
Conference Review

The 10th Annual CamTESOL Conference

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CamTESOL held its tenth anniversary edition in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on February 22-23, 2014, under the theme “English for Regional and International Integration”. With the forthcoming goal of regional economic integration for the ASEAN community with English as the official language, this theme was particularly timely. CamTESOL continues to grow and deliver on its mission through the extensive support of domestic and international partners, numerous local institutions, and conference exhibitors.

This year, over 1,700 delegates took part with 640 international participants from 32 countries. Financial support was made available for 40 ASEAN members to attend along with 514 provincial Cambodia teachers, three of whom I was able to support with the CUE Scholar Grant funding provided to me by the JALT CUE SIG. Certificates of attendance were available to be picked up at the end of the conference but only after submitting a conference evaluation form – an approach Program Chairs of various events held in Japan looking to capture feedback may want to take note of.

The aims for the CamTESOL Conference (www.camtesol.org/home-1) include:

- Providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and sharing of best practices in ELT
- Strengthening and broadening the network of teachers and those involved in ELT in Cambodia

- Linking the Cambodian ELT community internationally
- Showcasing research in language learning and teaching

Research and professional development are now supported by up to eight \$500US research grants. Recipients receive peer mentoring support in the development and execution of their project, are expected to present at a future CamTESOL event, and have the opportunity to publish in the biannual online journal *Language Education in Asia* (LEiA) (www.camtesol.org/publication). The 2013 edition of LEiA was given to all delegates on CD in their registration bag, and by simply scanning our ID badges registered presenters could be tracked on having been handed a hard copy.

To further meet these aims, a number of initiatives are in place to attract participants and provide opportunities to take part in various events to better understand the local context, needs, and services. Each year a selection of educational site visits is available, and there is also an orientation program for teachers from the Cambodian provinces. On alternating years, the event includes the Regional ELT Quality Assurance Forum or Regional ELT Leadership Forum. For more social interaction, registration includes a warm-up reception for presenters, and delegates have the option to attend the conference dinner on Saturday for an additional charge.

To provide an avenue for researchers across the region to present and discuss findings, ELT Research Forum presentations had previously been given within the conference itself. This tenth anniversary edition featured the first Regional Research Symposium (216 delegates, 23 countries) as a pre-conference event held on Friday, February 21. Bus transportation to the very well-outfitted Cambodia-Korea Corporation Centre on the campus of the Royal University of Phnom Penh was made available for those who booked in advance. Brian Paltridge gave an opening plenary (and fielded questions) on current and future directions in ESP research, and Barbara Seidlhofer introduced the VOICE corpus as a resource for researching English as a lingua franca. Featured in this symposium, with a separate application, vetting, and registration process, 40 research presentations were available to select from under streams of language acquisition, globalization and ideology, technology, assessment, pedagogy, and sociolinguistics.

My presentation was scheduled at the same time as workshops by the two featured speakers on conducting research projects, and others on the topics of replication studies, mentoring for regional research networks, and action research. Nevertheless, I had a full room of 45 people in my workshop on “Writing for Academic Publications.” I was also able to make contact with a future research colleague with mutual interests and offer informal support as a mentor to novice authors looking to publish, two of the principal goals I had for attending this event.

From Saturday to Sunday noon, over 450 presentations were conducted as 30-minute papers or workshops (with a few poster presentations as well), making CamTESOL one of the largest international ELT conferences in Asia. One of my primary objectives was to attend presentations from different countries and teaching contexts. Around the Saturday afternoon scheduling for my own workshop, “Insights into TOEFL iBT Listening and Reading,” I was able to see presentations based in Macau, Myanmar, the UAE, Vietnam, Japan, and Australia. These covered a range of topics from young learners, test prep, ESP, business English, action research, and even a research study into cross-cultural awareness conducted across two contexts in Portugal and Vietnam. Following their well-designed presentation, two teacher trainers from Myanmar were selected to write a book review on a title for teaching young learners. As Reviews Editor for *JALT Journal* I look forward to more formally supporting Myat Thinzar Tun and Aye Mar Thet in this area of professional development.

The final session I attended on Saturday was given by Anne Burns and Katherine Brandon, from English Australia (www.englishaustralia.com.au). Their presentation on a national action research project running with ELICOS teachers in Australia made me wonder why a larger scale, higher visibility, research-based network has not been funded and sustained in Japan. The foresight of asking my morning tuk-tuk driver to pick me up at the Institute of Technology Cambodia, the new host site this year, ended up providing a private networking moment with Prof. Burns, one of the instructors for my master’s courses at Macquarie. She had also been a plenary speaker at CamTESOL five years earlier when I first attended. Our discussion turned to the accelerated growth of English language

use and proficiency seen in Cambodia and generally across Asia, except of course for Japan. After dropping her off, since we were asked to be in national dress at the conference dinner, I picked up my red Canada beret and headed off to the Hotel Cambodiana on the shore of the Mekong River.

Sunday's schedule included four concurrent sessions. I sat in on presentations on teacher beliefs and practices by Nurkamoto Joko (Indonesia), multiple intelligences in text materials by Ali Bastanfar (Iran), content-based lessons using authentic materials by Samar Aal (a U.S. State Department Fellow in Indonesia), and journal writing by Sopheak Reasey Tuy (Cambodia). Ms. Tuy's enthusiasm and energy made her presentation one of the most engaging I had attended, and as a result she was another person I selected to work with on writing a book review. She was one of the top graduates and an English Presentation Contest award winner at Beltei International University and now teaches in the Faculty of Education, Arts, and Humanities. Through this connection, I was most fortunate to arrange a meeting after the conference with His Excellency Ly Chheng, Director-General of Beltei Group, an organization recognized as a TAYO ASEAN 2012 award recipient. He is also the president of the Cambodian Higher Education Association (www.chea.edu.kh) and has been a strong advocate of CamTESOL from its inception. This year he again provided support for 100 teachers to attend the event with a focus of becoming more effective instructors and models of language users. The value of positive role models was most evident when I asked one of the volunteers what she had learned from the session she was time keeping for. She simply beamed at how impressed and newly motivated she was by the English fluency of a Cambodian presenter: "a person just like me!"

Barbara Seidlhofer, from the University of Vienna, closed out the event with her plenary address titled "The 'E' of 'TESOL' in the Age of Globalisation." Her message was that English language professionals must take into account how "English" has been defined as an object of research and subject for teaching. Under the conceptualization of English as a lingua franca it must become separate from the culture of "native" speaker origins and more appropriated for those cultures and identities of international users with different national and L1 backgrounds. As a model of good practice for other speakers, in her introduction Prof.

Seidlhofer revisited elements from the opening plenary by Yilin Sun, President-elect of TESOL, on matters of changes in the goals of English language learning and teaching. Then, using terminology from her own research and writing, she closed with a message to focus on maximizing learners' opportunities, facilitating negotiated interaction, increasing language awareness, contextualizing language input, and raising cultural consciousness for improved global inclusiveness, local situatedness, and social responsibility.

One of the noticeable benefits of attending CamTESOL was the amount of interaction between first language English teacher—researchers and those working with English as a second, foreign, or even other language. Up to now, such formal platforms and informal opportunities with rather diverse audience populations seem to have been limited at events in Japan or maybe not catered for as effectively as they could be. Certainly the cross-pollination of ideas through the presentations and exchange of experiences in the Q&A sessions among those working in varied EFL contexts was a welcome opportunity to consider both similarities and differences. A rather spirited discussion took place during the Regional Research Symposium around the notion of cooperative and collaborative learning that the members of the audience had from their own graduate studies and teaching experience and the operationalization by the presenter in her research. Tea breaks of 30 minutes gave participants time to reflect on how the presentation contents may be related to their own setting and learners. This time allowed me to strike up conversations with teachers from different contexts and to better understand the needs and challenges of teachers in the Cambodian provinces.

For an overview of multiple teaching and learning contexts, from both academic and practical points of view, CamTESOL is an event that I would strongly urge colleagues to attend and consider submitting a proposal to as a presenter in the future. The 11th edition will be held on February 28 to March 1, 2015 in Phnom Penh under the theme “English: Building Skills for Regional Cooperation and Mobility” with key dates already available online at www.camtesol.org/2015-conference.

Author's bio

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Received: March 13, 2013

Accepted: July 2, 2014

***Editor's Note:** One of the primary aims of the CUE SIG is to support and recognize the distinctive work of our members through a variety of awards and grants. For outstanding articles in the OnCUE Journal or excellent conference presentations we offer the member or attendee nominated Reader's Choice and Best of CUE Awards. CUE also supports our members' interests in professional development through the New Member Conference Grant, Member Support Conference Grant, and Member Research Grant, which aim to help members with little or no institutional funding. To find more information about CUE awards and grants and learn how to apply, please see our website. <http://jaltcue.org/content/cue-grants-and-awards-2014>*

Greg is a recipient of the 2013 Member Support Conference Grant and consequently applied his grant to a conference trip. Here, he shares some of his experiences and insights while attending the event.

