



SPECIAL ISSUE ON

Engaged Learning and Innovative Teaching in Higher Education

The key economic issues of the next few decades, such as a plateauing of human capital, a reversion to sole cognitive skills, overeducation, AI and robotics, as well as longer lifespans and working careers, call for a reassessment of the goals and function of higher education. The ramifications for the higher education systems are significantly impacted by these challenges. For instance, it is predicted that the returns on education will increase; more people will pursue higher education at an older age; the emphasis is more on employment; older students shall be more motivated than younger ones typically on reskilling, upskilling, transition, and renewal of their skills; and more people will earn competence and skills in addition to pursuing education that culminates to qualification certificates. There have been extensive discussions about the future of higher education over the past years, as evidenced by the publication of numerous research reports, including *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferrable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century* by National Research Council; *New Skills Now: Inclusion in the Digital Economy*, and *It's Learning, Just Not As We Know It: How to Accelerate Skills Acquisition in the Age of Intelligent Technologies 2018*, by Accenture; *21 Jobs of the Future: A Guide to Getting and Staying Employed Over the Next Ten Years 2017* and *21 More Jobs of the Future: A Guide to Getting and Staying Employed through 2029 (2018)*, by Cognizant; *The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030 (2018)* and *Trends Shaping Education 2019* by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); *World Development Report 2019: The Changing Nature of Work*, from the World Bank; *The Future of Jobs Report 2018* and *Dialogue Series on New Economic and Social Frontiers Shaping the New Economy in the Fourth Industrial Revolution 2019* by the World Economic Forum, and so on.

In light of the aforementioned, innovation in higher education is required to ensure that students find higher education meaningful and relevant in order to be motivated to learn. This demand applies not only to classroom pedagogy, but also to curriculum and programme development up to the level of the institution.

As a result of discussions about the future of higher education, a number of initiatives in higher education have been launched to address the challenges, including Stanford's Open Loop University initiative, Georgia Tech's Commission on Creating the Next in Education, Harvard University's 60-year curriculum, and others. They share a common goal of developing and implementing innovative programmes and curricula at the institutional level, with a focus not only on young adults but also on lifelong education; as long as the individual finds higher education relevant and valuable, they are welcome to return to the institution to reskill, upskill, transition, or renew their skills.

In this Special Issue on Engaged Learning and Innovative Teaching in Higher Education, eight research reports are published after undergoing double-blind peer review. There is no overlap in this collection of research on various engaging learning pedagogies and/or the use of technology in higher education. Most of them revisit and further investigate innovative pedagogies and technology practises for a deeper understanding of the more effective teaching and learning process in higher education. Some of

them demonstrate that, neither technology nor pedagogy is to fault for a lack of comprehension of the learning processes; rather, it is the challenges and barriers encountered in practice that merit further investigation.

Higher education places a substantial emphasis on practicums, which are intended to provide authentic, real-world learning opportunities. It makes learning relevant and meaningful and engages students. The study entitled, "Student-Teachers' Practicum Experiences in Hong Kong and Macao during the COVID-19 Pandemic," investigates two groups of pre-service teachers in Hong Kong and Macao to identify the critical features of practicum practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, the implementation of practicum practice was mainly distance learning in nature. The study identified various pedagogical foci in the practicum, the different assessment tasks being developed, consequences of parental involvement, evaluations of the exercise, as well as challenges faced by student-teachers during the practicum.

Through the use of games, learning content is presented in ways that are interesting, entertaining, or captivating. Positive emotional states can be induced by playing games, which improves learning. When a player's attention is totally absorbed by the game and enjoyable activities, the player frequently experiences a state of flow in which one entirely loses all sense of time and place. Students fully engage in educational games with immediate rewards and constructive competition. Students remain motivated to learn while playing. The study entitled, "Creativity and digital game-based learning: A game selection framework for new DGBL teachers," proposes a three-stage filtration system for the selection of digital game-based learning-friendly games with a demonstration of creative pedagogical ideas in adapting the Nintendo Switch digital game Animal Crossing: New Horizons (ACNH) in the design of digital game-based learning environment.

Human species is sociable and human brains evolved for social interaction. Including activities where students connect with each other to make learning easy because education is linked with how humans learn. Asynchronous online discussion in a learning management system engages students by generating social learning experiences through structured curriculum-related conversations where they may collaborate and hear others' thoughts. The study entitled, "Intuited the usefulness of an asynchronous online discussion in a course management system among university students in Hong Kong," aims to explore the factors affecting the use of the asynchronous online discussion technology as in practice. It is found that students do not engage much in the activity. It was revealed that while students did not perceive the discussion useful for their learning, their perceptions were mediated by way of its practicing, students' learning strategies as well as socially desirable behaviour where socially desirable behaviour mediated the effectiveness of educational technology in enhancing learning experiences.

A research degree's objective is to facilitate the transition from a student to an independent researcher. The supervision process is a crucial component of a successful PhD programme. The supervisor and PhD student collaborate on this process. All research degrees depend on the relationship between the student and the supervisor. A PhD student's engagement will depend on how well he/she comprehends and upholds the supervisor-student relationship. The study entitled, "Navigating a supervision model in TESOL research training: Narrative insights from Asian international PhD students," explores the complex process of supervision that leads to successful research training globally. The study discussed the adequate supervision of prospective international PhD students and proposed a humanistic model for the supervision of Asian international PhD students.

By fostering students' motivation, autonomy, self-regulation, metacognition, and critical thinking abilities, self-directed learning keeps students engaged. Learners can gain a deeper understanding of the problem, the content, and the context by taking charge of their education. The study entitled,

“There’s more than one way to personalize (online): Exploring informal, self-directed learners’ autonomy preferences when learning with technology,” explored learners’ approaches to online self-directed learning and proposed a theoretical framework to explain differences in learning approaches. The findings depict four autonomy preferences: (1) learning in an efficient way; (2) in a structured way; (3) in a way that ensures depth of knowledge; or (4) in an experimental way. The study offered recommendations for how instructors might support learners with each preference.

The use of multimedia in the classroom can improve learning and student engagement. It can aid in the presentation of knowledge in many formats, appeal to various learning styles, and foster creativity and curiosity. Video essays in particular can be a potent and fascinating tool for students to communicate their grasp of a certain subject or idea. Students can make a multimedia presentation that demonstrates their knowledge and creativity by integrating video content with voiceover narration. The study entitled “Students’ perceptions of using video essays as assessment tools,” explored the learning experience of undergraduate students on the usage of video essays for tools for assessment.

Engaging students is one of the main challenges of online learning. It incorporates complex aspects like instructor presence, feedback, support, time invested, subject competence, information and communication skills and knowledge, technology acceptance, and use that determine the kinds of teacher-student interactions that affect student engagement. Additional elements, such as curriculum quality, design, complexity, level of required collaboration, and technological utilisation, may be taken into consideration (Hollister et al., 2022). The study entitled, “Teaching practical journalism modules online: a blessing or a nightmare to teachers?,” explored effective teaching strategies to improve practical participation in online learning environment, supplemented by social media communication means after class.

When learning is followed by immediate feedback, it pushes learners to reflect, engage, and change their behaviour right away. Learning becomes active rather than passive when feedback is provided immediately rather than over time. Through reviewing, summarising, clarifying, providing feedback, diagnosing erroneous knowledge, identifying knowledge gaps, and taking into account deviations from the ideal, using technology to enable students to also provide feedback in peer assessment increases students' critical engagement in learning. The study entitled, “Gongyeh App: EFL students’ voices from Hong Kong,” examines the experiences of university EFL students preparing and evaluating oral presentations via the Gongyeh App, an online presentation assessment platform devised by an EMI university in Hong Kong. It discussed pragmatic and useful learning support for students overcoming the challenges of giving feedback on oral presentations.

To provide high-quality and relevant higher education that engages students, it is essential to have a constant dialogue about the role of higher education in addressing global issues through innovative curriculum design, instructional pedagogies, assessment and feedback, and technology. This special guest issue of the *Journal of Communication and Education* is intended to serve as a forum for the engaged learning and innovative teaching in higher education. This platform should not be an one time event, but rather a constant and regular forum for the academic community to share research findings and best practises.

Will W. K. Ma
Anna Wing-bo Tso
Editors

Reference

Hollister, B., Nair, P., Hill-Lindsay, S., & Chukoskie, L. (2022). Engagement in online learning: Student attitudes and behavior during COVID-19. *Frontiers in Education, 7*. DOI:10.3389/feduc.2022.851019

Journal of Communication and Education © 2023

ISSN 2311-5157

www.hkaect.org/jce/

Please cite as: Ma, W. W. K., & Tso, A. W. B. (2023). Editorial: Engaging learning and innovative teaching in higher education. *Journal of Communication and Education, 6(1)*, 1-4.