

INTRODUCTION

ESOL: A Critical Guide is an introduction to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). ESOL refers to the English that is taught to and learnt by adult migrants to English-dominant countries, and is the common term for this branch of English Language Teaching in Britain and Ireland. In some countries, notably Canada, the United States, and Australia, it is known as ESL: English as a Second Language. The aim of the book is to provide readers with an up-to-date broad understanding of ESOL pedagogy in its social, political, and economic contexts, with a particular focus on research undertaken in England.

The teaching of English to adults suffers from a proliferation of acronyms, which are sometimes contradictory and overlapping. This is because English Language Teaching (ELT) is a broad and complex field. While this book has relevance to all areas of ELT, it is not principally concerned with EFL, English as a Foreign Language, which is taught and learnt in parts of the world which are not English-dominant. Nor is it about the Englishes used in countries where English holds some official or formal status, such as India or Singapore, but where the majority of the population do not have English as their first or expert language.

Global society in the post-colonial age is characterized by international flows of people, many of whom come to English-dominant countries with a need to learn English. There are over one million such people of working age in the UK alone, and about one third of these are currently taking ESOL classes. They come from a hugely diverse range of geographical, social, and economic backgrounds, and include asylum seekers and refugees, people from more settled communities, so-called economic migrants escaping poverty in their home countries, people joining their spouses and family members, and—in the UK and Eire—EU nationals, especially from countries which joined the EU more recently. The book considers this diversity, and engages with the challenges and issues it presents.

Migration and asylum, citizenship, social exclusion, the economy, and globalization all bear upon ESOL, a field which is passionately contested by practitioners and policy makers alike. Given this atmosphere, people connected with ESOL—readers of this book—will not be working in an apolitical sphere. This book does not shrink away from discussing contentious aspects of ESOL. For example, we examine how imposed