Editor's Note

Issues for Language Education Leaders in Asia

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Language Education in Asia publishes research and teaching practice papers with a practical focus on the classroom, yet the publication also aims to address all aspects of language education in this part of the world and so welcomes submissions from leaders in the field. Leaders have a broad perspective on and deep knowledge of language education issues, as well as experience with past changes in the field that may be applicable to current and future changes. Whether commentary or research, or describing successes or failures, these submissions represent potentially valuable contributions to the ongoing discussion and development of language education in this region.

Among numerous issues, it is suggested that the three briefly discussed below may benefit from examination by educational leaders in Asia: the professional development needs of primary school teachers in teaching English, access to language education, and the directions and applications of online education.

Throughout Asia, the increasing depth of globalization and the regional plan for the integration of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 have played a role in spurring national policies targeting English language education for primary-level students. These policies have created a need for professional development in teaching English and English language proficiency for primary school teachers (Spolsky & Moon, 2012; Stroupe & Kimura, 2013). Many of these teachers lack sufficient English language skills and confidence in teaching English (Fennelly & Luxton, 2011; Mathew, 2012; Sakamoto, 2012). Often additionally without adequate training, support, or resources, and with large classes, teachers at this level have been thrust into the role of providing the foundation for further language study. They may find they are expected to do this with methodologies that are at odds with their traditional classroom cultures (Hamid, 2010; Hu & McKay, 2012). Educational leaders, informed by experience and the teachers and researchers they represent, may be one of the best sources and advocates of appropriate and effective professional development in their particular contexts. Without their voices, the expected and actual outcomes of language education policies aimed at the primary level may be very different.

Secondary and tertiary students and those seeking to enter the workforce or already in it may find access to language education for enhanced job opportunities a challenge. With youth unemployment an issue in Asia, in particular in Southeast Asia (International Labour Organization, 2013), and as barriers to migration are dismantled, there is an immediate concern about better jobs going to workers who are newly mobile and more employable because of their language and

professional skills ("Regional Integration," 2012). While English skills alone are not a guarantee of economic success, these skills may be of help in obtaining better opportunities. Uneven access to language education within countries and across the region may become a factor in exacerbating existing domestic and regional socioeconomic gaps. While the tendency may be to look to governments for answers, educational leaders may have innovative solutions to effectively address access to language education for youth who are seeking better economic opportunities.

Online education is continually evolving and presenting new opportunities in language education for public and private educational institutions. Examples from around the world aimed at learners and teachers can offer ideas in implementing online education locally. In Egypt, the free *Nafham* (We Understand) Project (<http://www.nafham.com/>), which seeks to enrich the country's primary and secondary educational curricula (Chiang, 2013), includes modules on English. In China's estimated \$2 billion English learning market, alo7 (<http://www.alo7.com/>), a online startup specializing in English language education, has partnered with private English language institutions and public primary schools (Millward, 2013). The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), a U.S. Department of State-sponsored program that encourages cooperation in key areas for the five Lower Mekong countries, has an online component in its English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program for government officials (U.S. Department of State, 2013). Online education platforms such as Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org>), a massive open online course (MOOC) provider, and Wiziq (<http://wiziq.com>), a for-profit platform, offer professional development courses for teachers, some of which may be useful for language teachers. For teachers of any language interested in using online applications in their courses, Michigan State University's Center for Language Education and Research offers an array of free internet tools to support language teaching at <http://clear.msu.edu/teaching/online/ria/>. From large projects and platforms to applications, online education has the potential to support language learning and teaching. As for-profit and non-profit online education providers increasingly partner with public and private educational institutions, leaders in the field may be able to shape the many forms that online education can take to ensure that students and teachers benefit.

Leaders in education are encouraged to investigate innovative ways to handle these challenges and opportunities and to in turn encourage their researchers and teachers to do the same. The further step of seeking to share achievements as well as missteps with a wider audience through publication should be taken. Without input from educational leaders, researchers, and teachers in the region, unsuitable and / or unworkable policies may be made, regional plans for economic integration may ultimately favor countries or areas that produce workers with better English and professional skills, and the opportunities that the various forms of online education offer may go unrealized. The consequences will be mainly borne by the most important - and vulnerable - stakeholders in language education: our students.

This publication would not be possible without the support of our Advisory and Editorial Boards. We are very fortunate to have a large body of editors who have made *Language Education in Asia* known as a publication offering constructive feedback to authors. I would like to thank the editorial team for Volume 4, Issue 1, Mr John Middlecamp, Ms Deborah Sin, Ms Alice Svendsen, Ms Phanisara (Nina) Logsdon, and Mr Sophearith Ngov; they have dedicated many hours at all hours to bringing the Issue 1 articles to publication. A special thank you goes to Dr. Alan Klein, who helped behind the scenes whenever needed. We look forward to the addition of Dr. Caroline Ho to the editorial team from Issue 2.

Volume 4, Issue 1 is the second issue very ably supervised by Mr. John Middlecamp, Assistant Editor-in-Chief. The publication, our expanded editorial team, and authors benefited from his editing, training, and organizational skills as well as the tremendous amount of time he devoted to the publication process. John also brought fresh ideas to the publication; he is responsible for having the search feature added to the *Language Education in Asia* webpages. While John has stepped down as assistant editor-in-chief, he will generously support the publication by staying on to review from the next volume.

The research section of Issue 1 begins with Luna Jing Cai's investigation of the academic writing needs of postgraduate Chinese university students, as perceived by the students. These students, who may be required to write academic papers for their graduate studies or for publication after starting their careers, lack adequate knowledge of the specific features of the sections in academic papers and want to learn academic writing skills as well as the appropriate use of academic language. In Vietnam, Huong Quynh Tran's discusses EFL learners' competence in and perception of the use of commonly used figurative idioms. Although the study participants wanted to know and use idioms, they were found to have a low level of competence. The author offers recommendations on how to more effectively teach idioms.

The teaching practice section starts with Emily Harms and CeAnn Myers in Japan. The authors present an alternative to individual presentations to increase student speaking time, fluency, and confidence. Working in the same group over a semester, students practice various assigned speaking roles. The authors provide a framework for implementation and a useful set of materials. Collaborating in Thailand and Japan, Dittthayanan Punyaratabandhu, Edward Rush, Michael J. Kleindl, and Paul Wadden investigate two approaches to academic writing that provide students with higher-level writing and critical thinking skills that align more closely to what is expected in Western universities. While they encourage the use of one approach, writing using periodic development, they also describe another approach that offers more guidance for intermediate-level writers. From Vietnam, Le Pham Hoai Huong suggests using play activities in primary school English classes for the language skill practice and the practical and social skills that the games impart. The author discusses a wide range of play activities that can be easily adapted for various primary English lessons. The issue concludes with Daniel Ferreira in Japan; he describes how information and communication technologies (ICT) can be used to develop a learner-centered community to foster L2 identities in contexts where the L2 is a foreign language. Through blogs and newscasts, two classes began to form an online community together, first with teacher support and then more autonomously.

All of the authors who submitted papers to *Language Education in Asia* are to be commended for taking their inquiries through the long processes of investigation and writing and for seeking to share their work with the readership of the publication. *Language Education in Asia* continues to provide such researchers, teachers, and leaders an opportunity to contribute to the betterment of language education in the region.

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