

Hour 5 – Inclusion Without Taboo: Teaching Complex Realities

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1. What Is Social Identity?

Social identity refers to the social groups and categories we belong to such as **language background, gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, or professional identity.**

In ELT, social identity influences **how learners see themselves, how they use English, and how confident or safe they feel during lessons.**

When identity is recognized and included, students often participate more actively.

When identity is ignored or stereotyped, learners may disengage or silence themselves.

2. What Is Student Empowerment?

Student empowerment means giving learners the **tools, autonomy, and opportunities** to take ownership of their learning regardless of identity, background, or ability.

Empowerment in Action

- **Student Voice:** Students contribute to decisions about topics, tasks, and learning paths.
- **Choice & Autonomy:** Learners choose how to demonstrate knowledge.
- **Creative Expression:** Activities invite identity, culture, and language into the classroom.
- **Collaborative Roles:** Leadership rotates; every voice matters.
- **Growth Mindset:** Mistakes become part of the learning journey.

3. Inclusive Teaching: Removing Barriers

Inclusive teaching is the commitment to **equitable participation and representation** of all learners.

Inclusion Means Recognizing:

-  Multilingual learners
 -  Neurodivergence (ADHD, dyslexia, autism)
 -  Disabilities / SEN
 -  Social identities & gender identities
 -  LGBTQIA+ learners
 -  Socioeconomic factors
 -  Diverse learning preferences
 -  Access to materials and technology
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4. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in ELT

CDA examines **how language shapes power, identity, and social reality**.

Educators use CDA to:

- Uncover hidden assumptions in texts
- Identify stereotypes, biases, omissions
- Teach students to question narratives, representation, and authority
- Adapt or redesign materials through an equity lens

Ask:

- *Who is represented? Who is missing? Why?*
 - *Whose voice is centered? Whose is silenced?*
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5. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in ELT

UDL provides **multiple ways to learn, multiple ways to engage**, and **multiple ways to show understanding**.

Three Core Principles:

- **Multiple Means of Representation:** visuals, audio, diverse examples, demonstrations
- **Multiple Means of Action/Expression:** videos, presentations, discussions, projects
- **Multiple Means of Engagement:** choice, relevance, collaboration, personal goals

UDL ensures that **every student succeeds**, not only those who fit traditional models.

6. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

ESP focuses on teaching English for particular **professional**, **academic**, or **community** needs (e.g., tourism English, academic English, medical English).

Identity matters because each learner brings **unique goals, backgrounds, and social identities** into these specific contexts.

7. Inclusive Vocabulary: Moving Beyond Stereotypes

Using inclusive vocabulary ensures that language does not marginalize or exclude certain groups. Here are but a few examples:

Traditional	Inclusive Alternative
Fireman	Firefighter
Mailman	Postal worker
Chairman	Chairperson
Air hostess	Flight attendant
Waiter/Waitress	Service attendant
Housewife	Homemaker

8. Inclusive Language: Why Pronouns Matter

Language reflects values. Using **gender-neutral pronouns** (they/them/their) affirms student identity, prevents exclusion, and supports safer, more respectful classrooms.

Examples:

- ✓ A student should bring *their* materials.
- ✓ If someone has a question, *they* can ask.
- ✓ A learner may push *themselves/themself** to grow.

Avoiding gender assumptions removes invisible barriers.

NOTE: "themself" is an increasingly **accepted singular, gender-neutral reflexive pronoun, particularly in informal contexts and when referring to a specific nonbinary individual. Its use is **still debated**, thus, for formal writing "themselves" is considered the standard, safer choice.*

9 . Reflection Questions

- How do my materials represent student identities?
 - Who is empowered in my classroom and who isn't?
 - What small change can I implement **tomorrow** to reduce barriers?
 - How can I include more student voice and autonomy?
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CASE STUDIES & SOLUTIONS

Case Study 1: Multilingual Tourism Worker

(Linguistic Identity, Accent, Customer Interaction)

A multilingual tourism worker draws on several languages in their daily interactions, but their linguistic identity, including speaking English with a non-native accent, strongly shapes the communicative demands of their job.

Guests may respond differently to them than to native-English colleagues, sometimes stereotyping their abilities or underestimating their expertise. This can influence how confidently they communicate in high-pressure situations, such as managing complaints, giving safety instructions, or guiding large groups. At the same time, their multilingualism allows them to build rapport quickly with diverse tourists, often shifting languages strategically to support guests.

Their ESP needs include:

- practicing conflict-resolution and service-recovery language that supports clear, professional communication
- using accent-friendly scripts for tours, announcements, and customer explanations
- learning strategies for managing guest expectations and navigating bias or dismissive behaviour
- strengthening the language needed to maintain authority and credibility in customer-facing contexts
- developing strategies for shifting tone and register appropriately when moving between informal guest interactions and more formal service situations (e.g., tours, safety briefings)

Their **linguistic identity**, accent, repertoire, and multilingual flexibility, deeply affects how interactions unfold, making ESP support essential for confidence, clarity, and professional presence.

✿ Case Study 2: First-Generation University Student in Engineering

(Socioeconomic Background, Academic Identity, Confidence in Expertise)

A first-generation engineering student often enters university with fewer opportunities to engage with academic English compared to peers from more privileged backgrounds.

They may have limited prior exposure to academic genres such as lab reports, abstracts, or technical presentations, and may come from home environments where academic English is rarely encountered. These factors can lead to self-doubt, reduced classroom participation, and internalized beliefs such as “people like me don’t belong in this field,” which directly affect the ways they communicate expertise.

Their ESP needs include:

- gaining explicit support with engineering discourse (definitions, processes, report structures)
- developing oral presentation skills that help them speak confidently about their designs and data
- fostering the belief that academic expectations are achievable
- building language for self-advocacy, collaboration, and active participation in seminars and labs
- building familiarity with collaborative academic communication such as group problem-solving talk, design-meeting language, and peer-review discussions

Their **socioeconomic and educational background** intersects with their academic identity, shaping their confidence and communicative patterns. ESP instruction can help them claim their voice as legitimate contributors to engineering knowledge.

✿ Case Study 3: Migrant Learner Training for Customer Service

(Migration Status, Cross-Cultural Communication, Power Dynamics)

A migrant learner training for a customer service role must navigate professional communication shaped by both workplace expectations and their social identity as a migrant.

They might encounter discrimination, microaggressions, or assumptions about their competence, which can affect their comfort in speaking up. Interactions with customers require careful adaptation of politeness strategies to avoid misunderstandings, while communication with coworkers may involve frequent code-switching to bridge cultural or linguistic gaps.

Because migrants are often positioned in lower-status roles within hospitality, this learner must also negotiate authority while providing service.

Their ESP needs include:

- developing culturally flexible politeness and service-language strategies
- practicing diplomatic responses to demanding or disrespectful customers
- using English that enables confident participation in team communication and task delegation
- learning scripts and routines that reduce cognitive load in fast-paced service environments
- strengthening the language needed to advocate for fair treatment or clarify misunderstandings professionally without escalating conflict

Their **migration status** shapes power dynamics, expectations, and daily communicative challenges. ESP support can empower them to participate fully and professionally in customer service.

Case Study 4: Teacher in a Multicultural Primary School

(Intersectionality: Cultural Background, Linguistic Repertoire, Professional Identity)

A primary school teacher working in a multicultural public school often navigates intersecting layers of identity, both their own and their students'.

For example, a bilingual teacher from a minority ethnic background may teach learners who speak multiple home languages, come from migrant families, or have varying levels of exposure to English. In this environment, the teacher's linguistic repertoire is a professional asset, but it may also position them as an informal mediator between the school and families, adding extra communicative responsibilities beyond their teaching duties.

Their ESP needs include:

- developing culturally responsive communication strategies for speaking with parents from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds
- managing classroom English that balances clarity, inclusivity, and age-appropriate language
- handling conflict-resolution talk, especially when cultural misunderstandings arise
- producing written communication (announcements, progress notes) that is accessible to families with limited English proficiency
- developing strategies for simplifying complex academic content into age-appropriate, inclusive classroom English that supports all learners' comprehension

The teacher's **intersectional identity** as an educator, bilingual speaker, and member of a minority cultural community, shapes the communicative load expected of them. ESP training can help them refine both their pedagogic English and their cross-cultural communication toolkit.

Case Study 5: IT Support Specialist

(Emotional Regulation, Job Pressure, Communication Under Stress)

An IT support specialist often works at the front line of a fast-paced digital environment, where communication is as important as technical knowledge.

Consider a specialist who is highly competent but prone to stress when dealing with sudden problems, angry clients, or multiple simultaneous requests. Their stress may impair their spoken fluency, their ability to explain steps calmly, or their capacity to de-escalate tense situations.

Their ESP needs include:

- practicing clear, calm walkthroughs of technical procedures (“Let’s go through this step by step...”)
- building language strategies for de-escalation (“I understand this is urgent; let’s solve it together.”)
- strengthening listening comprehension under pressure, especially with irritated or impatient callers
- learning formulaic expressions for maintaining professionalism even when overwhelmed
- role-playing stressful scenarios to improve automaticity in scripted routines
- practicing concise language for prioritizing tasks and managing multiple requests (“I’ll address the urgent issue first, then follow up on the others”)

Their **emotional regulation challenges**, combined with a **high-stress professional context**, directly shape the kind of English they need. ESP support can equip them with predictable language frames that reduce cognitive load and help them remain effective during intense moments.

Case Study 6: (Female) Flight Attendant

(High-Stakes Communication, Emotional Labour, Dual Audience: Passengers + Crew)

A female flight attendant must communicate in a variety of high-stakes situations, balancing safety, hospitality, and teamwork.

She may need to support panicky first-time flyers, calm demanding passengers, follow strict safety protocols, and coordinate under pressure with a crew that may itself be stressed or

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fatigued. Her professional identity requires emotional labour: projecting warmth, authority, and composure, often simultaneously.

Her ESP needs include:

- mastering safety-related English that must be delivered clearly, confidently, and without ambiguity
- using supportive language with anxious passengers (“You’re safe, and I’m right here with you.”) and managing complaints diplomatically (“Thank you for bringing this to my attention. Let me see what I can do.”)
- coordinating effectively with crew using concise, procedural language (“Cabin secure. Ready for take-off.”)
- handling conflict or refusal scenarios in a calm yet firm manner
- rehearsing emergency-response communication that requires calm, authoritative language under extreme pressure

Her work involves **dual audiences**: passengers and crew, each requiring a different register, tone, and communicative purpose. ESP training can reinforce her ability to shift styles quickly and maintain professionalism in emotionally charged or safety-critical environments.

Resources for Inclusion and Empowerment

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