



Introduction to the seventh regular issue of JALT

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2020.4.1.1>

The coronavirus has entered its second year and counter-measures such as physical distancing and mask-wearing have been a necessity for much longer than hoped for. Diverse approaches to Covid-19 in Higher Education (HE) have been observed and different stages of HE responses to the pandemic have been conceptualised (Butler-Henderson et al., 2020; 2021a, b; Crawford, 2020). The vast observable differences were often due to variations in digital capabilities, national and university leadership, innovations in curriculum delivery and assessment, support of research activities, partnerships across higher education institutions and with industry bodies, and a decrease in international enrolments and engagement (Butler-Henderson et al., 2021a; Crawford et al., 2020).

The pandemic has had a numbing effect, at least on the two of us. Having conducted research on the educational effects of the virus since the beginning of last year, it appears like a never-ending tale of horror. While we feel fortunate to live in Singapore (that has one of the lowest fatality rates and one of the most lauded responses to Covid-19 worldwide: Kefalaki et al., 2021), adverse psychological effects are nonetheless undeniable. And while we acknowledge our good luck of being knowledge workers that can get stuff done from anywhere, the days when working from home seemed like an unattainable paradise are sure long gone. More generally, the pandemic's global consequences are bound to lead to greater inequality amongst and within countries, also in terms of access to higher education – as our present issue also demonstrates (see in particular, the contributions by Hawley et al., Martins et al., and Butler-Henderson et al.).

Pre-pandemic, 21st century academia had already moved far away from Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideal of a holistic combination of research and teaching in an environment of academic freedom (for both teachers and students) that transforms students into autonomous individuals and global citizens (Humboldt's vision was still elitist and dominated by white male privilege, amongst other flaws – Fleming, 2021; Rudolph, 2021). The enormous pressures on students and teachers that existed pre-pandemic have been exacerbated

by COVID-19. In a brilliant recent book, *Dark academia. How universities die*, Peter Fleming paints an alarming picture of the status quo in HE that runs counter to the fairy tale image of a "recondite club of tweed-jacketed, pipe smoking professors who think all day and pen esoteric research papers once every few years" (p. 156).

In its first three years of existence, JALT has come a long way. 200 contributors from 28 countries (and all continents) have contributed a total of 128 articles to six regular and two special issues – with our current issue containing another 22 pieces, and the forthcoming special issue on Alternative Education/Educational Alternatives featuring nine pre-published contributions (totalling 159 papers). In previous issues, we have interviewed six prominent educational thought leaders: Bror Saxberg (et al., 2018), John Biggs (et al., 2019), Stephen Brookfield (et al., 2019), George Siemens (et al., 2020), James Tooley (et al., 2020), and Martin Parker (et al., 2021) – and while the present issue does not contain such an interview, it is planned that the next issue will have one again. As of 20 June, 2021, "COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses" (Crawford et al., 2020) is our most cited article with 609 Google Scholar citations. It was the first article on the topic and it currently is amongst the two most-quoted papers on COVID-19 and higher education worldwide.

With our journal becoming more popular, the rejection rate in 2021 (as of 7 June) has risen to an unprecedented high of 46%. We do not regard this as a badge of honour, and we certainly do not aim for as high an article rejection rate as possible (so-called 'top journals' have rejection rates of around 90%). On the contrary, we do not measure our success and quality via an article rejection rate (or other related metrics) and aim to continue to be inclusive and developmental, for instance encouraging authors from countries that are at the fringe of academic publications to continue submitting articles to JALT.

With publications being an important part of many academics' performance indicators, it is publish or perish, and the emotional effects of rejections can include

“alienation, discouragement, disillusionment, damaged egos and threats to one’s identity as a scholar” (Tourish, 2019, p. 70). Strategic management guru Jay Barney (2005) narrates a telling anecdote that his article “Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage” was rejected multiple times by leading journals, until he himself accepted it for a special issue of the *Journal of Management*. At present, the article has more than 80,000 citations on Google Scholar, so it would appear that the rejections were not justified. The publishing game can easily lead to metric-fixation and metric-mania and become an end in itself (Fleming, 2021; Tourish, 2019). We sincerely wish our conversations may never become as shallow as what Dennis Tourish (2019, p. 234) tongue-in-cheek writes: “how high is your h-index today, and what is your total number of citations on google scholar?”

Over the last three years, Kaplan Singapore (our journal’s sponsor) has thus far conducted ten symposia in conjunction with its partner universities and JALT. In the second half of 2021, we will conduct additional symposia. On 22 July, a symposium co-organised with Essex Business School will be on Alternative Finance/Rethinking Finance Education, and on 17 September, we will, together with Murdoch University, deliver a symposium on Transnational Education. Additional symposia co-organised with other Kaplan Singapore university partners (Griffith University, University College Dublin, and University of Portsmouth) will follow later this year and will be promoted via the News section of the JALT website (<https://journals.sfu.ca/jalt/index.php/jalt/announcement>).

The seventh regular issue of JALT contains articles about educational issues of diverse countries. There are articles that focus on single countries (India, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nigeria, the U.S., and Vietnam), comparative articles (Hawley et al. compare the U.S., the Netherlands, Ireland, South Korea, China, Malaysia, and Taiwan, whilst Teo & Divakar compare India and Cambodia) and an article without a strong country focus (from Singapore/Japan) that are relevant irrespective of geographical boundaries (by Sim and Ng et al.). JALT’s focus on Higher Education is reflected in the vast majority of articles.

Unsurprisingly, the dominant theme in this issue is once again Covid-19 and Higher Education. This is reflected in the first four peer-reviewed articles as well as a brief article. Suzanne Hawley and 19 co-authors present the first peer-reviewed article of our latest issue on “Concerns of college students during the COVID-19 pandemic: Thematic perspectives from the United States, Asia, and Europe”. The authors researched students’ pandemic-related experiences in seven countries across three continents. Results identified the themes of education, safety, mental health, employment stability/finances, concerns about the future, and relationships. These findings point to the universality of students needing support for the continuity of their learning in a time of crisis.

The second article on Covid and HE is a contribution by Eileen Grafton, Elizabeth Elder, and Robert Burton. Their paper on “Innovative strategies to maintain nursing students’ academic continuity during the COVID 19 pandemic” is based on the critical reflection of their experiences in a

transnational Bachelor of Nursing programme in Singapore. Although online teaching has been reported as a practical option when encountering short periods of disruption, little has been written on its impact on course integrity and student academic continuity. Grafton and co-authors contribute to fill that gap and share innovative teaching strategies that they implemented.

Another valuable perspective on the pandemic is the article by Hélio Martins et al., titled “Online learning during COVID-19 emergency – a descriptive study of university students’ experience in Mozambique”. With teaching having shifted to digital platforms, the authors sought to investigate the student experience and collected in excess of 6,000 survey responses from HE students in the Southeast African country. Martins’ and co-authors’ research provides important insights into HE during the pandemic, and how the majority of HE students in Mozambique have a much-deteriorated experience in terms of quality education when compared to the pre-pandemic face-to-face delivery.

A fourth piece on the pandemic is provided by Salome Mshigeni, Evangel Sarwar, and Eunice Kimunai. Their article is titled “College students’ educational experiences amid COVID-19 pandemic”. Their study examines the impact of Covid-19 on higher education in the U.S., emphasising technology, mental health, and resources provided by a Californian university. While the difficulties experienced in California undoubtedly pale when compared to Martins’ et al.’s description of the situation in Mozambique, it is remarkable that more than half of Mshigeni et al.’s respondents found the study experience challenging, with a very high overall proportion reporting increased stress and anxiety levels.

In order to include the fifth and final piece on HE and Covid-19 in our description, we temporarily depart from our discussion of contributions in sequential order. In this brief article, Butler-Henderson et al. provide an updated version of the COVID-19 Higher Education Literature Database (CHELD) that was previously featured in JALT six months on (Butler-Henderson et al., 2020). This short communication provides a snapshot of the progressive response to COVID-19 by the higher education sector. The database provides easy and unencumbered access to a rigorous and valid assessment of manuscripts that discuss the response to COVID-19 within universities and other tertiary institutions. It is hoped that this database will provide fellow Covid and HE researchers with access to the relevant scholarship of learning and teaching as we collectively learn from the successes and failures in the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Apart from the aforementioned papers on COVID-19 and HE, there is a refreshing breadth of themes across the remainder of the issue that defies pigeonholing. In Kevin Adkins and co-authors’ “Exploring the impact of early exposure to research on dual enrollment students: A qualitative single-case study”, project-based learning as a scaffolding technique and its impact on undergraduate research in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is discussed. Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU), the world’s largest and oldest aviation-focused university, provides a concurrent enrolment model for high school students across the United

States.

Adkins' article on the intriguing issue of dual enrolment in STEM subjects is followed by explorations of engineering education in India and accounting education in Vietnam. Jandhyala Tilak investigates "Students' perspectives on quality of engineering education in India". It is commonly held that engineering education in India has expanded massively at the cost of quality. Tilak's research surprisingly found that the majority of students were satisfied with the quality of education in their institutions and thought of themselves as well-prepared for the world of work in India or abroad, or for further education. Tilak's article highlights the importance of considering student perspectives and is based on a massive inter-state survey across numerous public and private institutions in the subcontinent.

Mark Wheaton explores the theory of student engagement and its impact on student learning. The author used a quantitative approach and compared two strategies to teaching and learning, a teacher-centred class (lecture model) and a student-centred class (inter-teaching model). Wheaton's results of his research in Vietnam suggest that the kind of student engagement that inter-teaching generates encourages their learning in accounting courses. Given the oft-voiced prejudice that Vietnamese, and other Asian, students may prefer to be passive rote learners and listen to the 'sage on the stage' (and not to even discuss stereotypes of accountancy students as less verbal 'number-crunchers'), this would appear to be an important and inspiring result, especially to those harbouring such unfounded stereotypes.

The next two articles discuss an inspirational female lecturer as well as an important research approach on sexual misconduct. Innocent Anazia examines transformational leadership in his article on "Non-formal leadership in higher education: a case study of the transformational leadership of a young female academic in a Nigerian university". Using a qualitative approach, Bass and Avolio's four I's of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (that together define transformational leadership) were seen exemplified in the lecturer's teaching and her engagement with her students.

Sabrina Cherry, Melannie Pate and Zoe Leonard share their important research approach to "Assessing the campus climate on sexual misconduct: An opportunity for student-centred research". Cherry and co-authors' U.S.-based research details how universities can conduct large-scale campus climate surveys that effectively assess behaviours and attitudes regarding sexual misconduct. The authors taught and mentored undergraduate students in co-facilitating a sexual misconduct assessment and see this as an example of applied learning and research projects for students.

This disconcerting topic that is finally receiving much-needed attention in the context of the #MeToo movement, is followed by two articles that explore the ubiquitous learning management systems (LMS) as well as a more creative learning and teaching approach by using Lego. New Zealand-based Kwong Nui Sim discusses Blackboard as a dominant LMS in HE institutions. Students' perspectives on

the use of Blackboard in Sim's courses were collated through photographs, video and individual discussions over the duration of a trimester and showed questionable, though well-intentioned, uses by lecturers. Sim argues that teacher training is key for a sound pedagogical use of Blackboard.

The Singaporean-Japanese team of Desmond Ng, Florence Ng and Nobuaki Minato investigate the use of Lego in higher education and training via a systematic literature review. Ng and co-authors found that there is a clear contrast in the use of Lego in learning facilitation versus thinking facilitation, and there is also a distinct difference between individual and group application. A resultant four-quadrant typology is created to assist educators new to using Lego as a learning and teaching approach.

The final two articles in the peer-reviewed section go beyond HE and bring us into the realm of children's books and their stereotypical gender roles as well as mobile learning in two Asian emerging economies. In "Examining female characters in children picture books: an international teachers' perspective", Ibtesam Hussein and Maysoun Ali evaluate the influence of children picture books on the self-esteem, behaviour, and thinking of women in their formative years. In their analysis of award-winning children picture books, Hussein and Ali come to the conclusion that female characters are under-represented and have relatively unimportant and highly stereotypical roles. There is obviously a need to redress these misleading stereotypes, and teachers can do their part.

In the final research article of this issue, Teck Choon Teo and Aji Divakar set out to explore the gaps between traditional and mobile learning. In "Understanding the concepts of digital learning approaches: An empirical analysis of schools in developing countries", the authors reconstruct the practices of mainstream schools in Cambodia and India. Teo and Divakar discuss critical learning support along with various techniques and platforms that support effective m-learning.

In Vanessa Stafford's EdTech review, "Using Google shared files to facilitate successful online student group collaboration", she explores the use of Google's suite of cloud-based shared products (Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides) and its application to HE. Stafford argues that with a shift to mass online learning, it is crucial to maintain traditional on-campus collaborative group work benefits and ensure that learning continues during online group work. Through her providing of practical shared-file case studies, she challenges educators to be student-centred and to aim for quality learning outcomes by implementing cloud-based shared files that improve collaborative online learning experiences.

Sandra Meiras discusses "The challenges of feedback in higher education" based on her review of the literature. Meiras conceptualises the giving and receiving of feedback as a process that requires multiple inputs and should support the partnership between educators and students through dialogue and engagement. Developing feedback literacy means that emotions need to be incorporated as a critical aspect of professional and student development.

Justin O'Brien and Anastasios Siampos provide both a teaching case and a note to their case on marketing students creating a digital marketing campaign for the iconic Cirque du Soleil. The teaching case is to challenge HE students' communication skills, marketing knowledge and teamwork. O'Brien and Siampos encourage educators to use their case and invite students to build a digitally-focused, integrated marketing communications plan and work individually and in groups, using roleplay amongst other things.

The issue is complete with three book reviews that are positive throughout. Nursing education experts Vivian Tan and Sam Goh review the second edition of *Transition to professional nursing practice* by Robert Burton and Graham Ormrod that examines the responsibilities of fully-qualified nurses from international and professional development perspectives. Shannon Tan enthusiastically reviews *Never stop learning: Stay relevant, reinvent yourself, and thrive* by Bradley Staats. In addressing the importance of lifelong learning in the knowledge economy, both Staats and Tan encourage never-ending curiosity while emphasising our individuality. Finally, Jürgen Rudolph reviews *Strategic learning: A holistic approach to studying* by Professor Robert Kamei. Kamei's excellent and highly practical book could be read in conjunction with Staats' *Never stop learning*. As knowledge workers, we are bound to spend many years of continuous learning. So we may as well be strategic about our discovering how to become experts in how we learn best.

Finally, a customary big Thank You must go to our fantastic Associate Editors, Drs Margarita Kefalaki, Joey Crawford and Nigel Starck, as well as our esteemed Editorial Board, our peer reviewers as well as the leaders of Kaplan Singapore (especially Associate Professor Rhys Johnson and COO Mike Christie) for their continued staunch support of the JALT project. In addition, we have been blessed with two outstanding research interns who ably contributed to our research and the management of the journal: Ms Ching Sheau Rong and Ms Nurrul Diyyanah Binte Azman. Thanks also to our friend Mohamed Fadhil bin Mohamed Ismail for his persuasive charm in getting his students excited about doing research and assisting in an academic journal! We express our sincere gratitude to Professor James Adonopoulos for his infectious evangelism in promoting JALT to our esteemed colleagues from Kaplan Australia; Dr Mike Evans for his expert chairing of our Editorial Board meetings; and Veronica Mitchell for her social media posts on JALT on behalf of Murdoch University Singapore. Also a big shout out to our contributors and the many other friends and supporters that remain unnamed! As ever, we welcome all feedback and ideas.

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