

Guest editorial: CALLing out culture: the interplay between language, technology and culture

Introduction

Language education in the contemporary global context transcends the boundaries of linguistic proficiency, necessitating a nuanced understanding of cultural nuances and effective intercultural communication skills. This special issue aims to delve into the paramount importance of integrating cultural components into language education, emphasizing (inter) cultural awareness, understanding, communication competence and skills and sensitivity. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the transformative potential of technology in augmenting the language learning process, which is called computer-assisted language learning (CALL), facilitating telecollaboration, and addressing the multifaceted challenges inherent in the integration of technology into language education. In addition, it investigates the critical aspect of maintaining academic integrity while leveraging emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) in language education.

The interplay between language, technology and culture

The interplay between language and culture is undeniably intricate, with cultural comprehension serving as a cornerstone for effective communication and language acquisition. Infusing cultural components into language pedagogy acts as a catalyst for nurturing (inter) cultural awareness, sensitivity and communicative competence among learners (Eren, 2023). This entails recognizing and appreciating diverse cultural landscapes and fostering environments of respect and tolerance within educational settings. Simultaneously, a nuanced comprehension of cultural subtleties equips learners with the sociocultural insights essential for navigating various cultural environments and engaging in successful cross-cultural communication.

Moreover, the cultivation of intercultural communication competence is indispensable in today's globalized society. This encompasses not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to negotiate meaning, adapt communication styles and bridge cultural divides seamlessly (Wang and Shen, 2024). By nurturing intercultural communication skills, language education empowers learners to engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration across cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the development of cultural sensitivity serves as a cornerstone for fostering empathy, mitigating cultural biases and nurturing inclusive learning environments (Al-Shehri, 2020). Culturally sensitive individuals possess the acumen to navigate cross-cultural interactions with humility, empathy and respect, thereby fostering harmonious intercultural relations and promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity within educational settings.

Technology, in its myriad forms, has emerged as a potent tool in revolutionizing language education, offering innovative avenues for enhancing pedagogical practices and enriching the learning experience. Digital platforms, multimedia resources and online communication tools serve as conduits for authentic cultural immersion, interactive learning experiences and global collaboration (Luo and Gao, 2024). Telecollaboration, for instance, facilitates cross-cultural engagement, enabling learners from diverse cultural backgrounds to engage in collaborative projects, exchange perspectives and cultivate intercultural



competencies (Egitim, 2024; Eren, 2023; Fathi *et al.*, 2023). In addition, technology facilitates personalized and adaptive learning experiences tailored to individual learners' needs and preferences. Language learning applications, virtual reality (VR) simulations and online language courses offer immersive and interactive platforms for learners to explore cultural contexts, practice language skills and engage with authentic cultural materials in dynamic and engaging ways (Dooly, 2023; Hackett *et al.*, 2023).

Despite its transformative potential, the integration of technology into language education presents multifaceted challenges. Access and equity disparities, stemming from unequal access to digital resources and technological infrastructure, exacerbate existing educational inequities, impeding equitable access to quality language education (Tafazoli and Picard, 2023). Moreover, concerns regarding the reliability and credibility of online content, coupled with the lack of digital literacy skills among educators and learners, pose formidable barriers to effective technology integration (Tafazoli and Farshadnia, 2023).

The preservation of academic integrity in technology-mediated language education emerges as a paramount concern. The proliferation of online resources and AI-powered tools raises pertinent issues pertaining to plagiarism, academic dishonesty and ethical conduct (Kılıçkaya, 2023). Educators grapple with the imperative to instill in students a robust ethical framework, digital literacy skills and critical thinking acumen to navigate digital environments responsibly and uphold academic integrity standards. In harnessing technologies such as AI in language education, the preservation of academic integrity assumes paramount significance in safeguarding the credibility and validity of learning outcomes. AI-powered language learning tools, encompassing chatbots and language processing algorithms, offer personalized feedback, language practice activities and automated assessments, necessitating stringent measures to mitigate the risk of plagiarism and academic misconduct (Kohnke *et al.*, 2023).

Educators play a pivotal role in cultivating a culture of academic integrity, underscoring the significance of honesty, transparency and ethical conduct in technology-enhanced language education environments. This entails providing explicit guidelines and expectations regarding ethical behavior, alongside implementing robust assessment and monitoring mechanisms to detect and deter instances of academic dishonesty effectively.

Contributions to this collection

Although it would be impossible for this collection to extensively cover all topics in the field, the special issue of "CALLing out culture: The interplay between language, technology and culture" is intended to serve as a stepping stone into CALL and culture research and pave the way for work that still needs to be done.

Tafazoli's research delves into the potential benefits of integrating VR into teaching culture among in-service teachers of Teaching Persian to Speakers of Other Languages in Iran. Preworkshop, teachers expressed reservations about VR's efficacy in teaching culture, citing concerns such as skepticism toward effectiveness and technological apprehension. However, postworkshop interviews revealed a positive shift in perceptions, with emergent themes highlighting VR's potential to enhance cultural immersion and facilitate interactive learning environments.

Gonzalez-Vidal and Moore's study examines English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) secondary teachers' perceptions of using Web-based technology to enrich students' cultural awareness in Chile. The findings underscore the importance of critical reflection in cultural teaching as well as the need for effective technology integration and professional development.

Trinh and Dinh propose a theoretical framework integrating CALL into English language education, emphasizing cultural learning and intercultural communicative

competence (ICC). Their research highlights challenges such as conflicts between linguistic and cultural instruction priorities and a lack of emphasis on ICC.

Uzum *et al.* investigate how teacher candidates from Türkiye and the USA navigate intercultural communication skills in a telecollaboration project. The study reveals the significance of personal pronoun usage in positioning discourse and the importance of translanguaging negotiation strategies in intercultural communication.

Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo explore preservice language teachers' intercultural awareness following participation in a Collaborative International Online Learning (COIL) project. The research highlights COIL's potential to enhance global awareness and female participants' particularly positive attitudes toward the approach.

Shi and Cheung's paper advocates for a narrative-driven approach to cultural teaching in university language departments, emphasizing the importance of shared experiences in fostering cultural understanding and empathy.

Chen *et al.*'s study investigates the impact of demographic factors on ICC among ethnic-minority Latinx middle school English learners. The findings underscore the importance of engagement in interactions and the significance of demographic variables in language learning.

Motevali Zadeh Ardakani *et al.* explore the experiences of Middle Eastern refugee mothers in using technology for language acquisition in regional Australia. The study highlights challenges such as limited access to technology and the potential of language education programs to facilitate integration.

Pennington *et al.*'s research characterizes teachers' utilization of digital tools for multilingual learners, emphasizing the need for effective integration of technology and new media literacy skills.

Razmeh's study investigates the influence of CALL on cultural adaptation and language acquisition in nontraditional classroom environments, highlighting the role of virtual knowledge communities in promoting cultural adaptation.

McCallum's paper presents a lesson demonstrating the use of AI tools in language classrooms, emphasizing the potential benefits and the importance of AI literacy for teachers and learners.

Bannister *et al.* introduce an evidence-informed framework for formulating academic integrity policy responses in English medium instruction higher education. The framework aims to guide institutions in navigating the complexities of academic integrity.

Davoodi's research explores the integration of heritage language and culture in technology-enhanced bilingual education, highlighting challenges such as the dominance of English language and culture in language learning environments.

Finally, Pilar Rodríguez-Arancón *et al.*'s study investigates the impact of didactic audiovisual translation and CALL on intercultural competence among EFL learners, emphasizing the importance of effective integration of technology in language learning.

Final thought

In conclusion, the integration of cultural components into language education constitutes a pivotal endeavor in fostering (inter)cultural awareness, understanding, communication competence and sensitivity among learners. Technology emerges as a potent ally in this endeavor, offering innovative avenues for enriching pedagogical practices, facilitating cross-cultural engagement and enhancing the learning experience. Nonetheless, the integration of technology into language education presents multifarious challenges, including access disparities, digital literacy deficits and concerns regarding academic integrity. Through concerted efforts to address these challenges while leveraging technology responsibly,

educators can harness the transformative potential of technology to create inclusive, culturally responsive and engaging language learning environments.

Furthermore, it is evident that further exploration and research are imperative to fully harness the potential of technology in enhancing cultural competence within language education. Future studies should delve deeper into addressing the existing challenges associated with technology integration, such as access disparities and concerns regarding academic integrity. Moreover, continued investigation into the efficacy of various technological tools and platforms in facilitating cultural immersion, intercultural communication and language learning outcomes is warranted. By fostering collaborative interdisciplinary research endeavors and embracing innovative methodologies, educators and researchers can pave the way for the development of more robust frameworks and strategies for leveraging technology to cultivate cultural competence in language education. Thus, while significant strides have been made in this domain, there remains a rich landscape awaiting exploration to unlock the full transformative potential of technology in shaping the cultural perceptions, adaptabilities and identities of language learners in an increasingly interconnected world.

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