

Foreword from the Guest Editors

It is our great honour to be writing the introduction to this issue of the International Journal of TESOL Studies as the guest editors. This is an extra-large volume, reflecting some of the research managed despite one of the world's largest disruptions to daily life, and so the first task we have is to congratulate these fine scholars for their work during this time. Altogether, the work of 20 scholars appears in this volume, including two prestigious interviewees.

We have had the privilege of reviewing the work in this edition and will give a brief introduction to its contents. In the first paper, "Reflections on the 70-year development of foreign-language teaching and research in China", Weiguo Qu first briefly reviews the titular topic. With respect to teaching, he characterizes the progress in three aspects: textbooks, teaching syllabuses and the aims of the majors; with respect to research, he divides the development into three stages: pre-theory, theory acquisition, and multi-disciplinary theory application. He then discusses a couple of problems and challenges that emerged during the development of teaching and research in the last 70 years in China. Both academic and non-academic factors are discussed by the author.

Qu's broad reflection of foreign language teaching and research in China is followed by Andy Curtis' personal reflections on doing action research. In the paper "Action Research at the Interface: Personal-Professional Reflections on the First 20 Years," Curtis positions action research as comprising three different interfaces: the personal-professional, the theory-practice, and the quantitative-qualitative. The author then discusses a number of under-researched questions, for example: why do we do (action) research? Why should teachers become action researchers? How much time does research require? How much time can a busy classroom give to research? All the questions, which have not before been given much attention, are thought provoking and deserve more reflection by teachers and researchers.

The third paper is an empirical investigation by Luxin Yang. In "Learning in Collective Lesson Planning Discussions: Shifts in EFL Teachers' Practices," Yang investigates the impact of collective lesson planning discussions (CLPDs) on her participating teachers' EFL teaching practices based on data collected from observation notes, CLPDs, interviews, questionnaires and teaching materials. The findings indicate that CLPDs played important roles in the teachers' teaching as a result of sharing resources and exchanging ideas. Factors such as teaching environment and students' English proficiency were observed to influence the implementation of ideas and methods suggested in CLPDs.

This paper on teaching is followed by an assessment study by Jianda Liu and Ximei Li. In the paper titled "Assessing Young English Learners: Language Assessment Literacy of Chinese Primary School English Teachers," the two authors explore primary school English teachers' assessment literacy based on data collected from an online assessment literacy test, classroom observations and interviews of some teachers with a focus on their assessment of and feedback to students. The completed online tests were analyzed quantitatively and the observation and interviews were examined qualitatively, to address two research questions: (1) What is the state of assessment literacy among primary school English teachers in China? (2) What are the barriers for the teachers to assess the young learners and what can be done to remedy the problems and improve teachers' assessment literacy? The results suggest that the teachers mostly based their assessment on their teaching experience and intuition. Therefore, the authors argue that it is necessary and urgent to improve the primary school teachers' assessment literacy.

In the fifth paper, "The Effect of Combining CMC with Instruction on EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence," Ying Zhang investigates whether combining computer-mediated communication (CMC) with explicit instruction (the experiment group) was more effective than CMC alone (the control group) for enhancing L2 learners' pragmatic competence, based on Chinese EFL learners' compliment responses. The findings indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of appropriateness of compliment responses. In addition, the author also conducted semi-structured interviews, which revealed three possible factors influencing the learners' pragmatic development: namely, the learners' L2 pragmatic knowledge, the L1 influence, and their English-learning experience. The study thus adds further evidence to the consensus of the effectiveness of explicit teaching in pragmatics.

The continuation writing task is a newly developed type of integrated writing task proposed by Chuming Wang at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China, which has been continually observed to be able to facilitate foreign language learning. In “The Impact of Collaborative Writing on English Continuation Tasks of Senior High School Students,” Qiang Zhang explores the possible advantage of pair work than individual work in continuation writing, aiming to address three particular aspects: (1) the differences between writings produced by pairs from those by individuals, (2) the dialogues during collaborative writing process, and (3) the students’ attitudes towards collaborative writing in continuation tasks. The findings show that collaborative writing had a positive effect on the senior high school students’ continuation tasks, which was highlighted in the process of collaborative continuation writing. In addition, the students perceived collaborative continuation tasks positively.

In the seventh paper, “Factors Influencing Learners’ Motivation in Mobile-Assisted Language Learning: A Case Study on Four Chinese EFL Learners,” Ke Yang investigates possible factors that may influence Chinese EFL learners’ motivation in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in naturalistic learning. Four Chinese EFL learners participated in this case study, who were asked to write weekly journals and were also interviewed. The results show that the MALL influenced the learners’ learning motivation, whereas interaction on WeChat alone did not affect their motivations.

The eighth paper, “Development and Construct Validation of a Diagnostic Pronunciation Rating Scale by Many-facets Rasch Analysis” by Sen Liu, Zijie Niu and Yueyuan Hao, provides a promising glimpse into the often difficult world of assessing pronunciation (particularly as it has moved from the goal of native-like proficiency to intelligibility). The paper thus fills an important gap in the tools we have with which to effectively measure pronunciation ability. The authors do this by employing a well-rounded model to particularly focus in on the construct validity as seen through the MFRA approach. It further triangulates these results with qualitative data drawn from interviews of both instructors and students, and finds that the application of the pronunciation rating scale is supported by these participants.

This paper is followed by Joy Egbert’s “Engagement, Technology, and Language Tasks: Optimizing Student Learning,” which is particularly pertinent in a world forced to embrace technology-facilitated delivery. In this case, by taking a task-based perspective, new technologies are correlated to new pedagogical approaches to improve student engagement in language learning by integrating opportunity with ways to encourage students to take these opportunities. There are many interesting suggestions on resources to integrate for facilitating the major tools on engagement, including authenticity, interaction, interest, learning support and autonomy. Examples of potential application follow with specific choices of resources and goals.

Our tenth article, Ester J. de Jong’s “The Changing Landscape of English Teaching,” provides us with interesting thoughts on the very nature of our acronym TESOL and what the various antecedent terms might mean in the world today. After briefly addressing “teaching” and “English,” the paper then takes a learner-centered view via “speakers of other languages,” opening up through a discussion of multilingualism in general and then its place within our field. Importantly, both the environment of TESOL in the context of immigrants to English-majority areas and that of populations where it is not a first language (such as here in China) are considered. The key takeaway is that the use of a home language is a resource for our teaching, not as something to ignore or, worse yet, to marginalize.

This is followed by “Online Teaching - A Relational Study of Perception and Satisfaction” by Ning Yan and Andre DL Batako. This paper importantly takes understanding developed over the previous years of virtual and distance delivery and brings it into the COVID-19 era. The focus on satisfaction allows us to see what the users prefer when their teaching and learning is shifted to an online format. The key finding is that student satisfaction is tied to not only the course content and instruction, but also high-quality online discussions (which may have been missing from some of our switches to emergency online delivery!). Interactivity and communication self-efficacy are also linked to the perception of online teaching, so taking some time and effort to emphasize metacognitive aspects of the phenomenon might also be well spent.

After our research articles, there are two interviews with major TESOL figures conducted by Lun Peng. The first of these is with Professor Shouren Wang, University Distinguished Professor at Nanjing University. Among the many insights in this interview, Professor Wang discusses his own intensive learning techniques for English, arguing that user-oriented learning should be the key to language acquisition; he points out that striving for multilingualism is a key national goal that should not detract from the importance of Chinese language and culture and only serves to improve trade and settle disputes; he also makes excellent arguments for the benefits of language learning in general and why machine translation is not able to take its place. In particular, the exploration of the relative importance of EGP (versus ESP and EAP) is an important one. Finally, he gives sage advice of use to us all in the balance between teaching and research.

The second interview is with Professor Rod Ellis (Emeritus Distinguished Professor of the University of Auckland) also Research Professor in Curtin University and visiting professor at Shanghai International Studies University. In this interview, he speaks about some of the key points in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and how it can be used to benefit low-level learners in particular through incidental learning. There is also important perspective on focusing on function over form, and the place of testing and homework in this system of learning, and finally on available resources for learning more about TBLT.

Our issue culminates in the review of the 2019 Assembly, which shows the truly impressive breadth and depth of the endeavor and the amazing reach of the China TESOL activities. The keynote speeches from that event are summarized, as well as some of the highlights from the featured speeches. Importantly, the review also includes a discussion of the Hangzhou declaration which was designed to assist us in the new age of teaching; this year has seen us catapulted into a new future in which this declaration could provide us with a significant roadmap where we can achieve the goals of internationalization through technology while ensuring access to English education in all levels of society.

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