Innovations in English Language Education: New Issues and Trends

Edited by Bronwen Hughes and Margaret Rasulo

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Reimagining language education today

Language teaching encapsulates the complex interconnections between learners and their diverse social environments. It calls for a dynamic interplay among identities that continually evolve across numerous socio-cultural contexts and temporal frameworks. This multifaceted process requires educators and learners alike to engage with language not as a static set of rules but as a living, evolving system that both shapes and is shaped by the communities in which it exists. Language learning is thus not only about mastering grammatical structures or vocabulary; it encompasses a broader engagement with cultural norms, values, and expectations that vary dramatically across contexts. Such an approach acknowledges that language embodies the lived experiences of speakers, influenced by regional dialects, colloquialisms, and the unique histories embedded within linguistic communities (Kramsch 1993; Canale/Swain 1980).

This intricate process is further shaped by social interactions which serve as conduits for learning by facilitating the exchange of ideas, values, and knowledge that enrich the learner's perspective. Cognitive theories central to language acquisition, such as Bourdieu's theory of habitus (1991), emphasize that language use reflects the social and cultural contexts in which it is embedded. Learners do not merely absorb language; they actively construct meaning through interactions that reinforce or challenge existing worldviews (Vygotsky 1978; Swain 2000). This construction process is mediated by the social capital learners bring into each interaction and elements such as prior linguistic knowledge, socio-economic background, and cultural heritage all influence the way individuals engage with a new language and the identity they develop through this engagement (Bourdieu 1986; Norton 2000).

These interrelations reflect a nuanced understanding of language as not merely a communication tool, but as a medium through which learners interpret and navigate the social world. Language, in this light, becomes a lens through which learners view and understand different facets of identity,

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such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity, and engage with the power structures these categories entail (Gee 1996; Pavlenko 2007). Through language, learners gain insight into how societies function, how cultural values are preserved and transmitted, and how individuals and groups assert and negotiate their identities. Thus, language teaching is situated at the intersection of personal identity, cultural heritage, and collective social structures. It serves as a vital bridge between individual expression and communal belonging, allowing learners not only to communicate but to actively participate in the cultural and social fabric of their communities. In this way, language education becomes a powerful transformative tool, equipping learners with the skills to engage with diverse cultures and ideologies, fostering intercultural understanding, and contributing to the ongoing discourse that shapes the world they inhabit (Byram 1997).

Changes in language education, particularly within the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT), are inherently imbued with profound political significance, as language serves not merely as a communication tool but as a potent instrument for societal transformation and ideological transmission (Pennycook 2001). Language shapes our perceptions of reality and influences our interactions, making it a pivotal medium through which power and cultural norms are both established and contested. In an era characterized by intensified globalization, ELT has undergone significant transformations to equip learners not only with essential linguistic competencies but also with the critical thinking and intercultural skills necessary for effective engagement in a multifaceted global society (Graddol 2006). This evolution reflects an increasing awareness of the intricate power dynamics embedded within language education, as the ability to communicate in English transcends mere functional communication. Proficiency in English is now perceived as a passport, granting learners access to diverse socio-political landscapes, enabling them to unlock economic opportunities, and empowering them to participate meaningfully in cultural dialogues on an international stage (Crystal 2003; Kaplan/Baldauf 1997).

This shift in ELT further emphasizes the role of language as a vehicle for social mobility and empowerment, allowing learners to navigate complex global networks that influence their personal and professional trajectories (Holliday 2009). As they acquire proficiency in English,

learners gain not only a valuable skill set but also the confidence to voice their perspectives and engage with global issues such as climate change, human rights, and social justice. This capability is increasingly significant as the interconnectedness of societies deepens, requiring individuals to engage with diverse viewpoints and negotiate differing cultural norms in their interactions (Matsuda 2012). Thus, ELT serves as a transformative vehicle for cultivating informed global citizens who are not only linguistically adept but also capable of critically engaging with the social, economic, and political dimensions of their interconnected world. This holistic approach to language education and English language teaching and learning acknowledges the importance of fostering agency and responsibility, encouraging learners to become proactive participants in shaping the narratives that define their communities and the global landscape (Pennycook 2007). Indeed, through this lens, ELT emerges as a powerful catalyst for change, inspiring learners to challenge inequities, advocate for inclusivity, and contribute positively to the evolving tapestry of global culture and discourse.

Recognizing these political dimensions, language educators assume roles that extend far beyond mere linguistic instruction, actively engaging in the intricate process of shaping our understandings of social structures and individual identities within broader cultural contexts (Leung 2005). This expanded role necessitates an acute awareness of the socio-political landscapes in which learners exist, as educators integrate discussions of power dynamics, privilege, and cultural representation into their curricula. The evolution of ELT in response to globalization policies further underscores the transformative potential of language as a critical tool for shaping worldviews, fostering intercultural empathy, and preparing learners to navigate and participate meaningfully within diverse communities in a rapidly shifting global landscape (Warriner 2017).

Through a curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking and reflection, educators encourage learners to interrogate the societal norms and values that inform their own identities while simultaneously examining the cultural narratives of others (Freire 1970). This approach not only promotes linguistic proficiency but also cultivates critical consciousness, enabling learners to recognize and challenge inequities in their own communities and beyond. By pairing linguistic instruction with critical

social awareness, educators empower learners to engage with the socio-political influences that shape their interactions, fostering a more holistic approach to language learning that is responsive to the complexities of modern society (Pennycook 2010).

This pedagogical shift is essential when creating inclusive learning environments that respect and celebrate diversity. Educators can leverage language as a means of empowerment, encouraging learners to articulate their own experiences and perspectives while also developing the capacity to listen empathetically to the stories of others (Miller 2016; Canagarajah 2005).

The Covid-19 pandemic has markedly transformed traditional perspectives on language education, catalyzing an accelerated integration of technology into pedagogical practices and redefining the very fabric of educational systems (Zhang *et al.* 2020). This unprecedented global crisis served as a pivotal moment, forcing educators and institutions to rethink established methodologies and embrace innovative approaches to teaching and learning. As schools and universities transitioned to remote instruction virtually overnight, the rapid digital shift not only revolutionized pedagogy by creating unprecedented access to a plethora of digital resources, ranging from interactive learning platforms to vast online libraries, but also shed light upon significant disparities in digital literacy and social connectivity. These disparities, which had long existed but were often overlooked, pose formidable challenges to achieving equitable educational outcomes, particularly for marginalized populations who may lack reliable internet access or the necessary technological skills to fully engage with online learning environments (Selwyn 2020).

As we move into the emerging post-pandemic landscape, the significance of digital transformation remains a central concern for educators worldwide. They continue to navigate the evolving demands of an unpredictable educational environment that calls for adaptability and innovation. In this context, educators are confronted with critical issues such as digital equity, which entails ensuring all learners have equal access to technology and the skills to use it effectively (Hague/Payton 2010). Additionally, fostering learner engagement in virtual spaces presents a unique set of challenges, as educators strive to create interactive and stimulating online experiences that replicate the dynamism of in-person classrooms (Moore 2013). Striking a balance between in-person and online

learning becomes increasingly complex, as educators must weigh the benefits of face-to-face interactions against the convenience and flexibility offered by digital platforms (Zimmerman 2020).

This ongoing technological adaptation underscores the resilience and flexibility of language education systems as they embrace a hybridized model of learning. This model seeks to harness the strengths of both traditional and digital methods, facilitating a more inclusive and diverse learning experience (Fadel/Lemke 2008). The integration of technology into language education offers opportunities for differentiated instruction, allowing educators to tailor their teaching approaches to meet the varied needs of students. Furthermore, the use of digital tools can enhance collaborative learning experiences, enabling learners to connect with peers from different cultural backgrounds and geographical locations (Chun *et al.* 2016). Ultimately, the pandemic has served as a catalyst for a fundamental reimagining of language education, compelling educators to innovate and adapt in ways that will have lasting impacts on the future of teaching and learning.

This pivotal shift serves as the foundational premise for the inaugural issue of the *ALLiED* Journal, which critically examines the sweeping societal transformations reshaping global education systems in the 21st century. Changes in this field encompass a myriad of factors, including technological advancements, shifting cultural dynamics, and evolving pedagogical theories, all of which significantly influence the intricate and dynamic relationship between learners and target languages across a spectrum of diverse and shifting contexts (Blommaert 2013; Balirano/Rasulo 2023). Thus, the present issue delves deeply into recent advancements in ELT, highlighting how these developments have not only redefined the boundaries of traditional educational paradigms but have also catalyzed the emergence of innovative methodologies that effectively bridge local and global perspectives.

Encompassing a wide range of practices, from the integration of digital tools and resources to the incorporation of culturally responsive teaching strategies that acknowledge and celebrate the rich diversity of student backgrounds (Gay 2010; Earl 2012), contributions to this issue illuminate how these innovations transcend conventional teaching paradigms by prioritizing learner agency and fostering a more personalized and adaptable learning experience.

By equipping educators with novel strategies and resources, this issue not only empowers them to address the complexities of teaching in a globalized context but also encourages the development of classrooms that are responsive to the unique cultural and linguistic assets that each learner brings. Moreover, the contributions emphasize the importance of fostering a collaborative learning environment where students are encouraged to engage actively with both local and global issues, thus enhancing their critical thinking skills and intercultural competencies (Deardorff 2006). In this way, the *ALLiED* Journal aims to be at the forefront of the ongoing dialogue about the future of language education, exploring how educators can navigate and leverage these profound changes to create enriched learning experiences that prepare students for meaningful participation in an interconnected world.

The overarching aim of this Issue is therefore to present rigorous scholarly research on language education within varied cultural, technological, and pedagogical contexts, thereby underscoring the intricate roles that language, culture, and technology play in shaping modern education. This interplay facilitates a dynamic platform for learners to navigate a complex, globalized network of information, diverse viewpoints, and evolving ideas, effectively preparing them to become engaged and reflective participants in an ever-evolving world (Rasulo 2017). Featured topics include pedagogical innovation in response to digitalization, the unique implications of EFL teaching within the social media landscape, gamified learning environments, the challenges and successes of online classrooms, alternative assessment methods during the pandemic, novel higher education pedagogies, e-learning initiatives, and discourse analysis through digital storytelling. Through these lenses, the issue foregrounds the transformative capacity of language education to empower learners as informed, adaptive, and interculturally aware individuals who can adeptly engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly globalizing world.

Articles

Lucia Abbamonte in *How (Thoroughly) Does the Medium Shape Teaching? Some Considerations on Doctoral Courses in EPP at Vanvitelli University*, examines the profound shift of ELT educators and students from traditional

classrooms to remote teaching and learning environments, leading to the development of a distinct and adaptable skill set. Abbamonte provides valuable insights into how this transition can be effectively managed, drawing on findings from doctoral courses conducted at the Doctoral School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Vanvitelli University.

The article authored by Anna Anselmo and Elena Refraschini, is titled *Combining SLA Theory and Teaching Practice: "Big Bowl of Serial", or, How to Use TV Series to Become Autonomous Learners of English.* This study examines an asynchronous online English course through the lens of Leo van Lier's ecology of language learning framework, emphasizing its four core constructs: relation, action, perception, and quality. The primary aim is to evaluate the course's strengths and identify areas for potential enhancement, offering insights into how well it supports autonomous language learning and where future refinements could improve learner outcomes.

Balirano and De Santo in *Learning English in the Digital Age: eTandem, Autonomy and Intercultural Communication in Online Educational Environments,* explore how this methodology can enhance language learning by fostering autonomy, language skills, and intercultural communication. Conducted within a language university and utilizing Moodle, the research highlights eTandem's role in creating flexible, accessible online exchanges that enrich students' language practice and cultural connections. Findings suggest that eTandem, supported by guidance, reflection, and collaboration, can significantly improve language learning outcomes in higher education.

Francesca D'Adamo's study titled *Gamifying English Learning and Assessment to Reduce Anxiety and Foster Speaking Skills: The Case of Secondary School Students,* delves into the potential of gamification to transform English language learning. D'Adamo addresses a central challenge for Italian students: the considerable stress and anxiety associated with oral and written assessments, which often impedes performance and overall language acquisition. This study explores gamification as a dynamic approach to engage students, fostering greater ease and confidence within the learning process. Grounded in game-based learning theories, gamification is presented as a mechanism to promote learner autonomy, competence, and social connection. By redirecting students' focus on goal-

oriented tasks and leveraging motivation through structured feedback, recognition, and rewards, gamification fosters a more supportive learning environment. Using surveys, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, the research reveals promising outcomes, underscoring the potential of gamified learning to reduce anxiety and improve students' engagement and oral proficiency

Francesca D'Angelo's exploration of *Bilingualism and "Bilingualisms": Different Dimensions and Contexts of Acquisition* offers a nuanced analysis of bilingualism and bilingual education from multiple investigative perspectives. This work delves into the complexity of bilingualism as a phenomenon, examining its categorization ambiguities, its multifaceted impact on educational outcomes, and the crucial influence of acquisition contexts for each language mastered by multilingual individuals. Additionally, the paper addresses the role of metalinguistic awareness in facilitating the learning of additional languages, highlighting the influence of varied acquisition pathways available to learners.

Stefania D'Avanzo's *Storytelling as a Teaching Tool: Some Reflections from Experiences with Undergraduates Students,* examines the growing role of storytelling in enhancing teaching and learning within higher education. In this work, D'Avanzo delves into how various tasks and activities, specifically designed to teach corporate storytelling, can be effectively implemented with undergraduate students. She explores the linguistic and multimodal strategies integral to teaching English within a business university department, highlighting methods and tools that facilitate deeper engagement and skill development in corporate communication.

In *Questioning Across Contexts: A Comparative Analysis of Higher-Order and Lower-Order Questions in CLIL and EMI Education*, classroom questioning strategies are explored by focusing on higher-order and lower-order questions as essential tools for language development and content learning. Hughes and Rasulo examine how lower-order questions aid recall and comprehension, laying a foundation in multilingual settings where students often learn in a non-native language. In contrast, higher-order questions engage students in critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis. Based on classroom recordings from Italian high schools and universities, the study reveals that a balanced use of these question types effectively supports both foundational knowledge and advanced cognitive skills. The

findings highlight the benefits of a structured questioning sequence, where lower-order questions build essential understanding and higher-order questions foster deeper analytical skills. Through a qualitative analysis, this study emphasizes that integrating both question types can create a dynamic, inclusive learning environment, supporting students' progression to critical, independent thinking.

Anthony Yuh presents a compelling analysis of *Digitalization of the Post-pandemic Language Classroom in Cameroon and the Use of Technology in Teaching: Rethinking Local Policy on Classroom Praxis.* In this study, Yuh explores how digitalized language instruction in Cameroon has largely centered on the distance learning platform provided by the Ministry of Secondary Education. However, his primary objective is to call for a paradigm shift toward a more innovative and forward-looking language pedagogy that meets the evolving demands and expectations of 21st-century learners.

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