximize student score'. In our experience, and that of our teacher-practitioner students, this practice is still often observed across Vietnam, even where critical, communicative goals are explicitly sought. Thus, with diverse social and institutional pressures like these, teachers easily find themselves struggling to define their own roles. This may especially be the case for ERP courses in which students need to be instructed in unfamiliar research techniques, while simultaneously being guided in the process of designing and implementing an original research project for assessment (as advocated by Pfeffer & Rogalin, 2012).

A further, related obstacle to effective ERP provision may be seen in the experience and qualifications of the academic staff responsible. Even though English language lecturers in Vietnam are required by MOET to conduct and publish their own research — that is, to develop appropriate research skills themselves (Gorsuch, 2006) — it is questionable how many have fulfilled this requirement today. Pham's (2006) detailed study of ELT lecturers' research output shows that in the early 2000s such research was not happening for a variety of endemic reasons. In respect to ERP, this obviously means that teachers are very often not practising researchers themselves, and may thus be unclear about the dominant research and writing procedures of the global academy. Today, there is little Vietnamese scholarship for novices to draw on and thus they have

many questions left unanswered about how to research and write their discipline, or how to teach ERP skills as part of an advanced EL curriculum.

For all these reasons, formal education in Vietnam has been described as a system 'at a crossroads' (London, 2011). Teachers are being explicitly encouraged to try new teaching methods which in some places are being effectively implemented, yet teacher instruction and unquestioned obedience are still widely in evidence. Today the conflict between the old ways and the newer philosophy, when 'aspirations and constraints collide' (p. 3), seems to be found in many developing countries, and Vietnam, as an illuminating example, is clearly experiencing it. For those of us invested in the future of ERP, as Wagner et al. (2011, p. 83) have demonstrated, 'There is a pressing need for widespread debate, informed by pedagogical research, around what makes successful research methods teachers'. Under the pressure of globalisation, it is especiallly important to investigate the diverse educational practices of our own contexts.

1.3. 'Glocal' research questions

Others have also recognised the importance today of exploring both the reach and the implications of global trends in local non-anglophone settings. Roudometof (2016) has recently described these wider impacts of globalisation as involving

> waves that pass through the local in a way similar to that of light passing through glass. The result is not only a reflection of its qualities back onto the world stage but also refraction through the local. Glocalization is therefore defined as the refraction of globalization through the local. The result is glocality — a blend of the local and the global. (p. 13)

In fact, as Zielonka (2015, p. 2) has said, today global research needs to probe these 'glocal' forces in their own contexts, since it is 'local culture that assigns meaning to global and regional influences'.

As the authors of this chapter, we are immersed in these 'glocal' investigations in different ways. One of us is the primary researcher for this study: a young Vietnamese English language teacher with a great aspiration to develop broader and more rigorous research skills, as well as to develop effective ways to teach them to ERP learners; she wants, above all, to understand better what is going on in her own country. The other is an experienced researcher and research facilitator who has spent many years teaching and learning in the EL teaching culture of Vietnam and who wants to throw light on her own role in spreading Western epistemologies and rhetorical logics into Asian research contexts. As a team, we found we shared certain values and interests which gave rise to some key questions for us about the implications of teaching Western research methods in Vietnam, and about teaching ERP writing in contexts that are in many ways alien to its history and value systems. We worked together, then, to probe some of the philosophical and practical issues we were meeting in our different teaching situations: Is student-centred learning seen as an appropriate approach for this Vietnamese ERP

context? If we follow guidebooks such as that by Burton (2000) in targeting established 'research skills that help students collect, process and analyse data' (p. 1), are we in fact restricting the next generation of Asian researchers to conform to Western procedures, and limiting them to being 'clerks' of the global academic 'empire' (Giroux, 1994; Kim, 2011)? Finally, our personal experiences of both studying and teaching ERP courses prompted us to dig deeper into these issues to answer the question: How is ERP understood, and taught, in practice in Vietnam today?

With that overarching aim in mind, we focused on a specific course on 'English Research Skills and Writing' [ERSW] conducted by what we call in this chapter the City University of Vietnam [CUV], in order to answer the following questions:

- How do teachers perceive their multiple roles in the research skill course in the English Department of CUV?
- How do these teachers carry out their teaching practice and engage in their students' projects?
- How do students respond to their interactions with their teachers and to the ways teachers are engaged in the process of teaching them and facilitating their projects?

2. Methodology and methods

2.1. Critical pedagogic framing

As we have mentioned, we approached the design of this study in light of recent theoretical scholarship, which stresses the potentially destructive impacts of adopting anglophone norms in research and pedagogy for local-periphery contexts in both Europe and Asia (see, for example, Alastrué & Pérez-Llantada, 2015; Cadman, 2014). Thus we were conscious of Western critical values in both teaching and research as we sought to understand how Vietnamese ERP teachers and students saw and enacted their roles in research education. One of the most highly revered leaders in this pursuit is Paolo Freire, as Giroux (1992, p. 1) early pointed out: 'Increasingly, Freire's work has become the standard reference for engaging in what is often referred to as teaching for critical thinking, dialogical pedagogy, or critical literacy' ; many others have very recently endorsed a 'return to Freirean thinking' (O'Shea & O'Brien, 2011). Thus, we adopted a Freirean (1970) framework to inform our investigation and, while we acknowledge that our engagement with Freire's work is primarily pedagogic rather than political, we welcome its yoking of pedagogy, oppression and transformation for our considerations of 'glocal' ERP in Vietnam today.

2.2. Freire's 'banking' and transformation approaches in teaching

Identifying two distinct sets of goals and procedures in formal education, Freire's 1970 study has been seen to offer a yardstick. Here he describes one approach which he

suggests prioritises procedures of educational 'banking' and effectively places the teacher at the centre of the educational process as a 'narrating subject' with the students as 'listening objects' (p. 71). For Freire, such a process holds back the development of students, in that even the knowledge itself at the heart of the learning is conceptualised as 'motionless facts' (p. 71) which teachers hand over directly to their students. The student's primary role is to receive that knowledge, thus exercising minimal creativity in their learning. Whether feeling fulfilled or uncomfortable in this process, students are not required to demonstrate autonomy; to become 'good' students requires them basically to follow instructions, learn the given material and question little.

In contrast, Freire's (1970) 'transformation' approach is seen as promoting learners' creativity and freedom. In learning activities, they are encouraged to raise their voices and share their perspectives, which, in Freire's eyes, engages their humanity and transforms them into beings who have their own ways of thinking and interpreting experience. Such a teaching approach has been especially acclaimed as opening dialogic relations between teachers and students for classroom learning (see Young, 1992). In presenting strong arguments against 'banking' procedures, Kim (2011) shows how questions can be raised to show diverse perspectives on field materials, even those usually defined as established 'facts'. He argues that teachers engaged in 'banking' pedagogies often ignore opportunities for analysis and debate; they present 'knowledge as absolute and irrefutable and demand that students believe and accept it without questioning' (p. 55). This is Freire's (1970, p. 74) 'dehumanizing' process, which is seen to reduce learners to 'passive robots who do not have feeling and autonomy' (Shim, 2008, p. 527). A resulting and circular complication may then occur if teachers themselves want to go a different way; it may be that students are not happy with the new freedoms they are given. A striking example of this is shown in McNiff's (2012) analysis of teaching in Ireland and South Africa, where in both contexts the students considered the teacher as 'The One Who Knows' (p. 135) with the responsibility to hand over designated material, and they resisted their teachers' attempts to act differently. As Freire (1970) argues strongly, learners' naturally transformative curiosities can thus be distorted by non-dialogic teaching styles when they are deeply embedded in social customs. It thus became our goal to understand how students may be positioning themselves in ERP in Vietnam.

2.3. 'Banking' and transformative educational approaches in Asia and Vietnam

In Asia, these old-style teaching methods, which involve teachers in transmitting knowledge and students in passively receiving it, have become so deep-rooted that they may not easily be reshaped. A 2015 study by UNESCO on *Transforming Teaching and Learning in Asia and the Pacific* clearly describes the historical conditions of learning in Asia:

> [T]he conventional approach to teaching and learning … puts an emphasis on uniformity of learning objectives, contents, activities and assessment formats, regardless of the interests and needs of children. This approach is linked with the reproduction model of knowledge transmission, which was considered the key to producing a workforce for the industrial sector. (Law & Miura, 2015, p. 3)

Today, however, significant shifts in pedagogical priorities are being witnessed, towards an approach which 'recognizes that children have diverse learning needs and which engages learners in a series of problem- or issue-based learning experiences to enable them to gain the skills and values required for lifelong learning' (p. 3).

One key to the implementation of these crucial pedagogic changes lies in informed policy development. In recent years, in order to sustain a competitive position in the globalising marketplace, many Asian governments have made significant policy innovations to foster educational change, and these have been well documented in countries such as 'Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and mainland China' (Mok, 2006, p. 2). Further, in Japan, Yoneyama (2012, p. 228) has shown how, with the goal of producing more creative and critical citizens, the government now offers 'maximum liberty for teachers to be innovative and creative, and encourages students to think outside the textbook'. For Yoneyama, this is a very positive step in the quest for a characteristically Asian model of 'critical thinking' involving 'empathy and respect for the person with whom one holds a critical dialogue' (p. 230). In other words, Asian teachers are here exhorted to listen to students' opinions and try to understand their arguments in respectful critical dialogic interaction.

As we have noted, however, in our experience the wave of pedagogic change is not yet very big in Vietnam. Because the country is 'at a crossroads' (London, 2011), slow progress is inevitable: the old trend still demonstrably wants to keep its important position in the country's education (Doan, 2004), while the new is struggling to be seen and recognised. Nevertheless, thanks to government incentives, not all teachers wish their students to be passive, especially in tertiary institutions, and many students do not enjoy following exactly what they are told to do. As a result, Freire's (1970) theoretical concepts from four decades ago represent a very useful framework for analysing Vietnam's educational practices today, and this is especially true in ERP contexts.

2.4. Research design and method

Since this research aims to offer personal and subjective perspectives, both from the researchers and the participants, a constructivist paradigm and qualitative methodology were chosen. In this paradigm it is understood that human beings are complex and multifocal in their opinions; researching with them means we recognise that 'inner states are not directly observable, so qualitative researchers must rely on subjective judgments to bring them to light' (Hatch, 2010, p. 9). This kind of subjective approach does not aim to establish 'truth', nor to be qualitatively 'managed' in a set of strategic procedures, but

rather to draw on Heshusius's (1994) foundational idea of 'participatory consciousness' so as to develop the trustworthy reflexive perspectives of ourselves as situated educational researchers (see Gallagher, 2015).

2.4.1. Setting

Our immediate context here is an ERP workplace that has emerged as a result of the Vietnamese government's demand for, and encouragement of, research both in and out of universities. With the focus on improving both the quantity and quality of research outcomes, research training programs have started to appear in major universities in big cities of Vietnam at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. This small-scale study aimed to investigate the current goals and practices of undergraduate research training at a well-respected Vietnamese urban university, here referred to as the City University of Vietnam [CUV].

In many undergraduate contexts in Vietnam, research training is conducted under the umbrella of the English department, as a special course which falls under the designated skill of English language writing. Consequently, this target research and writing skills program was located in CUV's English department. Research writing courses were delivered over two years by the department, with the Primary Research Skills and Writing [PRSW] course occurring in the second year. For the purposes of this study, this course is categorised into three phases:

- *Phase 1: Learning the theory*. In this phase, students are introduced to the criteria for research writing for the first time. They have to select a topic, develop research questions, and find references for their own research study.
- *Phase 2: Putting the theory into practice*. Students learn about designing a questionnaire and using it for a survey to gather data. Undergraduates in CUV's English department are advised to use quantitative methodology for its 'objectivity'. They are technically permitted to use qualitative methodologies, but these seem to be unpopular among both teachers and students.
- *Phase 3: Data analysis and writing*. Students use the data gathered in Phase 2 to write an analysis and then produce a final research report.

2.4.2. Participants

The research participants were all teachers and second-year students in this department.[1] Two teachers (T1 and T2) were currently teaching the first two phases of the 2015 course, and the third (T3), had taught the third phase in 2014. The teachers in the project not only taught theoretical material but also supervised their students' work. Each teacher was in charge of one class of approximately 25 second-year students, which

1 All participants are referred to by coding labels to protect anonymity.

was further divided into 12 pairs who conducted joint research projects. Though the purpose of this structure was to help reduce the amount of work for teachers, with about 12 research projects to supervise in one semester, teachers had historically met a number of problems.

The student participants (S1-9) were third-year and second-year students who were undergoing Phases 1 and 2 or had recently completed Phase 3 of the PRSW course. Before enrolling in this course, students had no experience of research, so they, too, could meet unexpected problems.

2.4.3. Data collection and analysis

To secure rigour in the qualitative process and ensure that 'the themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researchers' (Dawson, 2002, p. 115), data were collected and triangulated from three sources: classroom observation notes, teacher interviews, and student interviews (Pine, 2008). Four classroom observations were carried out, in order to capitalise on a method which can 'be employed in "natural" settings, rather than those set up for research purposes' (Walshe, Ewing & Griffiths, 2012, p. 1049). Teachers T1 and T2 were interviewed during each of the first two phases of the course, and T3 was interviewed after having recently completed the teaching of Phase 3. Also, a total of 15 interviews was conducted with students from all three phases of the course. The teacher interviews were carried out in English, while the student interviews were in Vietnamese because the students found it easier to express their ideas and thoughts in their mother tongue. The passages of response in Vietnamese were translated into English by the bilingual researcher of this chapter, with the aim of representing the students' meanings as faithfully as possible.

Thematic analysis was then conducted, following the well-endorsed guidelines set down by Braun and Clarke (2006), coding the data into different themes that showed 'some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (p. 82). Investigating the data initially through the lens offered by Freire's (1970) fundamental pedagogic 'transmission' and 'transformation' approaches described above allowed for the generation of subthemes reflecting how the teachers were conceptualising the PRSW course and working within it, as well as the students' perspectives on the roles that the teachers were playing.

3. Results and discussion

As we focused directly on the ways in which the three participant teachers were engaging 'transmission' or 'transformation' strategies, as Freire (1970) defines them, the categories that emerged from the thematic analysis became 'Classroom atmosphere', 'Teachers' explained goals' and 'Teachers' situated practice'. In this ERP exploration, we felt it was important not only to learn the teachers' views but also to integrate students' perspectives.

Teachers in this context who trust knowledge transfer activities often feel constrained by Vietnamese institutional requirements, and with similar instrumental motivation, some students prioritise what they should do to succeed in the course by pleasing their teachers, following instructions and avoiding disapproval. Other teachers and students may want to go a different way — that is, they may want to use the teaching/learning context to demonstrate independence and creativity. However, there is no simple binary here; students may indeed want to get approval and good results but they may prefer to stand out, and their teachers may well be impressed by their originality.

Importantly for the 'glocal' framing of this research, it was not appropriate for us to observe through only one 'lens'. First, we had to see the teaching and learning through Freire's (1970) validated conceptual framework. However, it was also crucial for us to stand at 'the crossroads' — that is, to look from a locally situated view, at education in a country which is undergoing a period of refreshing its own education system yet still struggling between old traditions and new aspirations.

3.1. Classroom atmosphere

Through both the observations and interviews, it became clear that the content structure of the lessons given by T1, T2 and T3 in part represented the 'banking' approach. As a matter of fact, it was not that all of the lessons given by the three teachers reduced students' autonomy in the classroom, but clearly the teachers often unconsciously made it happen. This was shown in the initial classroom atmosphere of both classes C1 and C2. In Class C1, Teacher T1 was information-focused right from the beginning of the course. She headed the whole class towards a relationship in which she was the 'giver' and her students the 'receivers'. As we observed, this sometimes led to students' distraction because they could not do much but sit still and listen: 'They did not look very active, with their eyes looking out of the window or their hands playing with pens, lost in their own thoughts'. This was the first experience of learning the expectations of research writing for these students, so perhaps Teacher T1 wanted them only to pay attention to the content of her lecture. However, it seemed to discourage her class, as students S2 and S3 described: 'We sat there looking at the task for half of the given time. It was not until the teacher reminded us that our time had almost ended that we started to rush'. T1, however, had her own explanation for her 'banking' approach: 'In this class, the students are quiet. It is not because they are low level students but that seems to be their characteristic'. Feeling she had a class with a tendency to be quiet, she wanted to make sure they had no problem understanding what she said, so she bent her original intention of following a more transformational approach. The principal researcher's observations noted that there were moments when 'the atmosphere was dominated by discipline and conformity' and the teacher's 'authoritarian manner'. She was heard to say, 'I cannot let you leave early because if I do, you will not be able to complete your research. I cannot assure that you will get high marks, because the mark does not depend

on me. It depends on you'. In this atmosphere, students were aware of the fact that they were 'recipients' but notably, they did not remain unhappy with these teaching methods. They often engaged consciously, seemingly not with empty minds but with judgment, and were largely quite willing to follow her orders.

By contrast, there were times when teachers deliberately encouraged their class's autonomy. For example, even in the atmosphere described above, T1 gave extra marks to those who raised their voices to interrupt the routine process of 'listen, receive and repeat'. More significantly, for Teacher T2 there were clearly dialogic outcomes from the way she physically organised the classroom. The classroom observation notes show that, in her class, 'students are sitting in groups of four and each group consists of two pairs. The two members of a pair are to work with each other in one research paper'. Tables and chairs were arranged with a path between them so that T2 could easily walk to any pairs who asked for help. This method seemed to have a good influence on the self-management of the whole class, as they did groupwork most of the time and almost no-one was seen to be distracted away from the task given. They looked quite relaxed and as though they were in dialogue with, rather than intimidated by, their teacher.

3.2. Teachers' explained goals

In the interviews, these teachers expressed their desire to follow a transformation-type approach. When asked, all three teachers expressed that they were avoiding methods which relied on students' passive receptivity because making students confident in themselves as researchers was what they wanted. Teacher T1 declared that her goal was to 'help them, not do it for them'. She did not hide her frustration at Class C1's silence when she varied her method in order to teach in a way that was 'different from their learning preferences'. At that time our classroom observations noted that 'the co-operation between the teacher and the students was not that good'. She thought that asking questions would be a good way to prompt them to come up with new ideas, but Class C1 did not understand that she was giving them encouragement. Similarly, Teacher T2 wanted to focus on and nurture her students' interest in research by helping them see 'what they like and what they want to know because being a researcher is to know what there is in life'. T2 set the goal for herself to move students from pragmatism to passion. She 'was ardent' about research writing and thus wanted to spread the spirit so that her students could also be 'passionate about their topic' and participate with joy. Interestingly, both teachers said they wanted their students to understand themselves, and they planned to organise lessons with students at the centre. This clearly reflects Freire's (1970, p. 75) 'quest for mutual humanisation', which involves teachers having 'a profound trust in people and their creative power … [T]hey must be partners of the students in their relations with them'. Both T1 and T2 expressed the desire for this kind of relationship with students.

In contrast, in certain comments, the teachers did not hide their natural tendency to control the class. Teacher T1 thought students 'need the teacher's guidance because as they go, questions arise and I'm there to answer the questions'. She saw her role as central in the classroom, and this was of great importance to her. For T2, her biggest task was to make 'even the weakest student in the class understand what to do'. She did not want her students to 'struggle' on their own, as she felt they might misunderstand her instructions and thus do their research faultily. In fact, teachers acting in the manner of 'clerks' was not seen as negative when what students needed was precise information. Similarly, Teacher T3 explained, that in each of her research courses, she gave her class, C3, a check-list of what to include in their data analysis writing. Dictatorial as this may sound, this 'deposit' method was perceived to actually help C3 avoid unnecessary arguments and digressions in their research. Teacher T3 also made it compulsory for Class C3 to do extra grammar and vocabulary homework to strengthen their academic writing ability. In her view, leaving students to do this voluntarily meant that most of them would avoid it and produce poorly written research. As a result, the so-called 'banking' approach that all three teachers headed towards was seen by us to have not only weaknesses but also strengths in this context.

3.3. Teachers' situated practice

As teachers, it would be ideal for us all if we were consistently able to follow our own best plans. However, when it comes to real-life teaching situations, institutional requirements and student relationships may prevent us.

3.3.1. The 'banking' approach in action

Unsurprisingly, the teachers in this research often acted differently from their own aspirations and found that it was not possible for them to consistently follow their own transformative goals. In practice, all three fundamentally relied on a knowledge transfer approach. For Teachers T1 and T2, this was seen first in the way they organised the content of the course. Being the head of the writing skill division in this department, T1 had built the course and had been invested in improving its quality, as she said, 'for at least five years and it has been quite a success'. Similarly, having taught this subject for several years, T2 knew 'the difficulties, the obstacles and the challenges to help you write a research successfully'. Both these teachers had much experience with the obstacles students often meet, and knew how to deal with them. Consequently, they viewed it as actually legitimate and less time-consuming for students to be following their instructions.

Timeframe was another element that was not negotiable for students, as it was already set by teaching staff. Though very few students challenged course content, some of them complained about the schedule. Student S3 of Class C1 strongly wished

she did not have to 'wait another week to see my teacher face to face and receive the comments', because she wanted to carry out the project quickly while her ideas were still fresh. In Class C2, Teacher T2 was relatively more flexible, but she still required time between lessons for her students to think of questions that might have come up, as 'asking the right question … is an art and it is not easy to teach an art', especially in a tight timeframe.

Within such constraints, there was diverse feedback from students of both classes. Student S3 described Teacher T1's suggestion that she change her research topic, saying 'we had to change' in a way that conveyed she was not happy with the decision. She confessed that both she and her partner were 'very fond of the topic', yet she agreed it was appropriate to change the research question for the time-pressure reasons given by the teacher. Similarly, when Student S4 of Class C2 first recalled the time that T2 crossed out half of her questionnaire draft because the questions were irrelevant to the study, her tone was resentful because, in her view, the questions were interesting and relevant enough. Nevertheless, after discussion, both S3 and S4 came to value the advice, as 'only the teacher knew all the details in the study and [our colleagues] did not'. Finally, this pair came up with a way to design new questions, and both they and T2 were content. In these cases, student creativity was nurtured by what first appeared to be teacher dominance, though significantly without any 'depositing' of ideas.

In Class C3, however, a more clearly 'dehumanizing' situation occurred when Teacher T3 gave the students the task of pointing out mistakes made in a previous research paper. After a long time waiting for suggested answers, she said she finally 'had to tell my students, because it is easier for me to see the mistake. They did not have any experience of doing data analysis'. She perceived that, after listening to her, 'they immediately understood' — in other words, when allowed autonomy, Class C3 failed to do the given task. In this activity, they seemed to learn more effectively when T3's role as 'narrating subject' (Freire, 1970, p. 71) was fulfilled.

3.3.2. Practices of educational 'transformation'

When the three teachers announced that they would try to increase their students' creativity in the classroom, they all partly achieved their goal. Through the observations and the interview stories, it was clear that course materials were designed to engage students' autonomy. For students' selection of research topics, for example, T2 tried to reduce their experience of being 'listening objects' (Freire, 1970, p. 71) by giving them a set of personal questions to answer. From this activity, they could narrow down their area of interest and gradually come up with a topic which stimulated them. This enacts Freire's (1970, p. 60) description of the role of a transformational teacher, when he says, 'They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world'. In Class C1, T1 practised this by giving students a questionnaire and asking them to discuss

and point out its faults. Student S1 complimented this method as vitally helping her understand 'questions that are not objective, which means we impose our own viewpoint on those questions'. Also using materials to encourage students' dialogic input, Teacher T3 gave handouts about research writing theory as homework for students to do in discussion groups. When they read and talked together at home, they improved their critical perspectives on how to write good research.

It was not only in materials but also in the encouragement of independent critical thinking that the teachers aimed to increase students' autonomy. T1 tried to trigger Class C1's 'critical consciousness' by consistently requiring them to discuss with her their own ideas for topics of research. Freire (1970) explains this in the following way: 'The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication' (p. 58, emphasis in the original). Clearly, some students understood the value of such tasks. Students S4 and S5 of Class C2 confidently explained: '[A]t the very beginning, if we had not had a topic, how could the teacher help any of us?', and: 'She can only give comments on our work when there is work for her to do it on'. This also happened in Class C3 when one pair wanted to change their topic too late in the course. At first T3 tried to persuade them to keep the old topic but finally she gave them the choice to act against her specific advice: 'If they wanted to continue, I could still see a way to get them out of the mess. But after giving guidance, they still insisted in changing the topic, so I had to let them change. And then they came up with a wonderful topic'. This pair then spent double the effort and time to catch up with the others, and so, in this case, by transferring the responsibility for learning to the students, T3 not only encouraged their Freirean 'critical consciousness' but also raised their enthusiasm and inspiration.

Conversely, some other students felt discouraged when pressure was placed on their creativity and self-learning ability. Conflict could easily arise in what Freire (1970, p. 79) describes as 'the teacher-student contradiction' which can only 'be resolved [through] dialogical relations'. For Students S8 and S9, a disagreement occurred in the number of surveys they would hand out. After being advised to distribute 50, they thought: '[T]he more questionnaires we hand out, the more reliable our result is', and so they went with 150. They were then given a 'yes' when they consulted T3, who allowed them to follow their own plan. Later, the students realised that the number was too big to work with and were critical of T3 for not stopping them from making that decision. Others also looked for more direction. Student S7 hoped that T3 'could give me more guidance and comments so we can go the right way and then be creative'. Class C3 wished that T3 had given them more structured tutorial sessions, since they 'might not have thought of a question to ask and it was not until I was in the tutorial that I had an idea'. The classroom atmosphere at that time, as S9 recalled, was messy, as the students were all having problems and did not know where to start when they had no chance to discuss

anything with the teacher. The explanation from T3 was: 'If I identify the problem for you and then tell you directly how to fix it, then it is no longer your research but it is mine' (S9). For these students, clear initial teacher direction was sought, which raises questions about the applicability of Freire's (1970) arguments in all situations.

4. Conclusion: A view from the crossroads

It is clear, as discussed, that Freire's (1970) strong views on the oppressive outcomes of education based on a fundamental transfer of knowledge approach have been developed and endorsed by many Western scholars. Perhaps such educational leaders would look at the three classrooms in this study and see signs of student oppression, or, at the least, neglect. Especially in a context of research development and ERP, it may be possible to see these students as reprobated 'listening objects', or worse, 'lifeless machines' who are not given enough opportunity to raise their voices and develop their critical faculties. However, as seen in these observations and interviews, the students did not present much resistance or negative feedback about the mixed teaching approaches they experienced; even when teachers gave their students more chance to be creative, self-reliant or innovative, the students did not always value those chances. They often felt they needed guidance from a trusted source, and in this case the trusted source is the teacher. Years of following the old education system still leave their effects on social customs and on students. In fact, in a Vietnamese context, if students sit in the classroom listening to the teacher's presentation of useful information, and complete the tasks required, many today would say it is a healthy educational environment providing appropriate advantages. Thus, even while there are many signs of 'transformational' goals and methods being integrated into these ERP courses, if that old teaching approach is proving itself to be useful for students, it may not be effective for Vietnamese teachers to jump right over from their conventional 'banking' approach and prioritise critical, dialogic strategies.

Thus it seems that changes to accommodate globalisation appropriately take different forms and there is no perfect or homogeneous way of teaching ERP for the whole world. While it is evident that many Asian countries like Vietnam are stepping on the route drawn by Western anglophone research, critics like Hamilton (2008, p. 14) have argued that globalisation's effects may 'overtake a country's traditional identity' and contribute to the 'Westernization or Americanization of the world'. However, as Roudometof (2016, p. 65) points out above, what prevents this is 'glocality', or 'the refraction of globalization through the local'. The Vietnamese teachers here are rewriting their own story with the ideas given by Western scholars, but they do not see uncritically mimicking the West as the best path to take.

In this case, in response to the question of whether we are acting as, and training, 'clerks of the global empire' (Giroux, 1994), it seems we are not. Those of us who are Vietnamese EL teachers clearly value our identities as educators who are open to Western

developments, yet we still respond judiciously to the demands of our own classrooms. We aim towards Western theories while we continue to negotiate what will be appreciated by our students, by parents, and by ourselves as situated professionals. We strategically put ourselves in a 'salad bowl' rather than a 'melting pot'. The teaching approaches employed in the three classrooms here might not be flawless, but their significant strengths lie in their synchronicity with the real teaching and learning situations involved.

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