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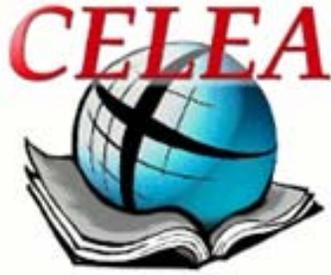
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## ELT and Empowerment: Questions, Observations, and Reflections for Christian Educators

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### Abstract

As a field, English language teaching (ELT) has come under attack from a number of critical practitioners. In the classroom, English language teachers aim to empower our students by helping them improve their English abilities and skills. Yet there are discrepancies in terms of who learns and uses English for various purposes. Are English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) teachers helping, or are we part of the ‘problem’ in ELT, as critics suggest? This article poses four questions in order for readers to consider issues in ELT and empowerment. In doing so, it summarizes observations from both the author’s experience and potential resources in the ELT literature, and closes with some reflections to help Christians in ELT consider their understanding of and response to some important current topics in our field.

**Key words:** critical pedagogy, ELT, empowerment, imperialism, world Englishes

### Introduction: Questions

I have worked to assist my students in learning and using English for over twenty-five years in order to help them reach their academic, personal, professional, and/or vocational goals. Yet a number of critical practitioners have challenged such everyday work at a number of ELT conferences I have attended. In reflecting here on such views, I would like to begin this essay by asking readers to consider the four following questions:

- 1) Is the *English language teaching industry* a problem? And if so, how? If not, why not?
- 2) In what ways might English language *teachers* be part of the above problem? And what about *Christian* English language teachers in particular?
- 3) In light of one’s answers to these questions, what *principles* and *practices* should guide Christians in ELT, in English as a second or foreign language contexts?
- 4) And finally, what *Scriptures* might guide us as Christians if we aim towards English language teaching and empowerment?

This article will contextualize and introduce a number of topics that these questions touch upon. In doing so I will share some observations that come out of my ELT experience in Canada, China, Indonesia, Japan, and the United States. Frankly, I do not claim to have all the answers or

solutions to the issues I am going to raise. Instead, I may raise more questions than I can answer. Yet through this essay I hope to help Christian English language educators engender some thoughtful Christian reflection, and thus develop our worldview and professionalism so that we might respond and work with integrity.

## **Background**

The field of ELT is a growing one. It is also the subject of continued criticism, dealing largely with colonialism (Pennycook, 1998) and linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992, 2009). Connected to Britain, the United States, and other countries with histories and ties to the United Kingdom, English is often viewed as a colonial language. Yet particularly due to on-going activities by the British Council<sup>1</sup> and the United States Department of State<sup>2</sup>, English language teachers, and especially native English speakers from these and other English-speaking countries, are also often viewed as agents of linguistic imperialism.

Christian English language teachers, in particular, are targets of scrutiny (e.g., Pennycook & Makoni, 2005; Wong & Canagarajah, 2009) within ELT, also known as the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages<sup>3</sup> (TESOL). In just one example, researchers Varghese and Johnston (2007) interviewed teacher training students at two Christian colleges, one in the Pacific Northwest and another in the South of the United States. While they did not seem to fault the universities for their educational programs per se, they nonetheless concluded that, in their opinion, “the values of evangelical Christianity stand in opposition to the values of the field of TESOL” (p. 27). As a Christian educator, I do not necessarily view these criticisms positively, but I do see critique as healthy for Christian ELT professionals. Such concerns are thus important for educators in Christian university teacher training programs, especially those where teachers are studying TESOL, whether for English-speaking countries (ESL) or abroad (EFL).

In short, key issues related to some of the criticisms of Christians in ELT are power and economics, which often inter-relate. Research commissioned by the British Council (Ramaswami, Sarraf, & Haydon, 2012), for example, affirms the value of English language

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<sup>1</sup> “The United Kingdom’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities” – see <http://www.britishcouncil.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> See especially <http://americanenglish.state.gov/>, a “website for teachers and learners of English as a foreign language abroad.”

<sup>3</sup> ELT is most common in Europe and Asia, while TESOL is frequently used in North America, mainly due to the professional organization with the same name (see <http://www.tesol.org/>).

knowledge and use for both individuals and societies in North Africa and the Middle East, and there are similar reports on other contexts (e.g., Pinon & Haydon, 2010). Cautious readers may wonder if the British Council's funding of that research leads to the results it desires. Put another way, do people around the world value English because it is important and helpful, or simply because it is the language of international business and the only major foreign language of education in many contexts? I honestly don't know, but I believe that these are valid questions on which those working in ELT should be reflecting.

People of various faiths (e.g., Hussain, Ahmed, & Zafar, 2009, whose work mainly reflects Muslims) believe English can be useful in empowerment in the developing world. Some, like Yagnik (2012), see "English as [an] empowered tool for empowerment" (p. 43). Others, however, such as Appleby (2010) and various authors in the Coleman (2011) and Erling and Seargeant (2013) collections, seem to offer both positive and challenging portrayals of English as a language of development, especially in education with English as the medium of instruction in societies where other languages are dominant. Still others argue that empowerment comes through language, and power is connected to English (Pütz, Fishmann, & Neff-van Aertselaer, 2006). So what are the issues and realities? And what might be some of the consequences?

### **Observations**

With this background, let me turn to several observations about the TESOL landscape in which Christian educators work with either ESL or EFL students around the globe.

First, ELT has taken on the vocabulary of "empowerment" in recent years, with this concept and term being central to many recent TESOL-related conference themes, such as "Facilitating Learning Through Student Empowerment" (TESOL in Puerto Rico, November 2012), "Language and Empowerment" (CamTESOL, February 2013, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia), "Harmonizing ELT by Empowering Teachers" (VenTESOL, June 2013, in Valencia, Venezuela), and "Empowering ELLs: Equity, Engagement, Enrichment" (New York State TESOL, November 2014, in the U.S.A.). At the Christians in English Language Teaching (CELT 2013) conference at Dallas Baptist University, one of the advertisements in the program asked attendees: "Are you looking for a career that will let you empower the lives of others?" It then went on to argue that its M.A. TESOL program is "designed to equip you with the insight and experience you need to make a difference as an ESL instructor." So the vocabulary of

‘empowerment’ is current both in the broader field and in some Christian TESOL programs, at least in the U.S. And if Christians are to work for students’ empowerment to make a difference, then they need to understand what this means in ELT, as well as the broader thinking in the field.

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* online, to “empower” has two main meanings: 1) “To invest with power, especially legal power or official authority,” and 2) “To equip or supply with an ability; enable.” ESL/EFL teachers certainly hope to enable our students to learn and use English effectively, for their specific purposes. As such we can help them develop their English ability. We may also wish to invest students with power, but this is not necessarily something we can usually do, legally or officially, especially if we work with children. On its TeachingEnglish website<sup>4</sup>, the British Council also noted that “Empowerment refers to giving learners the power to make their own decisions about learning rather than the teacher having all the control.” So in ELT it seems that developing learner autonomy is also part and parcel of empowering ESL/EFL students, and is reflected in Liu’s (2010) brief reflection.

Second, in the ELT literature, English itself has been the focus of three main approaches to global ELT issues. One is *linguistic imperialism*, associated with Phillipson (2012), who argues that such linguistic imperialism is “alive and kicking,” and connected with five tenets: that 1) “English is best taught monolingually,” 2) “The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker,” 3) “The earlier English is taught, the better the results,” 4) “The more English is taught, the better the results,” and 5) “If other languages are used much, standards of English will drop” (Phillipson, 2009, p. 12). A whole article could be written about Phillipson’s linguistic imperialism and these five tenets, but here I simply want to point out that in this view, English is a problem. A second, perhaps more positive, approach is that English is *a means of mobility*, largely socially and economically, and this view is associated with Brutt-Griffler (2002) and others, including some of the students whose views are included in Purgason’s (2014) survey. This second approach seems to reflect both the economic value of English knowledge and the thinking behind the advertisement at the CELT 2013 conference: through teaching English, ESL/EFL instructors can help empower their students. Finally, the third approach by academics like Prodromou (2008) is to view English as *a global lingua franca*, for both native and non-native English speakers. This final view is perhaps the most controversial, overall, since people in this approach argue that English no longer belongs just to native English speakers, and thus

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/knowledge-database/empowerment>.

we should accept varying English standards (see, e.g., Sewell, 2013). In this view native English speakers need to share the power they have held over the years as guardians of the language.

### **Revisiting the Questions**

Given the writings and views mentioned thus far, we should return to the first two questions asked at the start of this article. First, is the ELT *industry* a problem, as Mahboob (2011) suggests? Over the years I have talked with many in TESOL who argue cogently for each side. There are indeed many good ESL/EFL programs where students are learning English and are thus able to meet their needs, whether for academic, leisure, religious, or other purposes. We must also, however, admit that there are nonetheless problems in the ELT industry, especially where teachers are exploited and under resourced, and where students are promised unrealistic gains in their English language proficiency in a short period of time by unscrupulous schools that do not provide the input, support, and time frame required for most ESL/EFL students to be able to make effective progress. So the answer is mixed – there are aspects of the ELT field that are problematic, but there are also reputable programs where students are learning English!

Second, in what ways might English language *teachers* be part of the above problems? And what about *Christians* in particular? Teachers may be part of the problem if we similarly encourage our students to have unrealistic hopes and expectations, or do not provide the quality instruction, resources, and support necessary for our students to succeed in learning English. One major issue pointed out by critics Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003) is that one way that Christian teachers may be part of the problem is that a number of Christian organizations have been quick to send untrained and thus unqualified individuals as ESL/EFL ‘teachers’, robbing students of the ability to learn from appropriate and qualified English instructors (see also McCarthy, 2000). This unfortunately seems to especially be the case if the individuals such organizations are recruiting and sending are native English speakers.

If Christians are going to ask and thoughtfully answer such questions, we need some basis on which to formulate our responses. For example, we need to determine what a “problem” is, and how someone may or may not be addressing or contributing to it. We also need a framework to help us determine appropriate principles or practices, as well as resources, for an ELT that empowers both students and teachers. The remainder of this essay aims to help to start developing such a framework for Christian educators in ELT.

## **Reflections Towards Some Answers**

Responses to the three prominent views of English above vary significantly, but some insights and reflections here might help move us towards a deeper understanding which can inform our principles and practices as Christian educators in ELT.

### *Responding to Linguistic Imperialism*

There can be no doubt that Phillipson's (1992, 2009) linguistic imperialism approach has generated the most discussion in the literature. In a recent book review of Phillipson (2009), Waters (2013), for example, rightly states, "in a nutshell . . . Phillipson's thesis is that English as a world language is a largely negative force and that ELT, in aiding and abetting it, is likewise a morally questionable activity" (p. 127). In yet another review of that book, King (2011) similarly observes, "for Phillipson the English language is like a nasty virus, a plague bacillus, a lackey of just about everything he hates: globalization, multinational corporations, Western values, America, McDonalds, capitalism... The list of things Phillipson hates is very long" (p. 284). These reviews reflect the very ideological tone of the arguments and criticisms surrounding linguistic imperialism, but they can also help Christians reflect on our views of English and ELT.

The truth is that many ESL/EFL teachers, especially from Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, do not see any problem with English as a world language. For native English speakers, it is our language, and since it is useful for us we are happy to help others learn to use it for their personal or professional purposes. But we must also be aware that pedagogy and research recognize that the facts on English language learning are more complex than linguistic imperialism's proponents argue. There is a role for our students' mother tongues in their ESL/EFL learning, as well as our teaching (Deller & Rinvoluceri, 2002), the "ideal" teacher is someone who is trained and skilled in helping others learn, whether or not he or she is a native English speaker (Mahboob, 2010), students can learn English at various ages (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012), and drawing on students' first language knowledge can be a help, not just a hindrance, as they learn ESL/EFL (Ringbom & Jarvis, 2009). Even if there is some truth to aspects of some of Phillipson's five tenets of linguistic imperialism, we need not discard valuable aspects of ELT when we reject other problematic ones.

### *English as an Economic 'Good'*

Whether or not one agrees with Phillipson and his take on linguistic imperialism, I

believe Christian ESL/EFL teachers need to understand better the connections between economics and language. As Wright (2002) observed, “Language is an economic entity – what the economists call an economic ‘good’ – as much as any other social phenomenon. We do not have the option of ignoring its economic dimensions” (p. 3). A recent report by the British Council (2013) specifically lays out how “learning English” is a cultural activity that can result in both direct (“improved skills and knowledge”) and indirect (“increased access to and exchange of information”) impact for individual participants, which may then result in “increased interest in business opportunities with UK” and thus offer potential long-term economic impact to the United Kingdom (Chart 14, p. 23). This is just one direct example of how the English language may be viewed as an economic ‘good’, for both the ESL/EFL learner and for societies like the United Kingdom where English is dominant.

I believe Christians have generally downplayed the economic aspects of English and ELT. While I don’t necessarily always agree with them, I also think that we might learn from critical studies by Coluzzi (2012) in Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia, Kobayashi (2013) in Japan, and others, especially if we hope to offer English as a resource for multicultural understanding, like Toh (2012), and enrich our students’ English knowledge and use, as in Mok’s (1997) study in Hong Kong. In short, it seems to me that Christians need to be aware of both the challenges and the possibilities for English and ELT these and other authors discuss.

A final point about English as an economic ‘good’ connects to the earlier critical views. As Christians who want to think seriously about and interact with critical perspectives in ELT, we must acknowledge that many of our critics also recognize the potential benefits of English language learning and teaching. For example, in writing about the market realities of ELT in China, Guo and Beckett (2012) declare,

We acknowledge the empowerment that English language acquisition may confer, as is the case with the acquisition of any knowledge. However, we argue that the increasing dominance of the English language is contributing to neo-colonialism through linguisticism by empowering the already powerful and leaving the disadvantaged and powerless further behind . . . (pp. 58-59)

As this quote indicates, Guo and Beckett see ELT as empowering, yet they are also concerned about how English itself perhaps contributes to what they call neo-colonialism and linguisticism.

*Christian Teachers on English and TESOL*

Several years ago, I conducted a survey of 30 Christian teachers working in TESOL to determine how they viewed the influence of Christianity on English (Lessard-Clouston, 2009). While all respondents viewed English as an important language, only 57% felt there was a strong influence of Christianity on English, and 61% viewed such influence mostly positively (Lessard-Clouston, 2009, pp. 32-33). These are opinions, and we are all entitled to our own. However, I wonder if perhaps Christians have not thought very deeply, nor very often, about English and its role in education, business, or even the ELT industry. Nor is there much academic evidence that we have really thought very much about Christian views of language more generally<sup>5</sup>.

Recent research has nonetheless begun to shed some light on how Christian ESL/EFL teachers view the interaction of their personal beliefs and their professional lives. In a questionnaire study of 23 teachers in the Christian Educators in TESOL Caucus shortly before it was closed, Baurain (2012) reported the following findings:

- One of the primary perceptions of the questionnaire respondents was that Christian ESOL teachers should be loving, in a traditional sense of *charity* or acting for the holistic good of others. (p. 321, original emphasis)
- Another key perception . . . was that Christian ESOL teachers should respect students as intrinsically valuable human beings. (p. 322)
- “student-centeredness” . . . Christian teachers should do all they can to discover and serve students’ goals, both in and out of class. (p. 324)
- witness . . . respondents prioritized living out their Christian faith both in and out of the classroom, with the goal of persuading others to believe . . . . (p. 325)

In short, Baurain (2012) noted that Christian ESL/EFL teachers believe they should be loving, respectful, student-centred, and live their lives both in and out of the classroom in such a way that they might witness to their faith, but Baurain also rightly stated that these practices are “non-exclusive” to Christianity (p. 328).

In more recent research (Lessard-Clouston, 2013), I also used a questionnaire among eight volunteer ESL/EFL teachers at two Christian universities, in America and in Indonesia (four each), in order to conduct preliminary research on the integration of faith and learning in ESL/EFL instruction in these contexts. Results revealed that “faith and learning integration is indeed reported to be taking place in ESL/EFL classes . . . yet its practice seems to vary widely and is reportedly carried out to varied extents” (p. 129). Some teachers used self-developed

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<sup>5</sup> Though see Lessard-Clouston (2012), Pasquale and Bierma (2011), Poythress (2009), and Robison (2011) for recent and promising work towards a more robust Christian view of language.

materials, for example, while others simply used commercial textbooks. In the end, I concluded that participants “believe there are clear challenges in carrying out faith-learning integration in ESL/EFL, yet they also perceive significant benefits for themselves and their students” (Lessard-Clouston, 2013, p. 133).

These initial studies reveal that Christian ESL/EFL teachers see their beliefs as part and parcel of themselves and their teaching, and suggest that more research in these areas could be beneficial to Christian ESL/EFL teachers in the field. Both authors affirm we need more such studies: “Future research in this area is called for” (Baurain, 2012, p. 329).

### **Principles and Practices for ELT**

The section above has begun to answer our third question, on what *principles* or *practices* should guide Christians in English language teaching. Baurain’s (2012) participants believe Christian ESL/EFL teachers should be loving, respectful, student-centred, and yet true to themselves and their beliefs. The Lessard-Clouston (2013) study also gave examples of how such teachers at explicitly Christian universities go about integrating their faith and students’ learning in their various ESL/EFL classes.

#### *Six Principles: CREATE*

Turning to a more general but useful TESOL ‘white paper’, Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) offered the acronym CREATE for six principles they believe should be present in ELT: “collaboration, relevance, evidence, alignment, transparency, and empowerment” (p. 13). They argue, for example, that *collaboration* should be among policymakers, teachers, and other stakeholders, while *relevance* addresses language policies, practices, and materials. Analysis and best practices can provide *evidence* for those involved, and *alignment* should exist between students and teachers’ goals and the curriculum and materials. According to Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012), *transparency* deals with objectives and outcomes, hopefully disseminated to appropriate outlets, and “*empowerment* means that the ultimate objective of any ELT project should be the *empowerment* of local communities, teachers, and students through collaborative, relevant, evidence-based, and transparent practices” (p. 16, emphasis mine). While short on specifics, Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) argue that their principles have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in TESOL. I would assert that these principles can also help Christians in ELT consider issues in empowerment in our field, because I believe

*empowerment requires good pedagogy.* In essence, good teachers and professionals need to know ourselves, our students, our contexts, our teaching methods, and the various resources at our disposal. When we do, we can teach English effectively and help our students learn, no matter what approach we take to English.

### *Christian Views of Empowering Pedagogy*

In order to empower our students, Christian educators may also draw on the work of a number of thoughtful Christians who have recently begun to record and publish their views on issues relevant to good ESL/EFL pedagogy. Purgason (2009), for example, offers four biblically-based “classroom guidelines for teachers with convictions,” namely being honest and transparent about one’s identity, knowing one’s context and students, living in humility and gentleness, and being “committed to excellence in teaching” and curricular choices (p. 189). These guidelines seem to both reflect and complement Mahboob and Tilakaratna’s (2012) CREATE principles, while supporting effectiveness and integrity (Dorner, 2011).

Tokudome (2009) also offers four principles for Christian teachers who aim to respond to criticism but promote further dialogue with those who challenge us: “**Be** a true Christ-follower, **Only** hold to moral absolutes, **Love** each student unconditionally, and **Do** everything with excellence” (p. 10, original emphasis). Tokudome suggests that if we work in ELT in this manner, we will “be BOLD,” and this view seems to go along with the reported perspectives of Christian teachers in the Baurain and Lessard-Clouston studies.

In responding to linguistic imperialism criticisms surrounding inequality in ELT, Stover (2010) argues against the “Marxist mistake” and for a more Classical Liberalism “emphasis on individual empowerment” (p. 2). Many Christians in ELT may be sympathetic towards this take, particularly in response to Phillipson (2012). Winslow (2012) also discusses critical pedagogy and some areas where it might offer common ground for Christians in ELT, noting three main principles: “recognizing that worldviews matter,” “transparency regarding our Christian beliefs and mission,” and (following Baurain, 2007) “respect for persons” (Winslow, 2012, pp. 9-10). All these ESL/EFL practices and teaching principles challenge us as Christians, but they can also help us set realistic expectations in ELT.

In a short reflection, EFL lecturer Wicking (2012) discusses the dilemma facing Christian educators in Japan, where teaching religion in public schools is banned, but many still desire to

share their faith. Like Baurain (2007), Wicking (2012) rightly notes that 1) “a teacher’s personal belief system *cannot* be separated from his or her teaching practice” (see also Johnston, 2003) and 2) “all teaching aims to change people” (p. 37, original emphasis). Drawing on work by Snow (2001) and others, Wicking (2012) concludes:

And so it seems that one acceptable solution to the Christian teacher’s dilemma is: Be a good teacher. Do an excellent job. Work hard to encourage and motivate students and cooperate with colleagues. This is perhaps the best way that one’s faith in God can be expressed inside and outside the classroom. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” (Colossians 3:23) (p. 38)

Here Wicking echoes many others who have argued that sharing one’s Christian faith through one’s profession is something that needs to be done after we have a record of excellence and professionalism. I agree<sup>6</sup>. In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2009) writes:

Unfortunately, Paul never wrote a “Letter to TESOL” and therefore Christian language teachers need to decide for themselves on the best strategy to follow the Great Commission. I myself really like the advice attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” (p. 156)

As Dörnyei states, individual ESL/EFL teachers need to discern how to live empowering lives, as well as how to practise empowering pedagogy in our classes.

### *Research on Christians in SLA and ELT*

Thankfully second language acquisition (SLA) research has recently begun to address Christian learners and teachers, concluding that sacred texts can and do enhance motivation in SLA (Lepp-Kaethler & Dörnyei, 2013), “learners’ empowerment arising from their faith in God” is possible (Ding, 2013, p. 202), and Christian teachers can experience an integration of their Christianity and their profession as English language professionals (Chan, 2013). In her interview case study of four “Christian language professionals,” Chan (2013) concluded that even successful, “committed” Christian educators display unique patterns and degrees of stability in their vision and practice as professionals in ESL/EFL. So empowerment on both a personal and professional level is possible and appears to be central to English language learning and teaching. It seems, however, that we still need much more research in this area, including some

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<sup>6</sup> Readers might be interested in Henderson’s (2014) article on the topic of God in the classroom, which does not specifically address teachers’ religious views but argues instead for principled discussions of religion in ESL/EFL, using sacred texts. Penner (2013) offers another helpful perspective on religion in class, and additional examples.

on learner autonomy in TESOL, if indeed that is an important part of empowerment in ELT, as the British Council has suggested.

### **Scriptures That Might Guide Us**

We have begun to address the fourth question, on Scriptures that might guide us as Christians aiming toward empowerment in ELT. I believe that most Christians would agree that the Bible can guide our actions, thinking, and practices in our ESL/EFL teaching (as seen, too, in the quotes from authors above, and from participants in Baurain, 2012). Indeed, our principles and practices can and ideally should be based on Scripture. For most Christian educators, Jesus is the model teacher, and in our relationships with students and colleagues we are to have His mindset of servanthood, humility, and obedience to God (Philippians 2:6-8). As we face criticism in ELT, then, we do well to follow Jesus' command to be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Whether or not we see ourselves as sheep among wolves in our contexts for life and work, we need to understand our situation and know the broader issues and approaches to Christians in our field. But, as Wicking (2012) suggested, we also need to be professional and teach well, so that others will see the fruit of our work (Matthew 6:43-45).

For Christian educators, James 3:1 is a sobering verse<sup>7</sup>, which tells us, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." Whether we work in public, private, or home schools, or a language institute, college, or university, we should take our role as ESL/EFL educators and teacher trainers seriously, since we who teach will be judged more strictly. Our subject matter and our relationships are from God. As a result, it behooves us as we work with students, staff, and colleagues to "act justly and . . . love mercy and . . . walk humbly with [our] God" (Micah 6:8c).

In teaching in various contexts, I have tried to practise Romans 12:14: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." What does this mean for Christians in ELT? Can I bless difficult students or colleagues? My personal experience and response has been that no, in and of myself I cannot. But thankfully, Philippians 3:13 reminds me, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." By and through faith in Jesus Christ, who strengthens me emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually, I *can* not only bless but also serve and teach difficult students and colleagues. For as Romans 8:28 reminds us, "we know that in all things God works

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<sup>7</sup> All quotations are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” If we are called to serve in and teach ESL/EFL, God is at work in us, in our students and colleagues, and God will work all things for good.

A final point worth emphasizing here is that “empowerment” for Christian educators can and should be very different than in secular or other religious approaches, because our empowerment comes from and is all about Jesus Christ. As Colossians 3 makes clear, Christ is the source of our being and because of our relationship with Him our “life is now hidden with Christ in God” (verse 3). In short, whatever other divisions that might exist for us here in this world, for Christians “Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:10). Accordingly, Christian educators working in ELT should strive to empower our students and colleagues not in our own strength, but through Christ: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). Scripture is a great source of strength and encouragement to us as we aim to relate our personal beliefs, our teaching, and our obedience to Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Christians have a lot to contribute in English language teaching and research (see, e.g., Wong, Kristjánsson, & Dörnyei, 2013), but to do so we need to understand the broader issues, and reflect prayerfully on what to do, how to live, and how to teach. In ESL/EFL, using a textbook called *English for Empowerment* (Damodar, Venkateshwarlu, Narendra, Babu, & Sundaravalli, 2009) may be helpful in some situations, but that alone is insufficient in my view if Christians want to contribute to the field and to our students’ empowerment.

In this article, I posed a number of difficult but important questions concerning the ELT industry, Christian English language teachers, and principles and practices that should guide Christian educators in this challenging, exciting, and growing field. I also drew on the ELT literature in order to highlight both challenges and opportunities Christian educators face as we teach and aim to empower both our students and colleagues. Finally, I noted some Scriptures that might help guide us in this process, and reminded Christians in ELT that our empowerment ultimately comes through Jesus Christ.

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