

How can the ELT sector
become fairer for all
teachers?

Transcript



Episode transcript

The transcript highlights words that are classified under different CEFR levels

CEFR B2 words are highlighted in **yellow**.

CEFR C1 words are highlighted in **green**.

CEFR C2 words are highlighted in **blue**.

Further information about the underlined words can be found in the show notes.

Transcript

Episode 9: How can the ELT sector become fairer for all teachers?

We'am: Hello and welcome to Teaching English with the British Council – Series Two

Chris: A podcast in which we try and provide solutions to some of the key questions being asked by English teachers around the world.

We'am: We are your hosts We'am Hamdan

Chris: and Chris Sowton

In each episode, we address one such question and attempt to answer it in two ways. In the first part of each episode, we hear from a British Council project, programme or publication about something which is being done to address this issue.

We'am: Across the ten episodes of Series Two we'll hear from Teachers, Trainers and Researchers in a wide range of contexts including Ukraine, Romania, Egypt and the United Kingdom.

Chris: In the second part, a leading English expert and practitioner will provide practical solutions which you can immediately try out wherever you work.

We'am: Each episode of Teaching English is accompanied by a full transcript and show notes. These show notes provide additional information, a glossary of keywords and links to relevant websites.

Sting: This is episode nine. How can the ELT sector become fairer for all teachers?

Chris: Hello and welcome to episode nine of Teaching English with the British Council, in which we look at how the ELT sector can become fairer for all teachers. We'am, what do you understand by this word: fairness?

We'am: The concept of teaching everyone equally and fairly, not being biased or not to stigmatise against people because of their background, maybe their experience, it could be because of their gender. So how do we become more equitable and equal in our delivery of teaching?

Chris: And do you think the ELT sector is fair at the moment?

We'am: I think there's a lot of discrimination. Maybe it's unconscious bias sometimes, and sometimes you see it in students, but they don't notice it. I've seen a lot of students coming to the administration and asking for a native English teacher to teach them. But after a while, when a non-native teacher teaches them, they come to the realisation that it's not about the teacher being native or non-native, it's more about the skills of the teacher. Other sort of bias could be maybe more conservative students would want a male teacher not a female, so these sorts of imbalances in ELT can occur.

Chris: Do you have any personal experience with this, We'am, as a woman and as a non-native speaker of English

We'am: At the beginning, maybe students would question it, oh she's non-native or yeah, but once they're in the lesson, they realise that well, this is as beneficial as if someone who is native is teaching us. Perhaps maybe being young, when I started teaching, I was very young, and I taught adults, sometimes older students much older than me. So the first impression is that well, she's young, how would she be able to teach me. Especially if I had an older student, I had to establish this relationship

Chris: And how did you try and overcome those biases that people saw?

We'am: A lot of the times it's just about proving the opposite. So if it's an older student questioning a younger female teacher, I would establish from the very beginning that I'm a professional teacher, so I would just deal with them very professionally. And I keep my passion for my profession. And I think that works.

Chris: And I think that's brilliant and I'm sure you were excellent at being able to prove that but I think what we want to look at in this episode is how structures of ELT and how there can be reforms built into this system so future teachers such as yourself don't have those issues or they're, they're less likely to be around.

We'am: Yeah, I remember I had one student he was much older than me, so when he first saw me questioned, will she be able to teach me but the programme was designed into two courses, the second part of it, he was supposed to have another teacher, a native teacher, but he actually asked for me again to teach him because he felt that we grew a connection, he is able to learn from me and that is great, yeah.

Chris: In our field report, we'll be hearing from three different people working in different areas of ELT in terms of trying to make it fair from the perspective of workers rights, gender, and inclusion.

Simon: I'm Simon Francis, I'm currently the political officer on the steering committee of the TEFL Workers Union. We've had in recent years a growth of unions, we believe in militant direct action unionism. We will cooperate with other unions, but we're prepared to act independently of the more traditional TUC-affiliated unions. This has meant for example, winning compensation for an online teacher recently, who was dismissed abruptly without due process, and with no reason given. Unions have resources such as legal expertise, and the strength of the union is probably needed if workers representation is to become a permanent feature in reality of language schools. I just find the TUC-affiliated union, I think you can join both for example, but I would prioritise myself something like the TEFL workers union, a workforce should look at everything, but a first step it should be to try and just establish regular meetings, teachers meetings, teachers and staff meetings and the election of representatives. I've operated in places that have been un-unionised before, it's been perceived that management, the organisation has been behaving unfairly. It's needed a quick response, there's not been enough time to Unionise so things like just direct methods to management, you can use petitions and so on. We've had cases of people turning up in staff rooms wearing the same colour as a kind of symbolic expression of the strength of feeling over an issue. That rattles the cage of management and you're not contravening any kind of local restrictions. Of course, in the age of the internet, there are things like twitterstorms, how much you can do in a country will depend on the country and its legislation. So I understand that some of these will be more difficult to act on in some places, but yeah, there are plenty of strategies and mechanisms on offer that you could try out short

of actually trying to **establish** a union and **formal recognition**. Anyone, anywhere in the world can contact us if they're a member or not, whatever their particular **circumstances** and we can arrange a Zoom meeting to explore options certainly what to do about any issue that they have.

Tessa: I started working as a Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages in the late 1970s. And since then, this happy job has **enabled** me to travel, to work as a teacher, teacher, trainer, **editor**, writer, **publisher**, and President of IATEFL. And this background has **enabled** me to set up The Fair List, UK. The Fair List UK, is an **award** for organisers of ELT events that are based in the UK and who put on an event with plenty of women speaking at plenary, keynote, and/or panellist level and I set it up **basically** because I was tired of being the only woman on the main stage at events, so many students and teachers, Directors of Studies and so on are girls and women, that it seems **ridiculous** if we are not fully **represented** at the leading edge of events. In April 2013, at the first **award** ceremony, only five events based in the UK had achieved any kind of **gender balance** of speakers at the top level. But over the years, the numbers grew. We also set up a website and wrote articles about The Fair List UK. The recent pandemic though, meant that we were kind of on hold, paused for a while but now that ELT events based in the UK are picking up again, we're back in business. If you go to the website, www.thefairlist.org, you'll find lots of ideas for you when you either organise an ELT event yourself, or are thinking of **presenting** at an event, or **participating** in an event. Let's say that you hear about an **upcoming** event, and you're interested in there being plenty of women as keynote or plenary or panellist speakers. Well, there's lots you can do have a look at the **upcoming** event programme and if there are very few women **presenters** named on it, get in touch with the organisers and say that you're interested in attending and encourage them to do something about the speaker **gender balance**, and you can give them the address of our website of course, and when you check the programme if you find that the few women on it are all programmed at the same time as each other in **parallel slots**, then ask the organisers if instead they can **sprinkle** the women about so that at most times of the day, there is a chance of attending a woman's talk. If you get there and discover there's only one woman on for example a speaker **panel**, you can ask the organisers if they can provide a woman chair at least or suggest that some women **participants** be invited to give their views, kind of like **consumers** on the questions to put to the **panel**. And most **importantly**, if you're asked for **feedback** at the end of or after the event, comment on the **gender balance** of speakers - fair or unfair. Also do get in touch with The Fair List and become a friend or a supporter and get in touch with me and let me have any ideas and suggestions that you come up with because it's always good to have participation. It would be really nice to think that pretty soon a good **gender balance** at UK ELT events was so normal that our fair list wasn't needed anymore. But the history of all kinds of **civil rights movements** shows us that progress can slip back into regress very, very quickly if **pressure** is not **maintained**. So I think probably I need to keep The Fair List UK going. And once we're **truly** back to a kind of post-pandemic normal, I'll involve colleagues in a discussion just like I did 10 years ago when I started the **award** and **chew** over with them a few ideas as to where to go next.

Giovanni: Hi, I'm Giovanni Licata and I'm **joint** coordinator of the IP&SEN IATEFL Special Interest Group along with Rachael Harris. Teachers and language educators face many challenges when it comes to special **educational** needs and **inclusive** practices. But to me, one of the greatest challenges that educators face is having to deal with the term **inclusion** or **inclusive** practices because these have been under the **spotlight** for the last couple of decades. But they're often associated with labels and tokenisms which have very little to do with **actual inclusion** and **inclusive** practices. This is really what educators and language teachers have to face you know, having to unravel this mystery of what **inclusion** actually entails. The **inclusive** practices and SEN group is a Special Interest Group which promotes **genuinely inclusive** practices and it hopes to lead to a sense of **belonging** and full

participation for all within the ELT community. So we cover a wide range of human characteristics and identities and we try to acknowledge how identities overlap in many individuals, but the best thing to do if you don't know where to start is to get in touch with the IP&SEN Special Interest Group at IATEFL, because we will help you, we will guide you through different approaches to inclusive practices and we will try and put you in touch with the right person, someone who will address your immediate needs.

We'am: Perhaps this is one of the most important things that we should ask how can we make ELT a more fair place? And as we heard, one of them is unions, another way is achieving gender balance and also being more inclusive. So it's a multifaceted approach. I need to pick up on the inclusion one, I think there's a misconception sometimes of what inclusion can be. For example, in my context, a lot of teachers thought that inclusion means that we need to include people with disability, it shouldn't just include people with disability it could also be about gender. It could also be about taking into consideration, you know, the different backgrounds of people.

Chris: People can be excluded in all sorts of different ways. Sometimes, this can be deliberate, but sometimes it may be accidental or just the people aren't thinking but also the importance of intersectionality as well that if you are a woman, if you do, for example, have a disability, if you are from a group that's not in a teaching union, then you can be sort of triply stigmatised and marginalised in that situation which makes performing extremely difficult. So whilst each of these issues are really important in their own way, when people have more than one of these issues that they're facing, it can become a real burden.

We'am: Yeah, and I think representation matters in the classroom. When learners see that the teacher represent them or there's a representation from you know, a wider scope then they are more likely to be inclusive and their daily practice. So you're sort of teaching them how to be inclusive, but not directly and as teachers I think we should reflect on these practices in our daily behaviour.

And today, we're interviewing Rachel Tsateri to learn more about inclusivity in ELT.

Welcome, Rachel, It's a pleasure to have you here today.

Rachel: Thank you for inviting me.

We'am: My first question is, to what extent are non-native speaking English teachers discriminated against when applying for jobs?

Rachel: I know that an English teacher from France recently launched a survey and 80% of the respondents were actually English teachers who have already been rejected by language schools at least once teachers approached me all the time on social media, especially LinkedIn, sharing stories of discrimination, despite their qualifications that include MAs and even PhDs.

Chris: What do you put this down to, Rachel, where does this discrimination come in? Is it in-built into the ELT sector, do you think?

Rachel: A lot of people argue that this is you know, the company should have the right to employ who they want, it can also be because people are not informed, a lot of students if they, if this is something that they demand, or they expect, they're not aware that this is illegal, that this is discrimination. Or maybe they never had a non, so-called, non-native speaker teacher, and don't know that there can also be great examples of teachers. So it's, it could be a matter of awareness, you know. What will ultimately make someone a good

teacher would be their qualifications, would be their experience, would be their **passion**.

Chris: Perhaps you could share a little bit of your own personal experience of this Rachel of, of the **discrimination** that you've **encountered** when applying for teaching jobs.

Rachel: Absolutely, it was November 2021. I applied for work at Inlingua. I sent my CV and they replied are although my CV was interesting, and they were in fact looking for teachers, many of them as they said, they were not allowed to hire me. That was their answer, because I'm Greek. They told me I can teach Greek but not English. So when I replied that this is **discrimination** that this is **illegal**, they said it's company **policy**, and they didn't wish to discuss it further. That was it. So I went after them with my lawyer. He sent them a demand letter telling them that we'll be **suing** them from damages and a few weeks later in a court hearing the judge advised them to give up and pay because if we went to court they'd lose, so I actually I was really **frustrated** back then I wasn't sure I'd be staying in Germany. I didn't want to, you know, take this further. So I thought, yes, we're going to accept and to the best of my knowledge, it was the first time that a language school ever paid for this **discrimination**.

Chris: What I think what's so great about that you were willing to go the extra mile you and your lawyer were willing to do that. And it seems to me that we hear all sorts of stories from all over the world, certainly on social **media** sites. And it seems to be that it hasn't budged. And as you say, employees are hiding behind their right to choose who they want to and so on. How do you think we go **beyond** the **legal** side of things to making that step change so schools see the advantage of employing anyone based on their **merits**?

Rachel: Let's tell students right, let's ask students to think about the following. If you agree with that, you agree that you will never be good enough to become an English teacher yourself. Are you okay with this do you think this is fair? Are you **aware** that there are qualified teachers who are being **rejected** because of their **origin**? As we said, even if they have **committed** their time, they've **invested** time and money on teacher training courses. Do you feel comfortable being part of this cycle of **discrimination**, what kind of mindset are we promoting in general: fixed **growth**? It doesn't matter where we're born or what we're born or what we will **ultimately** grow to be? What is the value of education? I mean, so what is the value of education I think is a very important question. Why are we studying to become an expert? It will never mean that we are good enough. We're never going to be **desirable** candidates when we apply for a job. It's about everyone's right to be **appreciated** for and **valued** for their skill.

Chris: I think one of the **frustrating** things that we even have to have these labels, you know, native, non-**native** speaker teachers, we should just have English language teachers and as you say, you know, people should be able to be **appointed** based on their skills, their attitude and all of those other skills that we value in teachers and the very fact that we have to use these abbreviations, these descriptions is **unfortunate**.

Rachel: I also think it's not, but if we absolutely must, we can use more **inclusive** terms L1 or L2 proficient speaker. Our colleagues can also within the ELT **community** could avoid advertising themselves as **native**-speaker teachers, because this **automatically** divides the **community**.

We'am: What can we say to learners who say that they want a **native** speaker to teach them? And what about parents and I often also experienced that in the **workplace** where students or parents come and they want a **native**-speaker teacher

Rachel: I have been there and some of the things that I discussed are the fact that first of all, if they agree with this **policy**, it means that they agree their children or students

themselves will never be good enough to become an English teacher and ask them if they're okay with this **limitation** and also, if they are **aware** that it's **illegal**, let's say it is **discrimination**. It is **illegal**, like all other kinds of discrimination, are they supporting it? Sometimes we're not **aware** and that excuses us, but when we become aware, what are we doing to actually fight it? And again, as we said, given examples of a lot of proficient speakers who **excel**, it doesn't mean that because they will be **native** speakers or non-**native** speakers that will be good or bad teachers. Of course, if your child is studying English to move to a place to work, to study and it's they need to learn the local **dialect**, they need help you know, with some colloquial language or phonological **features** of a **specific** area, sure, they would need a teacher who can support them with that, no doubt, but this is not always the case. And students learn English as a lingua franca to **interact** with other international speakers all over the world. So how will it exactly benefit them? You know, to just have that teacher from I don't know Australia or Canada or the UK, to keep a more open mind. Sometimes, it seems like **stating** the obvious, but maybe they haven't been told these things.

Chris: I'm interested to also get your views on whether you think the continued **dominance** of **prestige** forms of the language like British English, American English at the **expense** of other forms of English, including things like international English and so on, and how you see that and whether there's any way that those **prestige** forms can be **challenged**, whether we should be as teachers promoting a more **global** form of English and where you sit on that issue?

Rachel: The **response** I have to most of the questions is it depends on the learners needs. I say that a lot on teacher training courses sessions it always depends on the learners needs, a **context** in which they're going to use the language, right, so they **dictate** what is to be taught if you ask me. I teach students who will use English to communicate with people from all over the world. My students, for example, **struggle** with listening and pronunciation so how I help them with that and I **adopt** this ELF, let's say approach, I choose or I create materials, and I try to **expose** them to a range of accents to help them with listening. In my **belief** listening is and pronunciation are **closely linked**. So to help them improve their listening skills and also develop positive attitudes right, towards different accents, I ask from international colleagues, my colleagues, teachers, teacher educators to record themselves, they could be from England or Thailand or Spain or or you know, anywhere in the world, not **necessarily** from a **specific** place. So that's how I tried to raise **awareness** of plurality of English, of accents. And I help students notice even you know, **potential** differences, which might help them in international **interactions**, or communication **breakdowns**. But I think that also we need to teach them communication compensation **strategies**, which means what can you do when you don't understand your co-speaker? Right? How can you be more accommodating towards your audience? Communication is a **mutual responsibility**. It's not just the **burden** of the speaker but also of the **listener**. So they, I'm also trying to help them with other attitudes on themselves trying to be active **listeners** and to help with any communication **breakdowns**, how will they fix it, you know, how will they be able to understand each other and communicate despite some cultural **features** in their own use of language

Chris: And this goes back, Rachel, to what you were saying before that the **overwhelming majority** of times that our students are going to be using English is with people whose first language isn't English and therefore they need to be prepared for these different accents, different sounds, different phonological **features**, but then also as you say, how to repair these things, how to **clarify** understanding, how to check what has been said and all those sorts of things. So it's actually a really responsible thing to do as a classroom teacher.

Rachel: Yes. But as I said, you know, it always depends on their needs. They might have different needs. It's just that probably most of the **vast majority** of students right now are

learning English as a lingua franca, as it seems

We'am: And sometimes our learners do not have a very clear idea of their needs. So it's a matter of raising their **awareness**, I think. So what can be done, in your opinion, to make the world of English language teaching a fairer place of **native** and non-**native** speaking teachers of English?

Rachel: Quite a few things, and these are not of my ideas. Raising **awareness** in the classroom and the training room classroom meaning talking to our students, discussing **this phenomena** of **native** speakerism and also teacher training courses, discussing it with our **student teachers**. There is an activity designed and **awareness** raising activity called Who is A **Native** Speaker? So this gets students with student teachers to **reflect** on who they actually believe is a **native** speaker and explore and **critically examine native** speakerism as a **concept**. It really helps, you know, get that discussion going and perhaps by the end of the session or **lessen** their **awareness** will have been increased and then perhaps they will have changed partly or **wholly** their attitude towards this. I think that we can include L2 speakers in coursebooks, which is okay, it's been done now more than a few decades ago, but give them more central roles. Yes, L2 speakers are introduced, but not as central characters. They are visitors. They are tourists. They are foreigners. They are outsiders, in a way. So perhaps they could be given more central roles. We talked earlier also about us within the **community**. I'd like to think of us as a **community** rather than you know two battlefields, right? We're all teachers, we're all **professionals**. So we help and support each other in promoting, you know, good practice where we see it. So in terms of schools, managers, directors, please **focus** when you're **reviewing** CVs, please **focus** on the candidates qualifications experience, as we said, don't **focus** on your nationality or passport.

Chris: Rachel, thank you so much for sharing your ideas and your **passion** on this subject.

Rachel: Thank you very much for having me.

We'am: Thank you, Rachel.

Chris: We'am, what are your views on non-**native** speakers and their teaching of English and the challenges they face and what the **sector** can do to support them more?

We'am: I think there's a lot of **unconscious bias** against non-**native** English teachers. What we can do more of is sometimes when we want to change something especially in order to make it more inclusive, we tend to **focus** on changing teachers, but I think the way to do it is to change the environment around it. Let's say a building is not **inclusive**, then how can I make this environment more **inclusive**? Maybe I need to make it **accessible** for students with **disability**. And maybe with non-**native** speakers, I need to give them a bit more **confidence** in their language and in their abilities. And I think if the managers are native speakers, it is **rewarding** that they get some more **encouragement** from the **native** speaker. So I see it as work hand in hand.

Chris: Yeah, and the hope must be **surely** in the future that we don't even need to use these labels. That we can just have English teachers. It feels like there's progress in that direction, but there's still a long way to go. And I think it seems to me one of the real challenges that we face as an industry is the financial part of it. Still there is demand for **native** English speakers as teachers. We have to change that view **amongst** the **clients**, the customers, **amongst** the parents who are buying those services for their children who think the best thing I can do with my money is to buy the services of a **native** English speaking teacher. So that is the role of everybody in the industry, but I think in particular, owners of private language school managers in those positions, Directors of Studies to have those

conversations and to say, there is no difference often those non-native speakers will be better teachers and certainly as good as that's how we can really change the narrative.


We'am: In my opinion, non-native English language speakers are more likely to know what are the weaknesses of Arabic-speaking students because they worked their way up to be professionals and proficient in that language. When students see that you were in their position. You were in their shoe previously, but you made your way up and you learned and that motivates them to keep learning and keep that journey. I always tell my students, my language wasn't as good years ago, but with practice, it becomes more natural. So I like to use my experience, just to give them a little bit more motivation.

Chris: And also because they've had to put up with all this prejudice in their careers they've had to work harder to get where they are. So you know, they will often be very driven, motivated people. That's what you want. If you want the best possible teacher for your son or daughter. That's the kind of person you want.

We'am: Thank you for listening and in Episode 10, we will talk about what do people say is the best way to teach English until then...

Chris: goodbye!





This episode was produced for the
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