

Guest Editorial Preface

Special Issue on TESOL and New Technology: Opportunities and Challenges

Rining (Tony) Wei, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Barry Lee Reynolds, University of Macau, China

Welcome to the *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (IJCALLT) special issue for the 2021 Global English Education China Assembly (hereafter “the Assembly”). The Assembly, a high-level international English Language Teaching (ELT) event in China, has been organised annually by *China Daily* in partnership with national and overseas academic institutions. The 2021 Assembly, held in July in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China, attracted over 3,000 attendees, both on site and online (Wei & Hu, 2021). We believe that the 2022 Assembly (<https://tesol.i21st.cn/2022/>), to be held in this summer, will continue to bring together thousands of ELT practitioners, scholars, and researchers, at home and from abroad, to exchange experiences and share research outputs, despite uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although many researchers showed interest in the topic of the special issue, only a small number of their submitted papers were able to be included. This special issue is comprised of five articles authored by six second language (L2) researchers based in the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. These papers deal with both pre-tertiary and tertiary education matters related to the opportunities and challenges of online language learning and instruction, multimodal input, and technology enhanced writing instruction.

The issue begins with Xuyan Qiu and Gavin Bui’s paper, “‘We Are Responsive on Zoom...But’: L2 Learners’ Perceptions Of and Attitudes Towards Speaking Tasks in Physical and Virtual Settings.” The aim of their study was to investigate undergraduate ESL students’ opinions of and attitudes towards pre-task planning in face-to-face and computer-mediated communication. While they found pre-task planning helped students in both conditions prepare to engage in an oral communicative task, some students in both conditions considered the planning as introducing an artificial element into their conversation practice. They also found both groups held similar perceptions and attitudes towards pre-task planning, most likely due to the tight constraints of the research design that limited how they planned for the communicative task. While most of the students preferred face-to-face communication to computer mediated communication, many participants also reported the online environment as relaxing. This result highlights how perception of computer mediated communication is moderated by not only the online learning environment but also the surrounding physical environment (Shadiev, et. al., 2020). The takeaway from this study should be that language teachers requesting students to engage in oral communication should consider incorporating pre-task planning for students that are lacking in confidence or proficiency; teachers may consider increasing impromptu communicative encounters as students’ proficiency and confidence increase. Furthermore, teachers that offer opportunities to students for online oral communication should encourage students to keep

cameras and microphones on to allow for their peers to benefit from the extralinguistic cues that a *black screen* is unable to provide.

The second paper, “The Influence of Contextual and Motivational Variables on Willingness to Communicate in Fully Online EFL Programmes,” written by Sean Grant, aimed to investigate how several environmental and motivational variables affected pre-sessional EFL students’ meaning-focused and form-focused willingness to communicate in an online English for Academic Purposes programme. Results showed task orientation, student group cohesiveness, and desire to learn English as important predictors affecting both types of willingness to communicate. In contrast, teacher support and motivation intensity were found to be weak predictors. These results indicate that online course developers should incorporate a wide range of support materials and offer a wide range of collaborative group tasks to encourage the active verbal participation of students. In connection with data analysis, it is commendable that Grant’s paper uses measures (e.g., Pearson’s r) of effect size. Effect size is much more important than p (the statistical significance level) in inferential statistical procedures (Ellis, 2010; Wei et al., 2019). Unfortunately, in the field of applied linguistics, only a very small number of international journals, such as the eight periodicals listed in Wei et al. (2019) have mandated the reporting of effect sizes. While IJCALLT is not among these journals, it is always advisable for authors to report and interpret effect sizes in their manuscripts employing inferential statistical procedures (e.g., t -tests and regression).

These first two papers share a common thread by highlighting the important role teachers play in orienting students through course and task planning (Ma, et al., 2002); doing so ensures students’ emotional needs are met so that language learning can be enhanced. As online education has gradually become a norm instead of a novelty, the trepidations that language learners feel are less likely to be caused by an unfamiliar environment (Shadiev, et. al., 2020). Task orienting and scaffolding should take pride of place regardless of whether students are taught online or face-to-face.

In the third paper, “Video Captioning Effects on EFL Listening Comprehension and Vocabulary Learning: Help or Hurdle?” Huizhen Wu investigated the effect of five video captioning conditions on vocabulary learning and listening skill development for low proficiency undergraduate EFL learners. Overall, the findings indicated bilingual captioning with highlighted target words led to the most effective listening outcomes and English captions with highlighted words and L1 glosses led to the most robust gains in both receptive and productive meaning of targeted words. While these findings do offer pedagogical implications for the use of captioned videos in foreign language classrooms, we also hope that language teachers will put this knowledge in the hands of learners by encouraging them to engage in informal digital learning of English outside the classroom (Soyoof, 2020). With an ever-expanding store of digital learning resources on the internet, learners need guidance from teachers to know which types of media can result in the most efficient gains in language skills. In terms of data analysis, similar to the second paper, Wu’s paper also reports effect sizes, which follows the recommendations for better statistical reporting practices (Wei & Gao, 2022).

The next two papers in the issue both report language learner engagement with technology for the purpose of writing development. First is Maggie Ma’s “Exploring Students’ Engagement With Computer-Mediated Peer Feedback on L2 Writing” that aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of university EFL students’ affective, cognitive, and behavioural engagement with computer-mediated peer feedback. The two case study participants were found to have different affective responses to the peer feedback received and had different foci when delivering peer feedback. Surprisingly, technology was not shown to exert much influence on the students’ engagement with the peer feedback. These complex results underscore the responsibility of L2 writing teachers to be concerned with ensuring that student writers’ motives for providing feedback aligns with how they engage with the comments they also receive from peers. Integration of technology in the peer feedback giving process should enable student communication; thus, teachers may reconsider whether asynchronous peer feedback should be used when there are options for synchronous interactions between students. As the individual needs that student writers require are different, the results of the study also suggest teachers should

train students in giving feedback that is balanced in focus to better ensure student writer needs have been met.

In the following paper, “Implementing Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching in an EFL Writing Course,” Yi-Chien Wang reports on how engagement in an online video exchange project positively affected EFL university student writers’ descriptive writing. This technology-mediated multimodal writing project had students work in collaborative teams to synthesize information used for descriptive essay writing and script writing about local tourism. The scripts were used to film videos that highlighted local tourist attractions that were uploaded to an online platform to be shared with peers abroad that were engaged in the same project. In addition to receiving and giving peer feedback to their international counterparts, the students were requested to produce a written reflection on the multimodal writing project. After completing the project, the students improved both writing and non-language skills, including video editing, time management, cross-cultural communication, among others. The results of this study underscore the importance of how audience and contextualization for L2 writing instruction can be enhanced through technology-mediated task design.

Editing this special issue has been a labour of love. We are sure that all readers will find the papers intellectually inspiring and of practical importance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Our sincere thanks go to the anonymous reviewers for their voluntary contribution and to the authors for their patience during the review process. Our heart-felt thanks also go to Dr. Bin Zou, Editor-in-Chief of IJCALLT, and Ms. Lun (Gloria) PENG, Secretary-General of the Assembly, for providing constructive feedback during different stages of our preparation for this special issue.

Rining (Tony) Wei
Barry Lee Reynolds
Guest Editors
IJCALLT

REFERENCES

- Ellis, P. D. (2010). *The Essential Guide to Effect Sizes: Statistical power, meta-analysis, and the interpretation of research results*. Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511761676
- Ma, Y., Yu, S., Reynolds, B. L., & Jiang, J. (2022). A qualitative investigation of Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English in the graduate school classroom. *English Teaching & Learning*, 46(1), 77–98. doi:10.1007/s42321-021-00087-1
- Shadiev, R., Yang, M. K., Reynolds, B. L., & Wang, W. Y. (2020). Improving English as a foreign language learning performance using mobile devices in unfamiliar environments. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/09588221.2020.1868533
- Soyoof, A., Reynolds, B. L., Vazquez-Calvo, B., & McLay, K. (2021). Informal digital learning of English (IDLE): A scoping review of what has been done and a look towards what is to come. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1–27. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/09588221.2021.1936562
- Wei, R., & Gao, X. (2022). New research trends in TESOL: An introduction. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 45(2), 220–223. doi:10.1515/CJAL-2022-0204
- Wei, R., & Hu, J. (2021). TESOL in the New Era: Introduction to the 2021 Global English Education China Assembly Special Issue. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 3(4), 1–7. doi:10.46451/ijts.2021.12.01
- Wei, R., Hu, Y., & Xiong, J. (2019). Effect size reporting practices in applied linguistics research: A study of one major journal. *SAGE Open*, 9(2), 1–11. doi:10.1177/2158244019850035