

## Guest Editorial Preface

# Special Issue of Applied Linguistics Research and ICT Integration for the 21st Century

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### INTRODUCTION

Educators and researchers have experimented with various techniques and approaches to integrate ICT into English language teaching and learning over the last few decades. This issue will focus on new trends employed in the English language classroom that center on the learner, teacher and the process of learning. Being cognizant of the new language learner who has a limited attention span, needs constant stimulation, enjoys being challenged, and wants to engage in collaborative learning, the articles here will explore how educators are coping and how the process of learning has been transformed.

The special issue is aimed at showcasing current trends and possibilities in integrating ICT to help enhance teaching and learning of English language at the tertiary level from the perspectives of classroom practitioners and researchers. There are five articles that highlight the innovativeness and creativity of educators and researchers to harness ICT to make the process of English language learning more effective and efficient.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

*Navigating the Shortcomings of Virtual Learning Environments via Social Media* explores the changing higher education landscape with the emergence of virtual learning environments (VLEs). The article uncovers the shortcomings of using VLEs for language learning in four Malaysian institutions of higher learning with data from in depth interviews and highlights the role of social media in addressing these issues. The researchers explored the VLE affordances, student experience and expectations and the language learning environment to shed light on the phenomenon of adopting digital resources in language learning and teaching. The findings point to the rigid structures and lack of dynamic features in VLEs that do not allow interaction and learner participation. Students are looking for accessibility, usability and flexibility and thus turn to social media. With poor internet connectivity, compatibility issues and low perceived usefulness there is dissatisfaction with the learning environment afforded by VLEs. The researchers posit the growing presence of social media is transforming higher education and it is pertinent for institutions of higher learning to position social media supported learning within the formal pedagogical system to benefit both learners and lecturers.

The second article entitled *Investigating the Need for Computer Assisted Cooperative Learning to Improve Reading Skills among Yemeni University EFL Students* relooks the topic of cooperative learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research used CALL to teach reading comprehension skills to Yemeni learners who had no experience with e-learning to examine if the use of CACL – Computer Assisted Cooperative Learning will help with their reading skills. Adopting a needs analysis approach the researchers used a questionnaire with students and lecturers to glean the feasibility of using CACL and claim there is definitely a keen interest in integrating technology in reading classes. This is because there is the need to provide structured materials identified by lecturers to help learners practice reading on the Internet. This will help develop better confidence among the learners and allow them to develop more reading skills. In addition, integrating technology will help make the classroom more learner centered and encourage more cooperation among the learners.

The article entitled *Social Media Translational Action: Translation Activities by K-Pop Fans in Twitter* examines the process of translation in a microblogging environment to understand how best to deliver k-pop content to fans. The rising popularity of the Korean entertainment industry has had a huge impact in many parts of the world including Asia despite the dearth of proficient translation technology. K-Pop fan translators or prosumers are playing a central role in acting as translators and mediators between Korean artists and fans. The research revealed that translation does not have to be professionally correct but needs to keep to the aesthetic style of the source text by using the expressions in the Korean language. The advantage of using social media is that the translation is immediate and comes in multiple versions as more than one fan is doing the translating. This research has revealed that the process of translation is undergoing change with the availability of technology in the form of social media platforms.

The fourth article *Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Malaysian ESL Students' Perceptions of Kahoot* investigates the emergence of gamification reinforcing the importance technology in education. Specifically, the research focuses on the effectiveness and suitability of Kahoot – a game based learning platform to motivate learners to learn more effectively and efficiently. A survey approach was used to collect data from students enrolled in a remedial English proficiency course after they had been exposed to 14 Kahoot sessions. It can be surmised that the findings strengthen the value of gamification to generate interest and motivate students to stay engaged with language learning. Students view games as fun learning and are naturally curious, fascinated and motivated to outdo each other. The students also indicated an interest in the use of Kahoot and wanted it to be applied in the teaching of other languages.

The final article in this special issue *Nominalization versus Clause Usage in CALL Technology-Mediated Acquisition of EFL Learners' Writing Skills* explores the use of technological support to help learners improve their language skills. The research investigated if task –based assignments can be used to raise awareness and familiarize students with nominalization and clauses. Data were collected from learners in an intermediate level writing course using questionnaires and pre and post-tests. Learners were divided into control and experiment groups. All learners did the writing task using the traditional pen and paper method for the pre-test while for the post-test the students in the control group worked with pen and paper and those in the experiment groups worked on the computer to complete the tasks. The findings reveal some awareness on the use of nominal and clauses with a desire to be more knowledgeable on how to use these in writing. Being able to check if their writing was accurate while using the computer helped students recognize and edit their mistakes quicker while the control group had to wait for the teacher to provide feedback on their writing before they could revise their work. The research confirms that having access to computer aided learning has a positive effect on students use of nominal and clauses in writing tasks.

## CONCLUSION

The articles in this special collection on the integration of ICT into applied linguistics research are significant in that each provides a futuristic approach to language learning and teaching. The current generation in classrooms has limited attention span, wants to receive information and feedback immediately, likes to participate in the learning process itself and likes learning to be a two-way interactive and fun process. VLEs are a common feature but may not necessarily be equipped to handle new demands as these platforms are largely static. Merging VLEs with social media is a novel way to introduce a dynamic platform that can help maintain and sustain interest in learning among learners. Teaching skills like reading and writing is challenging and using traditional approaches may not always yield the right results. Introducing computers to teach reading and writing skills can make the process more learner focused and less burdensome for teachers as errors can be corrected immediately and feedback provided online. Learning interactively and participating in the process of learning is highly popular today and gamification is certainly something to consider here. It is important to dispel the myth that using games is only for fun and not learning and be creative by inserting learning points with these games. A skill like translation can also be turned into a participatory act by encouraging fans to provide translations of favourite foreign movies and songs for instance. This is surely a fast and cheap way to learn a foreign language which many learners are interested to do today.

This special issue only scratches the surface of the affordances of ICT integration into applied linguistics research and should lead the way to more interesting insights and revelations.

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