

Editorial

This issue, the first of Volume 15, presents seven full articles and two book reviews. The articles are contributed by authors based in seven different countries in Asia, North America and South America on a wide palette of topics ranging from teachers' use of instructional materials to teacher written feedback and test anxiety.

The issue opens with an article by Sajjad Pouromid and Majid Amerian that compares how Japanese and Iranian teachers of EFL in private language schools use instructional materials and how they self-organize and construct narratives of immunity to justify and shield their materials use from criticism. The results of their study show that Iranian teachers tended to follow the textbook materials and sequences as they are, supposedly because of time constraints and the perceived need to comply with the stipulations of their school, while Japanese teachers adapted the prescribed materials to a considerable extent and introduced a number of additional materials in order to make the lessons more relevant to the learners and to meet their needs better.

The second article, contributed by Jingjing Ma, looks at the written feedback practices of two college EFL teachers in Hong Kong, and their perceptions as well as those of their students about the usability of the feedback. Ma uncovered that the teachers provided feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their students' writing, shaped their feedback mainly according to the given assessment criteria, and focused more on skills development than on content. While the teachers and students generally agreed that the feedback is important for improvements to be made to the students' writing, some students commented negatively about the usability of the feedback, as they felt that their teacher did not provide sufficient explanation to help them understand and fully exploit the feedback.

In the third article, Dina Abdel Salam El-Dakhs, Fouzia Phyllis Amroun and Musinah Charlot-Muhammad established the need to address the difficulties faced by Arab learners of foreign languages in learning collocations, and thus designed a study involving female Arab undergraduate students of EFL to explore if explicit instruction or incidental learning can lead to better results in developing collocational competence. Their findings suggest that explicit instruction can lead to significantly better short-term and long-term learning gains in the recognition and recall of collocations, while incidental learning only produces some benefits in short-term form recognition.

The fourth article, written by Ulf Schuetze, reports a study that sought to establish the comparative effectiveness of two kinds of online exercise types, namely multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blanks exercises, for learning and practicing prepositions among German language students in their third semester of language study at a North American university. The results reveal that the fill-in-the-blanks group outperformed the multiple-choice group in the post-test in terms of retention and recall.

Elizabeth Enkin and Maite Correa, in the fifth article, describe a study that surveyed instructors and graduating seniors in the French, German and Spanish programmes in a modern languages department of a North American university about their teaching/learning experiences and their opinions with regard to the achieved outcomes as well as future improvements to the curricula. It emerged from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative survey data that the perceptions and suggestions of the instructors and students generally align well, and that they have called for, among others, more free-speaking communication activities, tasks that reflect real-world professional needs, some form of exit validation of their language proficiency, and more service learning opportunities.

In the sixth article, I-Chun Vera Hsiao, Ying Stella Lin and Shao-Ting Alan Hung present the findings from a study on the washback effects of an intensive test preparation on the EFL participants of this programme. Data were collected through a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews,

and a formal proficiency test (TOEIC). Although the results did not reveal any significant relationship between the test preparation programme and the participants' test performance, there were significant increases in their motivation in comparison with students in a control group. They also reported increased use of three of the sixteen learning strategies taught as part of the programme.

The seventh and final full article of this issue, by Josefina C. Santana and Cristina Eccius-Wellmann, focuses on gender differences in the test anxiety levels of university EFL students in Mexico taking a high-stakes English test, namely, TOEIC. The results from the analysis of the data collected show that female students experienced a significantly higher level of test anxiety, while their TOEIC scores were significantly lower than that of their male counterparts. Based on this finding that test anxiety impacts females more than males, the authors question if the same tests and measures of proficiency should be administered to both genders. They also propose that, in general, universities should consider allowing alternative measures of language proficiency to conventional proficiency tests, as well as preparing students to better cope with test anxiety.

This issue also presents two book reviews. The first, written by Brenda Pui Lam Yuen, critiques the book "Language Learner Strategies: Contexts, Issues and Applications in Second Language Learning and Teaching" by Michael James Grenfell and Vee Harris, which looks at issues of theory and practice as well as applications of learner strategies in second language classrooms.

In the second review, Handoyo Puji Widodo summarises and evaluates Andrzej Cirocki's "Developing Learner Autonomy through Tasks: Theory, Research, Practice", which, as the title suggests, gives theoretical, empirical, and practical insights into how tasks in the EFL classroom can promote and contribute to the development of learner autonomy.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Editorial Board, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for your support as well as the generous contributions of our external reviewers and the members of our International Advisory Board. We also hope that you will find the articles in this issue to be both relevant and stimulating, and look forward to receiving your valuable submissions.

Wai Meng Chan
Editor-in-Chief