Introduction

Carmen Argondizzo* and Gillian Mansfield

Wellbeing in language learning and teaching

<https://doi.org/10.1515/cercles-2021-2034>

It is a pleasant challenge for us to compile each issue of *Language Learning in Higher Education* by capturing an underlying theme in its contributions and the threads running through them. The thoughts that go through our minds for this collection of papers is, for teacher and learner alike, a sense of wellbeing and of feeling comfortable in whatever aspect of the teaching-learning continuum the author is focusing on.

The papers show that researchers give voice to learners and teachers through the number of questionnaires and surveys they present and discuss in response to their research questions. These forms of investigation give space to both individual and collective testimonies that are, on the one hand, food for thought for critical reflection from which to develop future scholarly activities. On the other, giving voice to participants in a research experiment is a means of stimulating them (be they teachers or learners) into thinking critically about what they are doing, how and why they are doing it, and whether they are satisfied with the outcome.

In this Issue 11.2 in which, once again, learning is considered a dynamic aspect of the language classroom, the opening paper invites readers to focus their attention on the *CercleS survey on the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on foreign language teaching in higher education* carried out by Katarina Zamborová, Isabella Stefanutti and Blanka Klimová, under the coordination of Sabina Schaffner. The authors present a survey aimed at studying teachers' reflections on teaching during the pandemic and on the future of foreign language instruction in Higher Education (HE). The findings, which were collected through the feedback received from several European University Language Centres, highlight the fact that the respondents were able to see the benefits of a blended and hybrid mode of language instruction despite the difficult worldwide conditions. In addition to the data carefully described, the paper presents implications for teaching practices that will be useful for professionals involved in the daily action of language

***Corresponding author: Carmen Argondizzo**, University of Calabria, Rende, Italy,

E-mail: carmen.argondizzo@unical.it

Gillian Mansfield, University of Parma, Italy

education. The survey is in progress, therefore further data will be collected and presented to the CercleS community at future events.

The issue continues on the basis of a thread which cohesively links the topics covered in the different research articles. Tanja Angelovska, Sarah Mercer and Kyle Talbot introduce the issue on *Personality traits as predictors of language learner engagement*. The authors affirm that we know little about the nature of engagement when dealing with language learning. In particular, it is difficult to identify the individual differences (ID) in learners that account for variations in engagement. The study investigates whether there is a relationship between the engagement of tertiary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and one key ID, which the authors identify as a student personality trait (see Goldberg's Big-Five Personality Markers 1992). Indeed, the study, which involved 154 EFL tertiary-level students from two universities in Austria, revealed that trait neuroticism and age predicted language learner engagement as linked to the dimensions of cognition and affection. The paper offers readers pedagogical implications connected to the study.

In their paper, *Evaluating a collaborative and responsive project to develop language assessment literacy*, Claudia Harsch, Sibylle Seyferth and Salomé Villa Larenas turn the readers' attention to a project set up for employees at a University Language Centre serving four universities in Bremen (Germany), where over 80 teachers provide courses in 21 languages. The project involved teachers, course/assessment coordinators and researchers with a background in assessment. Their insights contribute to a better understanding of the conditions that are conducive to designing and delivering effective Language Assessment Literacy development projects.

With her paper, *Translingual transcultural competence: student agency, teacher guidance, and program support*, Claudia Kunschak further expands on the importance of Language Centres by claiming that they have a critical role to play in the development of a transcultural process which should offer language and culture training in multiple languages to students, professionals and the wider community alike. In fact, she affirms, an increasingly interconnected world requires people to become versatile communicators in a variety of different settings. Surveys and interviews were conducted to prove this. In the specific, the student survey investigated awareness and attitude, identity and community as well as the autonomy of students involved in the programme. Teacher interviews, on the other hand, provided insights into programme parameters, classroom pedagogy and out-of-class projects. Findings from this research study indicate the need to acquire and activate multicompetence thinking which embeds challenges in developing the transcultural component.

In her paper *Analyse des besoins en français de spécialité pour étudiants étrangers en stage professionnel en France*, Hana Delalande urges readers to adopt a

more effective approach to teaching French for specific purposes. She argues that needs analysis is a necessary step in determining the real needs of students who will use French language at work on a regular basis. Cooperation between universities and companies or authorities active in the labour market becomes an essential and beneficial step for supporting students. The author presents the findings of a detailed analysis which aims at highlighting problematic areas and language needs linked with the necessary development of intercultural competence. The latter will be meaningful in preparing students for international mobility.

An action-oriented approach is the focus for Evelina Jaleniauskiene in her paper *Shifting towards the action-oriented approach in Higher Education: language learners' perceptions*. The author reminds us that the updated version of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume* (Council of Europe 2020) highlights the action-oriented approach as the most viable for modern language learning. The study explores the ways in which some students reacted when exposed to a collaborative project based on this approach. The results point to some potential challenges that mark a significant turn in language education. The students' reflections will help to increase awareness in other language educators who should adopt the action-based approach to a wider extent.

Micòl Beseghi discusses *The Importance of the Self: Using Online Diaries in the EFL Classroom*. Her paper investigates how diary writing can be used in the EFL classroom to encourage students to express their identities through a second language. The author argues that reflective writing can offer learners an important tool with which to explore their emotions and reflect on their identity as learners and users of English. In this study, diaries have an added value since they are used as a qualitative research tool with the objective of examining metacognitive and affective aspects of language learning among the students involved in the study. They were, in fact, encouraged to keep an online diary throughout a semester. The findings highlighted their desire to speak as themselves, not just as language learners, while exploring their emotions. A final questionnaire confirmed that students enjoyed this task-oriented activity and considered it relevant in terms of their learning autonomy, self-awareness, and self-regulation.

The focus switches from writing to reading skills with the paper *The impacts of reading strategy instruction on improving the reading comprehension of students with different learning styles* by Mojtaba Tadayonifar, Mohammadreza Valizadeh, Mahnaz Entezari and Mosfata Bahraman. In fact this paper explores the short- and long-term impacts of explicit reading strategy instruction and its aim is to help students with different learning styles improve their reading comprehension. A group of Iranian learners participated in the study. The authors describe the different steps of the research study which included a pre-test, 12 weeks of explicit

reading strategy instruction and a post-test followed by a delayed post-test, the aim of which was to determine the immediate and long-term effects of reading strategy training respectively. The results of paired samples T-Test and ANOVA using SPSS indicated that there were significant differences in the pre-and post-test scores for all groups in all tests. They also indicate the difference between the auditory and the visual type of strategy in terms of the amount of improvement. The study thus emphasises the importance of equipping students with appropriate reading strategies that should be tailored to their perceived learning style. This will guide them more easily to improve their comprehension of a text and subsequently gain more enjoyment out of it.

The topic discussed by Jolanta Łacka-Badura focuses again on the reading skill and the importance of using authentic materials in the language classroom. Her paper, *Acquiring business knowledge through Business English reading materials: a pre-experience students' perspective*, investigates how the type of business content found in specific reading materials is perceived by Business English students. Undergraduate students at the University of Economics in Katowice, with no prior experience of learning either Business English or the principles of business, were involved in the research study. They were asked to participate in a survey through which they would compare pairs of texts related to three business topics. The selected texts were excerpts of: (a) a Student Book of a widely used Business English course book, and (b) a text from online repositories of business-related articles. The findings highlighted that, while appreciating 'real-life examples' of successful companies described in the course book, students expressed a strong preference for the Internet-based texts which provided them with the opportunity to acquire 'basic knowledge' related to specific business issues. The survey findings confirmed the importance of an appropriate selection of content-based learning materials in order to foster learners' motivation and engagement.

Patrizia Giampieri in her *"Googleology" for second language learning* explores the World Wide Web as a tool to be used for language learning. The research question is: can second language learners be taught how to navigate the web in order to improve their language skills? In other words, the issue highlights once again the importance of using authentic materials in a meaningful way and through tasks accurately designed for the learners. The author describes the teaching organization which covered six months of a language course. The participants were given instructions on how to work with Google Advanced Search syntax and they were asked to apply the newly-acquired skills through tasks which involved them in a collocational search. Learners had some initial hesitation and showed inaccuracies in completing the tasks. However, their performance was globally successful thanks to the interest raised in the students and the practical engagement they were constantly involved in.

Lenka Tóthová and Jitka Sedláčková focus on *Fostering autonomy in learners with special needs: A specialized e-learning course*. They argue that international engagement has become a priority which offers learners the opportunity to improve the quality of their education and their future social and professional experiences. Yet, we should not forget vulnerable groups of learners with special needs, some of whom may have limited chances to interact in the spoken and written codes when using foreign languages. This has an unfavorable impact on the learning opportunities they can join, especially when abroad. The paper presents tools which can be supportive for the needs of these learners, so that they can be offered a connection with the process of academic internationalisation. Firstly, students should be supported in their ability to self-regulate in order to reduce teacher dependency and reliance on directed learning. Secondly, they should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. The paper provides examples of classroom dynamics and cooperation built up through forums and on-line chats.

Tugba Elif Oprak-Yildiz, Tugba Seda Colak, Mustafa Koc and Betul Dusunceli focus on a rather unusual topic which involves *The application of eye movement desensitization and reprocessing treatment (EMDR) on adults with foreign language anxiety*. The study aimed to apply Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing treatment in order to assess foreign language anxiety. The authors explain that this is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that has been seen to provoke profound effects in foreign language learning. While giving technical information on EMDR, the paper presents a study which involved learners experiencing severe FL anxiety. The effect of the treatment on such anxiety, caused by language learning, was tracked and measured with the aim of obtaining self-reports of distress, in the long run, from the subjects. Interestingly enough, the results demonstrated that EMDR was effective in reducing anxiety towards language learning and in increasing subjects' positive cognition.

In their paper, *Investigating teaching assistants' participation in a simulated meeting in a United States University English course*, Justin E. Freedman, Benjamin H. Dotger and Denis Samburskiy note that the United States and Canada have been recently involving an increasing number of non-native English speaking graduate students as university teaching assistants. As a consequence, communicative gaps often occur between non-native English speaking International Teaching Assistants (ITA) and native English-speaking undergraduate students as well as diffidence of the latter, for which it has been necessary for universities to develop educational programmes with a view to training ITAs in how to perform in authentic contexts and to improve their instructional capacity. This training, described in detail by the authors, provided ITA personnel with the opportunity to reflect on shared experiences, while offering strategies in order to face

comprehension challenges. This had the final aim of promoting mutual understanding between ITAs and native English-speaking students.

This 11.2 Issue ends with a short section devoted to Activity Reports. In her paper, *An initial assessment of the academic and professional profile of modern foreign languages' teachers in UK Higher Education*, Marion Cordech examines the state of the art of professionalism among modern foreign language teachers in UK Higher Education. The paper begins with a literature review that identifies the main defining the qualities of modern foreign languages teachers. It then continues with a detailed evaluation of the professional and academic profiles of UK language teachers. The data, collected and analysed by the author, support the characteristics identified in the literature. This aspect encourages the author to urge for a more qualified profile of professionals in the field of language teaching in the UK. It would be interesting to receive similar kinds of reports from other nations for the purposes of enlightenment and comparison.

Susanna Kohonen, Jonna Kosonen and Sinikka Kettunen in their *Evaluation for development: The E.A.S.Y. model for empowering actors and stakeholders in curriculum development* present a collaborative project that integrated teaching between the Language Centre and the Law School at the University of Eastern Finland. The aim of this report is to present a model for the purposes of developing teaching. The project describes an interactive and participatory model which draws on the principles of evaluation *for* development rather than evaluation *of* development. The authors' aim is to propose a model for curriculum development in Higher Education which could be widely adapted in other contexts.

To conclude, this issue once again offers not only contributions from a European academic context but also realities from much further afield. This confirms our desire to offer shared experiences which depict different cultures and academic assets. Indeed, we hope that the impact of the individual papers will generate future opportunities to create an exchange of research experiences regarding language learning and teaching and continuing reflection on innovative practices in the field.