i

English Language Education in the Digital Era:
Innovation, Inclusivity and Multilingual Agency in Contemporary Classrooms

Editorial

English Language Education in the Digital Era: Innovation, Inclusivity and Multilingual Agency in Contemporary Classrooms

Cecilia Yin Mei Cheong
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
Universiti Malaya
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The contemporary landscape of language education is undergoing significant transformation. Rapid technological advancement, heightened awareness of sociocultural diversity, and renewed attention to learner agency have collectively reshaped how English language teaching (ELT) and English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) education are conceptualised and practised. The contributions in this issue reflect these evolving trajectories, foregrounding learner motivation, AI-assisted pedagogy, intercultural pragmatics, inclusive assessment design and translanguaging-informed digital storytelling. Together, these works illuminate the complex interplay between cognition, culture, technology and equity in 21st-century language classrooms.

This issue opens with Satomi Shinohe's exploratory study, *English Learning Goals and Actions for Goal Achievement among Japanese EFL Learners*. Grounded in empirical data from Japanese EFL learners, the study advances the field by developing two original measurement instruments: the Goals for Learning English Scale (GLE Scale) and the Actions for Goal Achievement Scale (AGA Scale). Through rigorous exploratory factor analysis, English learning goals were categorised into enhancing communicative competence, fostering positive attitudes towards English use, and maintaining minimum required skills. Correspondingly, goal-oriented actions encompassed daily self-directed practice, technology-based training, and active communicative engagement. The study's findings reveal strong positive correlations between goal-setting, goal-directed behaviours, and willingness to communicate (WTC), with highly motivated learners demonstrating greater strategic alignment between aspirations and actions. This article contributes validated tools that extend beyond the Japanese context, offering researchers and practitioners structured mechanisms for diagnosing and supporting learner motivation and behavioural engagement in diverse EFL settings.

ii

English Language Education in the Digital Era:
Innovation, Inclusivity and Multilingual Agency in Contemporary Classrooms

Extending the discussion of learner agency into technologically mediated contexts, Yuto Yokokura's practitioner-research study, *AI-Assisted Self-Paced Grammar Instruction in Secondary Education*, explores the integration of generative AI tools, e.g. ChatGPT and Google Gemini, within a self-paced grammar programme in an under-resourced Japanese high school. The model combined level-based worksheets, AI-generated feedback, and teacher scaffolding to accommodate students with heterogeneous academic backgrounds. The findings demonstrate that AI, when embedded within learner-centred instructional design, can enhance autonomy, iterative learning and differentiated support. Notably, the study reframes AI not as a replacement for teacher expertise, but as a supplementary mechanism that amplifies personalised learning pathways. In contexts marked by limited resources and diverse learner needs, this scalable model offers practical insights into balancing individualised instruction with collaborative classroom engagement.

While the first two articles foreground learner motivation and technological innovation, the third article, *From Culture to Classroom: Teaching Politeness Strategies in ESL through Apology* by Kimberley Lau Yih Long and colleagues, re-centres the discussion on intercultural pragmatics. The study examines apology strategies among Iban undergraduates in both their first language and English. The findings reveal distinct sociocultural patterns that shape pragmatic transfer, highlighting how L1 norms influence L2 apology performance. The authors moved beyond descriptive analysis to propose pedagogical applications that equip teachers with culturally responsive strategies for teaching apologies. In multilingual contexts such as Malaysia, where indigenous learners navigate layered linguistic and cultural expectations, this study underscores the necessity of integrating pragmatic competence into ESL instruction to prevent communicative breakdowns and to foster intercultural sensitivity.

Complementing this focus on communicative competence is Clarissa Pesidas' critical examination of assessment practices in *Inclusivity in Multiple-Choice Questions Assessment (MCQA)*. The study interrogates gender representation, lexical difficulty and cultural-linguistic orientation within MCQA design. Through interviews and focus group discussions with teachers and students, the research identified discursive misalignment between test designers' assumptions and test takers' lived realities. Such misalignment may inadvertently disadvantage learners from diverse gender and linguistic backgrounds. The study further reveals structural factors influencing assessment design, including curriculum mandates, institutional demands, and teacher training. By proposing inclusive modifications, this article contributes to the ongoing conversations about fairness, equity and validity in language assessment, reminding educators that assessment practices are never ideologically neutral.

The issue concludes with a review of Heather A. Linville and Polina Vinogradova's (2024) book, *Digital Storytelling as Translanguaging: A Practical Guide for Language Educators*. The reviewed volume responds to the "multilingual turn" in ELT by operationalising translanguaging through digital storytelling. Structured across twelve chapters, the book provides both theoretical grounding and practical guidance for integrating multimodal, multilingual narratives into classroom practice. Particularly salient is its emphasis on learner agency, linguistic justice, and identity affirmation. In contexts such as Malaysia that is characterised by the dynamic coexistence of Bahasa Melayu, English, Mandarin, Tamil, and numerous indigenous languages, the book's translanguaging stance offers a counter-narrative to monolingual classroom ideologies. Although technological access and assessment conventions may present practical constraints, the book's core message resonates powerfully:

iii

English Language Education in the Digital Era:
Innovation, Inclusivity and Multilingual Agency in Contemporary Classrooms

multilingual repertoires are not obstacles to English acquisition but resources for equitable and meaningful learning.

Collectively, the contributions in this issue converge around five interrelated themes. First, learner agency emerges as central. Whether through goal-setting, self-paced AI-supported learning, pragmatic awareness, inclusive assessment, or digital storytelling, learners are positioned not as passive recipients of instruction but as active constructors of meaning. Second, technology is reframed as pedagogically purposeful rather than merely innovative. AI tools and digital storytelling platforms are effective only when embedded within learner-centred, equity-oriented design. Third, sociocultural responsiveness is foregrounded. Pragmatic competence and inclusive assessment practices demonstrate that English language teaching cannot be divorced from the cultural and ideological contexts in which it operates. Fourth, equity and inclusivity are recognised as structural imperatives. Assessment design, instructional strategies and classroom language policies must consciously accommodate diverse gender, linguistic and cultural identities. Finally, the issue reaffirms the multidimensional nature of language education, where cognitive, affective, social and technological domains intersect.

As global classrooms continue to diversify and digital ecosystems expand, English language educators face the dual challenge of maintaining pedagogical rigour while fostering inclusion and innovation. The articles assembled in this issue provide evidence-based insights and practical frameworks for navigating this complexity. Together, they invite us to reconsider how goals are set, how technology is integrated, how culture is negotiated, how assessments are designed, and how multilingual voices are amplified. In doing so, they collectively advance a vision of English language education that is not only communicatively effective but also socially just, technologically informed, and profoundly human-centred.

Happy reading!

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cecilia Cheong Yin Mei
Editor-in-Chief
The English Teacher Journal
MELTA Malaysia