

Editorial for EJEL Volume 20 Issue 1

Dear readers,

This edition of EJEL is a second and a final instalment of the special issue comprising articles responding to the call for papers from December 2020, on Covid-19 and the future of e-learning. The papers in this edition add to the diversity of views across different subject areas (technology, languages and mathematics) and different regions (China, Romania, Spain, South Africa and Indonesia).

Dan Li from Hunan Railway Professional Technology College (China) presents the results of a survey study on the benefits and challenges of online classes during the pandemic, from the students' perspective. These are confirming some of the findings from other similar studies from the previous issue on this topic (for example, technology obstacles) but also add some new findings, such as the benefits of developing digital learning communities. The shift to online learning seems to have induced a shift of power in the student/teacher relationship too, with students expecting to be more involved in future online learning design and setting higher expectations for teachers' online presence.

Benefits and challenges of online learning during the pandemic have also been considered by Lidia Alexa and her colleagues from Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iași (Romania). The outcomes of their (complementary) mixed method study suggest that students' digital competencies do not necessarily lead to the full exploitation of the benefits of online learning. They found that the role of teachers has expanded beyond learning and teaching to also providing mentorship and guidance in the times of crisis, suggesting wider institutional implications.

The paper by Nassima Kerras et al. from the Universities Pompeu Fabra and Granada (Spain) presents the challenges of online learning during the pandemic from the perspective of students learning Arabic language. In comparison with technical subjects studied in the previous two papers, the results of their survey indicate some specific difficulties of using technology to mediate the learning of pronunciation. The authors emphasise the need for empathy and creativity in class for increasing students' motivation for online learning.

Online learning of Arabic language is also the focus of the paper by Tawffeek Mohammed from the University of the Western Cape (South Africa). In addition to evaluating students' learning experience using a purposely designed survey the study provides details of the course design founded on a Technology Integration Matrix with Bloom's taxonomy (Winkelman). The findings emphasise the benefits of digital storytelling and interactive online tools such as Sanako Connect for the effectiveness of students' learning.

Marfuah Marfuah and her collaborators from four different universities in Indonesia employ didactic design research in the analysis of pedagogical and didactic interactions in online learning of in-service mathematics teachers'. Their analysis reveals the crucial role of discussion forums for students' learning but also the need to explain the benefits of discussion for learning to the students who sometimes see it as an 'optional extra'.

The articles in this issue confirm that there is a great level of agreement on students' perspectives on online learning across different subject areas and different regions. To conclude this multi-instalment (19.1, 19.4 & 20.1) special issue on Covid-19 impact on e-learning, we can say with some confidence that the eagerly anticipated end of the pandemic would not imply the end of online learning. On the contrary, online learning is 'here to stay' despite the exposed issues and challenges. The experience gained during the pandemic will help in combining online with face-to-face instruction into meaningful and transformative learning activities that make up the blended learning model.

**Journal Editors,
Marija Cubric and Heinrich Söbke**