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DOI:10.17951/Isml.2023.47.3.1-5

Introduction

The ever-evolving field of foreign language education continues to intrigue scholars, educators, and practitioners alike. As societies transform, so too do the ways in which we engage with language learning and teaching. Never was this more evident than during the global upheaval brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In an era characterized by unprecedented global challenges and transformative shifts in educational paradigms, the present special volume (47/3) of *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature* delves into the intricate landscape of foreign language learning and teaching, particularly in the context of pandemic and non-pandemic circumstances.

The articles in this volume primarily address the dynamics, challenges, and experiences of foreign language teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and non-pandemic times. Their authors underscore the adaptive and evolving nature of language teaching and learning strategies in light of unexpected challenges such as a global pandemic or within the scope of regular educational environments. Whether faced with the immediacy of remote learning or traditional in-person methods, teachers and learners continue to find ways to enhance their experiences and outcomes. Collectively, the authors of the articles elucidate both the confluences and divergences between virtual and traditional (in-person) teaching paradigms. A prevailing agreement emerges that the similarities between these two distinct modes of teaching are more pronounced than their differences.

First of all, whether their instruction is online or face-to-face, most learners require more than mere exposure to a foreign language for effective learning.

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Passive engagement with even a vast amount of target-language content, such as videos and books, often yields minimal returns. To convert input into intake effectively, learners must actively engage with the language. This can be significantly enhanced by communication in a foreign language. Consequently, second language instruction should be suffused with opportunities for interaction, underscoring the principle that language acquisition primarily hinges on interactive exchanges.

Secondly, the goal for language teachers, both in distant and face-to-face teaching, is the transition from a mechanical, straightforward “Q&A” lesson structure towards a more naturalistic mode of communication. Communication necessitates language use, fostering the development of communicative competence. It provides an avenue for constructive feedback and allows learners to immerse themselves in authentic language use. The articles in the present volume show that the efficacy of instruction may be improved when learners are granted some agency over the interaction or when they display a willingness to initiate topics. Importantly, learners should have the opportunity to respond to language input and seek clarification in moments of doubt.

Thirdly, the present volume acknowledges that language learning cannot rely solely on communication. Effective teaching involves guiding learners’ focus towards the form of the language, either directly (for example, “Look at this preposition”) or indirectly (for instance, “I don’t understand, could you repeat that, please?”). In the absence of such focus, there is a risk that learners will constantly rely on a limited set of phrases and communication strategies, consequently stunting their progress.

The above reflections on the role of focus on meaning and focus on form in foreign language teaching are nested within a broader debate about the roles of explicit and implicit learning of a second language. Robust empirical evidence indicates that maximizing opportunities for implicit learning yields the most effective teaching outcomes. Implicit learning, which occurs subconsciously during language use (reading, listening, speaking, writing), represents the innate mechanism of language acquisition. This involuntary form of learning occurs when learners are consistently immersed in the language and actively communicate. At the same time, it is generally acknowledged that novice learners attempting advanced-level communication will struggle significantly. Thus, intentional (explicit) learning becomes vital, not to learn about the language per se, but to highlight language nuances, thereby augmenting the benefits derived from implicit learning. This can be achieved through consistent feedback on learners’ utterances, integrating “traditional” teaching methods in response to their requirements, or reformulating incorrect phrases.

Ultimately, effective teaching, whether on- or off-line, aligns with individuals’ natural learning processes rather than with strictly adhering to textbook guidelines

or course syllabi. The challenges and opportunities in foreign language learning and teaching are related not only to teaching modalities but also to the various educational contexts, accentuating the dynamic interplay between pedagogical methods, technological tools, and learner and teacher experiences.

The present volume is purposefully divided into two distinct sections, each offering a unique lens through which to examine the multifaceted nature of language education. The first section, “Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in Pandemic Times,” deals with the profound disruptions caused by global events, particularly the seismic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pedagogical landscapes. The subsequent section, “Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in Non-Pandemic Times,” highlights innovative practices and explorations in more stable educational climates.

The issue commences with Marzena Wysocka-Narewska’s study, “To Study or Not to Study Online? Students’ Views on Distance Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Diary Study”, which probes the landscape of distance education as experienced by university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a diary study, the author demonstrates the complex array of attitudes and perceptions held by English Philology students at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. The findings, echoing the oscillating impact of infection rates, intricately portray online education’s multifaceted advantages and drawbacks. The study ponders the profound question of the efficacy and desirability of remote learning, hinting at potential avenues for refining distance education within the context of university closures and the reconfiguration of academic identity.

The pedagogical exploration continues with Mustafa Zeki Çıraklı’s “Reconsidering Spatial Interaction in the Virtual Literature Classroom after the Pandemic Lockdown”, which describes the transformative journey of adapting a literature classroom to virtual confines. Through the lens of auto-ethnographic inquiry, the researcher crafts an immersive narrative chronicling his endeavor to infuse spatial interaction and creativity into the virtual realm. Employing the “theory of postromantic education”, the study illuminates the utilization of virtual tools, such as whiteboards and chatboxes, in mitigating the challenges of social and spatial interaction. By fostering cognitive growth and imaginative prowess, the study underscores the capacity of innovative strategies to transcend the limitations of virtual learning environments.

Gabriel Sánchez-Sánchez and Eduardo Encabo’s research, described in “Academic Achievement of Foreign Language Undergraduate Students during Pandemic Times”, endeavors to unravel the intricate tapestry of academic accomplishment amid the tumultuous pandemic landscape. With a focus on foreign language students at the University of Murcia, Spain, the study traces the trajectory of academic performance across varying instructional modes – normal course, lockdown, blended learning, and the return to routine. The analysis

intriguingly suggested heightened performance during the lockdown and blended learning phases, beckoning us to ponder the nuanced interplay between pandemic circumstances and educational outcomes.

Transitioning into the realm of instructional methodologies, Eda Duruk and İrem Nur Yılmaz's exploration, "Self-Regulated Learning and Listening Achievement of Turkish EFL Learners", navigates the realm of self-regulated learning within a flipped classroom context. With a cohort of B1-level Turkish students, the study dissects the impact of a flipped classroom model on listening skills and self-regulated learning. The study discerns significant differences in listening skills achievement scores through meticulous analysis, offering a fresh perspective on the dynamics between pedagogical methodologies and student outcomes.

Transitioning to the second part of this volume, we embark on a voyage into the intricacies of foreign language learning and teaching in non-pandemic times. Here, a collection of scholarly contributions delves into themes encompassing learner agency, transfer of learning, teacher beliefs, creative writing's pedagogical potential, and innovative practicum experiences. The exploration commences with Halina Chodkiewicz's "Advanced EFL Students' Practices in Formal and Informal Language Learning Settings: An Exploratory Study of Learner Agency". This study investigates the realm of learner agency among advanced Polish learners of English as a foreign language. Through self-reflective learning journals, the study unveils a rich mosaic of language-based practices that empower learners to transcend traditional formal settings, nurturing academic and self-directed learning pursuits. This exploration heralds the profound role of intention, motivation, and self-awareness in shaping language learners' trajectories.

The next article, "Learning Transfer through Corpus-Aided Instruction" by Eunjeong Park, analyzes learning transfer within the context of corpus-aided instruction. With a focus on second-language college students, the study examines the potential of corpus-based approaches in fostering multilingual learners' skills in the writing class. The findings resonate with the potential use of corpus-aided instruction to enhance learners' writing proficiency and offer pedagogical insights for both researchers and teachers whose interests fall within the domains of corpus linguistics and English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

The subsequent article by Dima Mahmoud Daoud and Ruba Fahmi Bataineh, "Language as a Medium of Grammar Instruction: Jordanian EFL Secondary-Stage Teachers' Beliefs and Practices", navigates the intricate interplay between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices, and the alignment or divergence between the two. The study provides a fascinating window into the teaching landscape, where contextual factors, student preferences, and language proficiency influence pedagogical decisions. This investigation resonates with the complex dynamic of belief-practice congruence and its implications for the EFL classroom.

In “Breathing Enlightenment and Necessary Change into English Language Programs with Creative Writing”, Patrick T. Randolph eloquently advocates the potential of creative writing as a transformative vehicle for English language learners. Drawing from neuroscience and years of teaching experience, the study positions creative writing as a conduit for nurturing individual writing styles, bolstering confidence, and amplifying linguistic expression. With empirical evidence of heightened writing skills among participants, the study celebrates the potency of creative writing in fostering linguistic fluency and cognitive growth.

Tomáš Gráf’s “In-Faculty Practicum for TEFL Undergraduates at a Specially Created, On-The-Premises Language School: A Study in Innovation” chronicles an innovative approach to a teacher-trainee practicum. The study illuminates the transformative impact of extended practicum durations on teacher trainees’ development through a unique language school within a faculty. The narrative captures the metamorphosis of trainees as they navigate the intricacies of classroom management, material utilization, and students’ diverse needs, thus highlighting the potential of innovative practicum paradigms.

With a nuanced focus on diverse perspectives and pedagogical practices, this collection of articles offers insightful examinations of pedagogical dynamics, technological integration, learner agency, and innovative instructional approaches. Amidst shifting global landscapes, both pandemic-infused and beyond, the scholars within these pages deftly dissect the complexities, emerging insights, challenges, and possibilities that shape the educational trajectory. The volume resonates as an invaluable compendium for educators, researchers, and practitioners invested in the multifaceted tapestry of modern language pedagogy. The insights herein offer guidance as we navigate the dynamic contours of foreign language education, nurturing proficient linguists and fostering innovative instructional practices that align with the ever-evolving educational horizon.

Środa Wielkopolska, Burdur, Piła, September 2023