

## Editorial Chapter

The central theme of this issue is education and language learning in a globalized digital age. In this issue, we explore various angles of language teaching and learning, in the context of the modern world.

### Major Learning Theories influencing Language Learning

Over the past century, educational psychologists and researchers have produced many theories regarding learning that may be grouped into three main categories:

- Behaviorist learning theories
- Cognitive development theories or Information processing theories
- Constructivist learning theories

Behaviorists completely ignore the unobservable mental process while the other two schools of thought address the role of internal cognitive processes in the brain. For example, information processing theories study how information received through the five senses is processed in short term and long term memory. Constructivists focus more on the active role of the learner as the one who constructs their own knowledge from the environment around them.

Language learning, just like other subject fields, is influenced by these major learning theories.

### Major Theories and Approaches in Language Learning

The field of second or foreign language acquisition has been characterized as a highly fluctuating field (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014, M. Clarke, 1982). Just to highlight some changes, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century learning focused on reading approaches, where reading comprehension, relevant grammar, and vocabulary were used as major approaches in learning English. Later in 20<sup>th</sup>

century came the Oral Approach, Situational Language Teaching, and the Audiolingual Method (Richards and Rodgers, 2015 p.58).

Among the most influential approaches in 21<sup>st</sup> century are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the Natural Approach, and Content-Based Instruction Models such as, Content-Based Language Instruction and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), and Specifically Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Other 21<sup>st</sup> century approaches are Whole Language, Cooperative Language Learning, Task-Based Instruction, Total Physical Response (TPR), Multiple Intelligences, and brain based learning.

In an attempt to conceptualize these fluctuations, the early history of language teaching can be described as grammar-based teaching, designed by applied linguists with help from psychologists (Richards and Rogers, *ibid*, p.1). Later in the globalization age, the changing needs for effective communication prompted oral approaches to learning a language. The focus here, is for the learner to be able to speak the target language in authentic situations.

As for content-based movements, these approaches came into play when immigrants to a new land experienced an immediate need to understand the target language alongside content learning at the same time; they cannot wait two to three years to master language skills before learning the content. Hence, in content-based approaches, the learning focuses on *both* the content objectives and language objectives.

This introductory overview of language learning would not be complete without addressing the whole language approach and phonics. Based on Constructivism, the whole language approach takes account of the view, that children learn the language through the big picture – the whole word – rather than breaking it down to alphabets and sounds, as

in the phonics approach. For example, if the child sees the word 'dog' each time he sees a picture of a dog, he will then associate the meaning of the word 'dog' with the animal.

In phonic-based learning, on the other hand, children will learn to decode the letters and sounds. For instance, 'cat' and 'mat' will be presented to learners to decode the sounds and symbols of /k/ and /m/ which produce different meaning.

### **Language Learning in Digital Age**

Finally, here we are in a digital world where access to social media and the internet is a norm. In this modern age, the pervasive use of technology and the internet has significantly changed the face of language teaching and learning. Students may bring their own device to the classroom, or might be encouraged to learn from relevant websites or social media, as additional or assigned source of information.

It can be concluded that there is no single method that works for every child, in all situations. It is the teacher who must constantly observe, and determine, what is best for their students.

### **What is Contained in This Special Issue**

#### ***Reflecting the Teacher's Role in a Project-Based Learning (PBL) Classroom: Lessons Learned from Students***

In view of constructivism theories, PBL advocates for the active roles of learners through group work, when trying to solve real world problems in their project work. This study aimed to investigate the roles of the teacher in a project-based learning (PBL) classroom from the students' perspective, based upon their perceptions toward 1) topic choice, 2) teacher's support, 3) evaluation method, and 4) preference for PBL. Interestingly, while PBL calls for an active role for the learner, this study at a conceptual level found that teachers' domination in areas that are beyond students' capabilities to make decisions, would greatly contribute to students' learning.

#### ***Factors affecting Thai students' participation in dialogic talks in EFL classes: Students' perspectives***

This empirical research aimed to discover the factors that affect Thai students' decisions to engage in dialogic interactions with peers and lecturers. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with 12 Thai EFL students from three universities in Thailand. The clean verbatim transcript was adopted for data analysis. Findings revealed fundamental factors of student engagement in dialogic talks, as well as providing practical implications for EFL lecturers.

#### ***The Development of E-Learning Media for English Conversation at the Higher Education level***

Also focusing on speaking skills, this experimental research aimed to develop e-learning media for English Conversation at the higher education level. Data were collected through an assessment survey, by language professionals and programmers, pretest and post test scores, and a student satisfaction survey. Findings revealed positive results of the e-learning media developed and high learner satisfaction.

#### ***Students' Perception of Technology Factors and its impact on Byod-Based Learning in Private Secondary Schools in Dubai, UAE***

This study investigated students' perception of technology factors and their impacts on BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) based learning among ninth grade students from eight private secondary schools in Dubai. Major findings were (1) students' perception of technology factors had a higher impact on students' achievement in the schools using BYOD than the schools not using BYOD, and (2) its relation to gender was higher in the BYOD schools. These findings contribute to the BYOD body of knowledge, which can help schools to effectively implement BYOD programs.

***A Comparative Study of the Generic Structures of English Research Article Abstracts: Moves and Their Realizations***

This paper compares the rhetorical structure of RA abstracts in the field of information and communication technology (ICT), which were written by Thai and non-Thai authors, and published in international and Thai-based journals, as previous studies have shown that English native and non-native speakers write their research abstracts differently. Findings and pedagogical implications are discussed.

***Articles Review***

This is a review of three articles, two of which are research studies based on the natural approach, which is similar in process to the way of learning your mother tongue language; while the third article interestingly, looks at language acquisition from a quite different perspective, emphasizing rote memorization and high motivation to drive maximum effort in learning language. The results of all three studies are remarkable.