The English Connection

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Preview to the KOTESOL International Conference 2025

"Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI: Enhancing ELT Through Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovation"

Invited Speakers' Articles and Interviews

KOTESOL
대한영어교육학회

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The English Connection

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Contents

Spring 2025 / Volume 29, Issue 1

KOREA TESOL
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To promote scholarship, disseminate information, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding among persons concerned with the teaching and learning of English in Korea.

Editorial
A Plena-Kucha Key-Quium ZoomShop

By Dr. Andrew White Editor-in-Chief, *The English Connection*

I have been attending conference presentations for over 20 years, but it wasn't until just recently that I started to ask myself, "What exactly am I attending?" Conference goers are faced with the difficult task of choosing amongst a variety of concurrent sessions (often five to ten scheduled at the same time), but more confusing to me are the categories and terms. What should I expect from a plenary talk, as opposed to a keynote speech? How's a colloquium different from a panel discussion? Do I need to roll up my sleeves for a workshop? Browsing and selecting the talks to attend can be a struggle, to say the least, when looking at the lexicon of a conference catalogue's schedule of events.

As well, since our goal as teachers, presumably, is to make English accessible and easy for our students, wouldn't it make sense to use clear, direct language when structuring ELT conference schedules? Complex academic terms may create exclusivity and a sense of expertise, but also confusing jargon, so an attempt at using straightforward session labels might ensure that both educator and student attendees aren't bewildered with the selection, and benefit more from the conference content that's right for them.

Let's take a lighthearted and slightly irreverent look at common conference session types to see what I mean.

Keynote Speaker — I've always assumed that the keynote address (and thus shouldn't it be *addresser* and not *speaker*?) was from someone "brought in," and perhaps a major drawcard, whose speech bookends a conference. The topic tends to be general, maybe even peripheral to the conference theme, but sets the motivational tone for the proceedings. This is befitting, as the term *keynote* originates from music, where the first note played establishes the tone and pitch for the entire performance.

Plenary — If a speaker speaks, and a presenter presents, what does a plenary do? Is it a person, place, or thing, or perhaps all three? I've seen this function as a *plenary talk*, *plenary session*, *plenary speaker*, and even just *plenary*. However it's used, you'd better be there, as the main meaning purports it's for all at the conference to attend (though I'd be willing to bet half don't know what it means). It originates from the Latin term *plenus*, meaning "gathered," and refers to a session held before or after participants split into smaller groups. A *plenum* is the full group. It may come as no surprise to you that I've never been a plenary, which is probably a good thing, since I still don't know what the role is to fill.

Featured Speaker — One must ask, what is being featured that other sessions don't have? I would assume, for example, that a plenary or keynote speaker is also somewhat featured, yet more coveted, so those just go without saying. As a collocate, it is normally the speaker that is featured (and not their presentation), so the term implies a certain name recognition or power.

Invited Speaker — I have been an invited speaker on numerous occasions. First, I had to apply as a representative, then vetted, then considered and chosen by a committee. My name was then submitted to the host conference's organizational committee, at which point I was finally "invited" as a speaker. I then could take advantage of the time slot reserved for the invitation's recipient, and present on a topic of my choosing (assumably one related to ESL, and not my grandma's cookie recipes). However, aren't all speakers invited in one sense or another? Surely plenary and featured speakers are receiving the true invites from organizers. Perhaps not as lofty a title as it sounds, I've still appreciated being invited, despite the ambiguous term.

Colloquium — Defined as "a conference at which scholars or other experts present papers on, analyze, and discuss a specific topic." Sounds like just a fancy foreign word for panel or roundtable discussion to me. "Never use a long word where a short one will do" – Orwell.

Pecha Kucha — Why is it that the presentation style meant to be concise and coherent has the longest and most confusing name? To further confuse the issue, *pecha kucha* means "chit chat" in Japanese, which is exactly what the 20 slides at 20 seconds each is ensuring to prevent.

Workshop — Alright! Finally some English I can comprehend. These sessions are held in the garage in the venue parking lot, right? Workshops are typically longer sessions at a conference, following the assumption that engaging participants with hands-on, structured work will keep them awake and in the room longer than listening to 20 minutes of theoretical lecturing.

Zoom Session, Asynchronous Session, Hybrids, etc. — So many iterations can get confusing. Video conferencing can be seen as convenient, even innovative. However, over time, many have experienced tech fatigue and a longing for face-to-face interaction. People pay to gather at conferences for the authentic engagement, and the rapport in video sessions can be hit or miss, so I'll just catch the virtual highlights on rerun.

Poster Presentation — Speaking of authentic engagement, you can't get more interactive than talking one on one with the researcher right there in front of the 3 × 4-foot poster data. They're eager to explain their work, and you probably won't get this kind of access at other session formats unless you rush the stage or accost the presenter in the hallway. "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end" – Thoreau. Less is more.

As we look forward to the KOTESOL 2025 International Conference, let this be a keynote (perhaps out of key!) guide to various sessions we are anticipating. And with "Embracing Humanity" as the theme, take some time to check out the lonely guys at the poster presentations.

KOTESOL and the Year of the Snake 2025 –
Leading to Growth, Transformation, and Renewal!

By Dr. Lindsay Herron KOTESOL President

As I read Lunar New Year predictions for 2025, the Year of the Snake, many included words such as *transformation*, *change*, and *adaptability*. Others added *renewal* and *growth*, evoking the image of a snake shedding its skin, or *wisdom*, *calm*, and *creativity*. All of these seem like solid goals for KOTESOL in the coming months – and areas where we can provide ample service to our members year-round! What are your personal and professional goals for the year? Perhaps KOTESOL can help!

First, the 32nd Korea TESOL International Conference rides the tides of this year. Indeed, the theme, "Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI: Enhancing ELT Through Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovation," seems an apt representation of judicious evolution, of reflectively combining our current strengths with a compassionate, critical approach to the future. The invited speakers come from a wide array of backgrounds, and the conference builds on our organization's extensive experience with both in-person and online events to create what is sure to be an impressive and inclusive event. We look forward to participation by many of our partner organizations, both international and domestic; pre-recorded videos will be available for free online, maximizing access for participants unable to attend in person; and lifetime member Kara Mac Donald is sponsoring a new travel grant for up to two presenters with demonstrated financial need, further ensuring a diverse range of perspectives and insights. The conference will also provide ample opportunities for connections and conversations among our participants, creating space for mutual inspiration, collaboration, and rejuvenation. I am confident this conference will be empowering, energizing, exhausting – and above all else, enjoyable!

KOTESOL also offers many avenues for participation throughout the year. Would you like to expand your professional development by attending more in-person events? Or perhaps your goal is to hone your presentation skills (and your resume) by presenting more often and more widely. KOTESOL can help with both of these objectives! Many KOTESOL chapters around the nation host monthly workshops, which are great opportunities to connect with other members, explore new ideas, or try out a new session you're developing as a presenter. Got an idea for a new topic or an innovative format for a meeting? Talk to your local chapter leaders; they're always looking for inspiration! And don't miss the special events coordinated by our special interest groups (SIGs). If you're looking for professional development related to a specific topic, check out our SIG offerings – including our new Book Club SIG. The SIGs offer a chance to share your perspectives and passions with like-minded individuals and are a great resource for delving deeply into a particular area.

If you'd like to broaden your professional development outside the boundaries of KOTESOL events, take note of the reciprocal conference-registration discounts offered by many of our partner organizations! You might also be interested in applying for a travel or conference grant to represent us at our partner organizations' conferences. Conferences are exceptional opportunities to acquire new knowledge and build new relationships, and our recent partnerships with the Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (SPELT) and the Korea Association of Secondary English Education (KASEE) provide some excellent new options.

Is your goal for this year to expand your research presence or publish your work? If so, it might be time to look more closely at KOTESOL's research grants or submit a piece to one of our plethora of publications! Our Research Committee offers up to two grants each year, one for up to 250,000 KRW and one for up to 750,0000 KRW; if you need funding for an inquiry project, consider submitting an application. We also have publications suited to a variety of audiences and purposes: informal blog posts in *Scribes Square*, magazine-style pieces in *The English Connection*, and formal research papers in *Korea TESOL Journal*. Perhaps it's time to submit some of your writing – or even volunteer your time and expertise to assist the editorial teams.

Speaking of contributing your time and effort, there's one pathway for personal and professional development that I routinely praise above all others: serving as a volunteer or leader for KOTESOL! We are a 100%-volunteer organization, and we strive to empower our members to take the lead on their own projects. Volunteering also offers a chance to develop your skills in a variety of non-teaching areas, from ad design to website development – so you can contribute to our organization (and your own growth) in personally meaningful ways. Consider stepping up as a chapter leader, running for national office, or coming to our annual KOTESOL Connections Day to share your thoughts and learn more about contributing at the national level.

Will the Year of the Snake lead to growth, transformation, and renewal for you? However you choose to pursue personal and professional satisfaction, I wish you wisdom, tranquility, flexibility, and success! I hope to see you at a KOTESOL event in the near future.

"Humanity in the Age of AI" at KOTESOL 2025

By Rhea Metituk, International Conference Chair

"It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end." — Ursula K. Le Guin

As we send this issue of TEC to print, we know that by the time the conference arrives, the landscape around us – technological, educational, and societal – may have shifted yet again. We are living in a time of rapid transformation, where conversations about artificial intelligence, digital ethics, and the evolving nature of human endeavor are in flux. What does it mean to teach in an era where ChatGPT and DeepSeek are not just tools but controversies, where our educators and students alike are mapping out the intersection of automation, privacy, and agency? These are big questions, but if there is one thing we know, it is that amidst uncertainty, we return to the spaces where we have the most impact: our classes. Teaching is an act of humanity – beautiful in its messiness, essential in its adaptability. This year's conference asks us to lean into that humanity while engaging with the pressing questions of our time.

Our theme this year, "Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI: Enhancing ELT Through Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovation" asks how we, as teachers, researchers, and thinkers, take on the challenges we face and anchor ourselves in the irreplaceable role of human connection in learning. This theme also invites reflection on the ways technology both supports and complicates education. The proliferation of AI-driven tools raises urgent concerns about economic equity, environmental cost, data privacy, and social justice. Yet it also presents opportunities to expand access, personalize learning, and build on what has proven effective in traditional methodologies. We gather to explore these challenges critically and creatively, to consider what is lost and what is gained, and to reaffirm that our classrooms are spaces where knowledge is not just transferred but transformed.

The conference offerings will be a dynamic response to these challenges, shaped by educators and researchers identifying the most critical issues to address. Our conference program is designed to foster discussions on teaching ELT in the digital age, while also providing hands-on opportunities to experiment with emerging technologies. We have invited and vetted speakers providing content on each branch of our theme: (a) reflective practice and emotional intelligence, (b) innovative AI tools, (c) multilingual and multimodal pedagogy, and (d) future-proofing strategies.

Attendees will have access to a robust offering of research presentations, as well as panels, roundtables, workshops, poster sessions, and pecha kuchas that highlight both theoretical perspectives and practical applications. We have three presentation types: in person, online, and hybrid. As we all know, KOTESOL international conferences have embraced hybrid formats since the pandemic. In addition to housing some research presentations on our YouTube channel, we plan to simulcast our plenary sessions live for all to partake in. We will also introduce an experimental presentation style we call "hybrid" in which presenters joining from outside Korea will deliver live Zoom sessions to attendees in the room. This format, available to invited speakers and vetted presenters, allows individuals from locations such as Italy or Nepal to deliver their talks from their own home or office while engaging with an audience seated in a classroom at Sookmyung Women's University. The sessions will include opportunities for real-time interaction and live feedback. By incorporating this approach, we aim to expand the definition of an international, equitable, and inclusive event.

This year, we're excited to introduce a special activities room – an interactive space dedicated to community, culture, and rejuvenation. Designed to help recharge our energy throughout the conference, this space will focus on well-being, featuring yoga, aromatherapy, and a few other surprises. Our conference this year also has some special add-ons, including a creative video contest and a poster contest. Additionally, as always we encourage attendees who visit Seoul for our event to take advantage of the vivacious options travelers can delight in, including Korean food, art, nature, and culture in the venue's surrounds. Whether you are with us to present your research, refine your teaching strategies, or simply connect with like-minded people, we hope our event offers inspiration, tools to face challenges, renewal, and fun!

Registration deadlines are currently as follows: Accepted presenter registration is open from February 15 to March 15. Attendee pre-registration will be open from March 15 to April 30, and we encourage you to secure your place soon. The official conference hotel will be the same as last year: the Seoul Garden in the Mapo area, so be sure to book your stay via our event site soon if you wish to stay there.

Additionally, we're thrilled to announce we received two travel grants to support accepted presenters from eligible low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and other underrepresented nations!

We appreciate the educators and researchers whose ideas, discussions, and dedication make this event possible. We look forward to seeing you at the conference, where together we will continue the conversation, embracing both the uncertainty and the possibility of what comes next.

International Conference Preview
"Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI"

In probing the theme of the 32nd Korea TESOL International Conference, "Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI: Enhancing ELT Through Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovation," we are thrilled to present an outstanding roster of invited speakers who will illuminate our May 10–11 event. Here, you will find the titles of their main sessions. A number of them will also be conducting additional sessions, adding depth and richness to this conference experience.

Luciana C. de Oliveira
Virginia Commonwealth University, USA

Plenary Session: Innovation and Humanity in AI: Prompts and Mentor Texts in L2 Writing

Robert Stroud
Hosei University, Japan

Featured Session: AI in Our Classroom Communities: Connecting or Alienating Students?

Milan LaBrey
KideoGo

Featured Session: Teaching Beyond Language: Cultivating Emotional Intelligence in TEFL for Holistic Learning
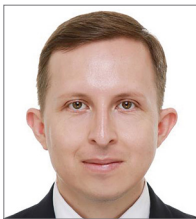
Alvaro Fuentes
Jeonbuk National University

Featured Session: AI and Human-Centered Teaching in Education

Maria Teresa Martínez García
University of Valladolid, Spain

Featured Workshop: Innovative Approaches to Pronunciation Teaching: Hands-on Strategies for Effective Learning

Ashley Ford & Kinsella Valies
Nagoya City University & Jissen Women's University, Japan

Featured Session: Reel Learning: Building Authentic and Meaningful Platforms for Student Showcasing

Nam-Joon Kang
Sookmyung Women's University

Plenary Session: Perceptions of Students and Teachers on AI-Based EduTech in ELT: Insights, Challenges, and Future Directions

Michael Griffin
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Featured Session: Reimaging Reflective Practice: Bridging Tradition and Innovation

Diane Rozells
Sookmyung Women's University

Featured Session: On the AI Bandwagon – To Jump or Not to Jump?

Richard Rose
Yonsei University & HUFS

Featured Workshop: Improving Writing Instruction Through LLM Scripting

Cheryl Woelk
Collective Joy Consulting

Featured Session: The Gift of Messy Humanness: Transforming Conflict for Successful ELT

Jared McKee & Han Zheng
University of Florida, USA

Featured Session: Reflecting on Empathy, Compassion, and Cultural Awareness in TESOL Education

AI-Based EduTech Materials in ELT and Young Learners

Dr. Nam-Joon Kang, Sookmyung Women's University

Dr. Nam-Joon Kang is a plenary speaker at the upcoming KOTESOL international conference and a TESOL professor at Sookmyung Women's University, our conference venue. She will be presenting "Perceptions of Students and Teachers on AI-Based EduTech in ELT: Insights, Challenges, and Future Directions." In the following interview, Dr. Kang talks about AI-based edutech, student and teacher perceptions on it, teaching young learners, and much more. — Ed.

The English Connection (TEC): Thank you, Dr. Kang, for your time for this interview for *The English Connection*. To start things off, would you tell us a little about yourself?

Dr. Kang: Thank you very much for giving me the honor of participating in this interview. I hold a BA in Chinese language and literature from Sookmyung Women's University (SMU). Subsequently, I pursued my academic journey in the United Kingdom, where I earned an MA from the University of York and a PhD from the University of Leeds, specializing in TESOL with a focus on young learners of English as a foreign language.

Currently, I serve as the director of both the Graduate School of TESOL and the TESOL Certificate Programs at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul. This has been my professional focus for over 20 years since completing my PhD, a role that continues to be both challenging and rewarding.

TEC: I hear that in addition to all your university duties, you also do some teaching to young learners. Why would you add this to your workload?

Dr. Kang: Yes, I do. I teach young kindergarten children English at church once a week. I've been doing this for quite a few years, and it has become one of my greatest pleasures.

There are two main reasons I continue to do this. The first is tied to my faith as a Christian. For many years, I served as a member of the church choir, but one day, I realized that singing

They will learn various activities that incorporate elements of play, music, and art therapy...

might not be my strongest talent. So, I prayed and asked God what other talents I could use to serve Him better. That's when it struck me — I already teach English to children for a living, and it's something I'm skilled at. It's also a way for me to return the love and blessings I have received from Him.

The second reason is tied to my professional philosophy. I believe that teaching English in a real-world context is essential for educators like me. It keeps us grounded and helps us stay connected to the practical techniques and skills required in actual teaching situations. Engaging with real learners allows us to encounter dynamic, diverse situations that challenge us to make spontaneous decisions, understand how theories and methods work in practice, and adapt them to suit the realities of the classroom. Each learner brings unique characteristics, varying levels of English proficiency, and different attitudes toward learning, which creates an enriching and dynamic learning environment.

For me, this weekly activity is incredibly meaningful, both professionally and spiritually. It provides valuable opportunities to practice and refine my skills while also fulfilling my personal mission to serve others.

TEC: You have been involved in materials development, including materials for television English programs. Could you tell us a little more about that?

Dr. Kang: Before starting my career at SMU TESOL, I worked as a freelancer for various broadcasting companies, such as EBS, KBS, SBS, and DBS. During that time, I participated in producing numerous English language teaching television programs for children aged 5 to 12. I also created educational video programs for several publishing companies, including YBM Sisa and Woongjin. I was involved in quite a few notable children's English language teaching television programs, such as *Hello English, Knock Knock Playground, English Fun Fun*, and even non-ELT programs like *Ding Dong Daeng Kindergarten*.

In these roles, I wore many hats — studio teacher, scriptwriter, songwriter, actor, and curriculum developer — over a span of more than 20 years. I'm especially proud of contributing to the title songs of *Ding Dong Daeng Kindergarten* and *I Can Do Well Myself* as well as the physical education theme song for *TV Kindergarten One, Two, Three*, to which I wrote the lyrics. It's heartwarming to believe that some people still remember these songs.

However, one day, I discovered something both shocking and humbling: About 80% of elementary school children were watching the English TV programs I had produced every morning in their schools. While this was a tremendous honor, it also made me deeply reflective. At that time, I lacked formal educational training and wasn't confident that these programs were pedagogically effective. This realization motivated me to

pursue a PhD in TESOL in the UK. I wanted to learn how children acquire language and how to teach them more effectively.

Even after earning my PhD, I wouldn't claim to have all the answers or to know the best methods for teaching young EFL learners. However, I do feel more equipped with knowledge and insights than before. With this renewed understanding, I continued creating TV programs, textbooks, and materials for young learners.

One of the projects I take pride in is the development of *Knock Knock Playground* and *Yo Yo Play Time*. These programs were developed for EBS to teach English to kindergarten and elementary school students, respectively. What sets these materials apart is their alignment with the national curriculum. For example, *Knock Knock Playground* was designed using topics from the Nuri Curriculum, developed by the Ministry of Education for kindergarten learners. Similarly, *Yo Yo Play Time* was tailored for first- and second-grade learners, incorporating topics and sequences from their science, mathematics, social studies, and literature textbooks.
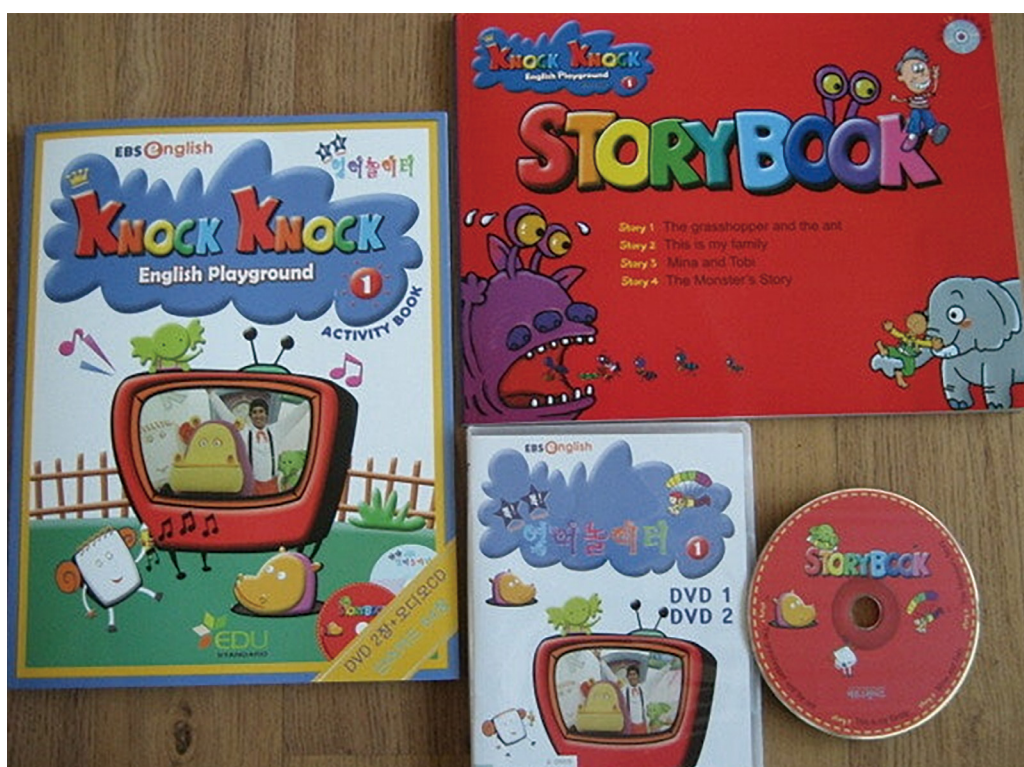
This approach reflects the principles of subject-based language teaching (SBLT). SBLT emphasizes immersion and interaction, asserting that using cognitively appropriate topics enhances meaningful interaction, thereby improving learning outcomes. By aligning language instruction with the cognitive level of learners, SBLT helps bridge the gap between their linguistic and intellectual capacities. This is crucial in EFL contexts, where learners often lose interest in English as they grow older because the curriculum fails to challenge their cognitive abilities.

Moreover, SBLT emphasizes the integration of content and language objectives. Without clear language objectives tailored to the learners' proficiency levels, students can feel overwhelmed by complex content, as seen in many immersion programs. By systematically integrating content and language objectives, lessons become more meaningful and effective, fostering both language acquisition and content understanding. Despite the thoughtful design of these programs, the accompanying curriculum didn't resonate with teachers as much as I had hoped, even though the TV series achieved high

viewer ratings. Perhaps the materials weren't as effective as I had believed, or maybe they were just unfamiliar to educators.

TEC: I'm also intrigued in your interest in therapeutic approaches to TESOL. Could you tell us more about what that entails?

Dr. Kang: Ha, this is a very good question! This course is something I am genuinely proud to discuss because it is such a unique offering, unlike anything I have seen in other programs. This SMU TESOL MA course introduces three therapeutic approaches – play therapy, music therapy, and art therapy – with the dual purpose of supporting children who require special care and integrating these therapeutic activities with English language teaching methods.

Through this course, I aim for my graduate students to develop a deep understanding of these therapeutic approaches and their potential in educational contexts. They will learn various activities that incorporate elements of play, music, and art therapy, while also exploring how to design and implement these activities in a way that seamlessly combines them with English language instruction. The ultimate goal is for my students to apply these approaches effectively in their teaching contexts, addressing the diverse and unique needs of their learners. By doing so, I hope they will not only enhance their teaching practices but also make a meaningful difference in the lives of the children they teach.

The inspiration for including these therapies in the SMU TESOL MA curriculum stems from my personal experiences teaching young learners at a daycare center. While I and my students prepared numerous activities to teach English, we often found that these activities became ineffective when faced with students exhibiting behavioral or psychological challenges. Some of the young learners lacked attention or motivation, wandered around the classroom, or disrupted the learning environment. In such cases, teachers spent more time managing behavior than delivering lessons.

These experiences led me to reflect deeply on how traditional teaching methods often fall short for students with special needs. I became increasingly interested in understanding the underlying causes of these issues and finding ways to support such learners in their English language acquisition. Over time, I realized that this was not an isolated problem but a national concern. South Korea has consistently ranked high among OECD countries in adolescent suicide rates and unhappiness indices for decades. Many young students suffer from psychological and behavioral issues, such as learned helplessness, depression, autism, and ADHD. These challenges often lead to low self-esteem, lack of participation in school activities, limited persistence, poor self-regulation, and inadequate English language skills.

Furthermore, I noticed that these challenges also affected teachers. Many educators felt overwhelmed and unequipped to handle students with such issues. They needed guidance to understand the root causes of these problems and strategies to support their learners effectively. This realization motivated me to develop a curriculum that addresses the needs of both students and teachers.

The outcomes of introducing this course exceeded my expectations. Many students who took the course shared how it helped them heal mentally and emotionally. By learning about different psychological issues and their causes, they began to understand and address their own challenges. This dual benefit – supporting teachers in managing their classrooms and helping them confront their personal struggles – has made the course particularly impactful.

Ultimately, this course is about more than just equipping educators with tools to help students with special needs. It fosters empathy, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of mental health issues that affect both students and teachers. I believe courses like this are essential for creating a brighter future for everyone. Expanding such programs could profoundly benefit the teaching community and society as a whole.

TEC: Your plenary session at KOTESOL 2025 is titled "Perceptions of Students and Teachers on AI-Based EduTech in ELT: Insights, Challenges, and Future Directions." Could you tell us a little more about the session than your title reveals?

Dr. Kang: Of course! In this presentation, I will discuss the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the use of AI-

based educational technology (edutech) in English language teaching within Korean public schools and private institutions. Specifically, I will introduce a few AI-based edutech tools implemented in two top-ranked private language schools and compare them to those used in public school curricula. The study aims to explore the perceived benefits and advantages of these tools in three critical areas: motivation, engagement, and language acquisition, from the perspectives of both students and teachers.

The primary inspiration for exploring this topic stemmed from my curiosity about the practical implementation of AI-based edutech tools widely advertised on the websites of private institutions, as well as in the digital textbooks introduced by the Ministry of Education for public elementary schools this past year. I wanted to understand whether these tools are used as claimed and to examine how they are perceived by their primary users – students and teachers. Furthermore, I aimed to investigate any differences in perceptions between these groups and how these tools are viewed across different contexts.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the research gathered data through surveys and interviews with elementary school students (Grades 1–6) and teachers from public and private schools across Seoul (Seocho-dong) and Gyeonggi-do (Incheon and Pyeongchon). A total of 98, 38, and 32 students from elementary schools in Incheon, Seocho, and Pyeongchon, respectively, participated in the survey. Additionally, three teachers from public schools and three teachers from private institutions were interviewed. The study examined the effectiveness of various edutech tools, exploring students' preferences and the motivations behind their choices. It also analyzed differences in perceptions between lower- and higher-grade students regarding edutech-supported versus traditional, teacher-led, paper-based learning.

> **They highlight …
> disparities between students'
> and teachers' perceptions…**

The findings provide valuable insights into the role of AI-based edutech tools in English language education. They highlight significant differences in perceived effectiveness across educational settings, including disparities between students' and teachers' perceptions, the types of tools used in public versus private institutions, and variations in opinions between lower- and higher-grade learners. In summary, as hypothesized, several gaps were observed. These include

- Discrepancies between students' and teachers' perceptions of AI-based edutech tools.
- Variations in the types of tools used in public and private institutions.
- Differences in attitudes between younger and older students toward using these tools.

In conclusion, while there are many conflicting perspectives on AI-based edutech tools in education – and indeed across all aspects of life – it is clear that their integration into language learning is inevitable. Although I am not yet an expert in using these tools, I am enthusiastic about their potential in English language learning (ELL). One aspect I particularly appreciate is their ability to personalize learning, allowing students to progress at their own pace, in their own time, and from their preferred locations. This flexibility addresses a long-standing limitation of traditional teaching methods, which often failed to accommodate the diverse aptitudes, talents, learning styles, and backgrounds of students. With careful planning and proper training, these tools have the potential to bring significant benefits to ELL.

TEC: Fascinating research, Dr. Kang! I think we'll stop here and allow our readers to attend your plenary session at the conference to learn more. Thank you.

Dr. Kang: Thank you! There is much more to discuss, so I warmly invite your readers to attend my plenary session, where we can delve deeper into these findings. It is a fascinating topic. Ha ha.

Interviewed by David Shaffer.

The Importance of Incorporating Emotional Literacy in Core Curriculums

Dr. Milan LaBrey, Emotional Literacy Specialist

In today's interconnected world, where the pace of change is faster than ever, the need for a well-rounded education that equips children with both academic and emotional skills has never been more critical. Incorporating methodologies like the TAEI (The Advancement of Empathy and Integrity) into English as a second language (ESL) classrooms and core curriculums is not just a progressive educational strategy but an essential one. Here's why integrating such frameworks is crucial for students, teachers, and society as a whole.

While many programs are available to schools to develop and support social-emotional learning and mental health and improve behavior, most focus on treating the symptoms of broader systemic issues. These interventions, though valuable, fail to address the root causes of emotional struggles, disengagement, and behavioral problems.

The TAEI methodology is a transformative approach to creating a school culture where every child is seen, valued, and supported. It places foundational values like empathy, integrity, and resilience at the cornerstone of the curriculum and becomes part of the school's fabric. This holistic approach creates an environment where students feel safe, connected, and empowered, which is essential for deep, lasting change.

When foundational values are embedded into the culture of a school, they become a guiding force for decision-making, classroom interactions, and peer relationships. This sense of continuity across all aspects of school life helps children internalize these values, providing them with a moral compass that extends far beyond the classroom. For ESL students, many of whom may feel isolated or disconnected due to language barriers or cultural differences, this approach ensures they feel truly included in the school community.

Social-Emotional Learning: The Cornerstone of Modern Education

Emotional literacy, also known as social-emotional learning (SEL), has proven to be a cornerstone of progressive education, with studies demonstrating its effectiveness in reducing teacher burnout, improving classroom behavior, and supporting student outcomes. Methodologies like TAEI take SEL to the next level by weaving empathy, integrity, and emotional intelligence into the daily rhythms of the school.

For educators, this shift is crucial. A school culture grounded in TAEI values reduces the stress associated with classroom management by creating an environment of mutual respect and understanding. Teachers experience greater satisfaction and a stronger sense of purpose when their classrooms are calm, inclusive, and engaging. In turn, students learn to cope with challenges, navigate relationships, and build resilience in the face of adversity.

mental health. Unlike overt interventions, which can sometimes stigmatize those in need, TAEI creates an environment where mental health support is seamlessly integrated into daily life.

The TAEI methodology provides a transformative approach to mitigating self-harm and suicide in children by addressing the root causes of emotional distress and helping them to develop resilience. Through its emphasis on empathy, integrity, and emotional intelligence, TAEI creates a supportive environment where children learn to recognize, understand, and articulate their feelings. This model encourages the development of self-awareness and coping strategies, enabling children to manage overwhelming emotions more effectively. By integrating mindfulness practices, reflective activities, and values-based education, TAEI promotes a sense of belonging, purpose, and self-worth, which are critical protective factors against self-harm and suicidal ideation. Additionally, the methodology encourages open communication, builds trusted relationships with peers and mentors, and empowers children to seek help when needed. By creating a culture of understanding and support, TAEI not only reduces risk factors but also equips children with lifelong tools for navigating challenges, ensuring their emotional well-being and resilience.

By embedding emotional intelligence and resilience into lessons, TAEI ensures that every child is equipped with the tools they need to handle life's challenges. This support helps students develop a stronger sense of self-worth and well-being, which translates into happier classrooms, better academic performance, and stronger teacher–student relationships.

TAEI's benefits also extend far beyond the classroom. Focusing on emotional literacy prepares children to become innovative, emotionally healthy adults. These traits are essential not only for thriving in the workforce but also for building meaningful relationships and contributing positively to society. This approach also addresses broader societal challenges, such as declining birth rates and widespread loneliness. When people experience less stress and better life quality from a young age, they are more inclined to pursue connection, family, and community. By developing life satisfaction and reducing the pressures that lead to isolation, TAEI contributes to a healthier, more balanced society.

Without innovative approaches like TAEI, the growing pandemic of loneliness, unhappiness, and mental health challenges will continue to strain nations. By addressing the root causes of these issues through emotional literacy education, TAEI offers a long-term solution that empowers children and strengthens communities.

Conclusion
Incorporating methodologies like TAEI into ESL classrooms and core curriculums is not just a modern approach to education; it is an essential one. By addressing the root causes of behavioral and emotional struggles, TAEI transforms schools into places of belonging and growth. It equips students with the skills they need to navigate a rapidly changing world while creating a foundation of empathy and integrity that benefits society as a whole.

TAEI is more than a way to teach; it is a way to build a future where every child is seen, every teacher is valued, and every community thrives. This is the future of education, and the time to embrace it is now.

You may ask, "Why is this so important now?" As technology unites the globe, children must be equipped with the skills to navigate cultural differences, ethical dilemmas, and rapidly shifting societal norms. TAEI methodologies prepare students to thrive in this environment by developing compassion, tolerance, and understanding, critical traits for a world increasingly reliant on global collaboration.

In ESL classrooms, this approach is especially important. Students are not only learning a new language but also bridging cultural divides. By teaching empathy and emotional intelligence alongside language skills, TAEI helps students build connections that transcend words, creating global citizens who are prepared to lead with integrity.

A Modernized Approach to Education
Traditional teacher-centered models, while effective in their time, often fall short of meeting the needs of today's learners. TAEI replaces these antiquated methods with a student-centered approach that nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and emotional well-being.

For ESL students, this means classrooms where language learning is dynamic and interactive, rooted in real-world connections and personal growth. Activities like storytelling, role-playing, and collaborative projects engage the whole child, supporting their academic, social, and emotional development.

This approach doesn't just benefit students; it also strengthens the fabric of the school community. When values like empathy and integrity are prioritized, schools become places where children feel safe, heard, and connected, which reduces behavioral issues and supports a stronger sense of belonging.

Supporting Mental Health with Subtlety and Impact
For countries facing high rates of suicide and self-harm among children, TAEI offers a proactive way to support

AI and Human-Centered Teaching in Education

Dr. Alvaro Fuentes, Jeonbuk National University

Introduction

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed various aspects of society, including education. AI's integration into classrooms has created new opportunities for personalized learning, adaptive assessments, and automated administrative tasks. However, as AI becomes more prevalent, it is crucial to ensure that it enhances – not replaces – the human-centered aspects of teaching.

AI's potential in education is significant, but its implementation must balance technological advancement with ethical considerations, such as data privacy, fairness, and accessibility. This article explores how AI can support human-centered teaching, improve learning experiences, and address key challenges while maintaining the core values of education: inclusivity, engagement, and ethical responsibility.

AI-Enhanced Personalized Learning

One of AI's most promising contributions to education is personalized learning. AI-driven platforms can analyze student data to identify learning patterns and adapt instructional content to meet individual needs. For example, AI can recommend additional exercises for students struggling with a particular concept or provide advanced materials for those progressing quickly.

Personalized learning through AI ensures that students receive the right level of challenge, keeping them engaged while preventing frustration or boredom. This approach benefits learners with diverse needs, such as students with disabilities or non-native speakers, by offering tailored support. AI-powered tools like language translation applications and speech-to-text programs can help bridge communication gaps, making education more inclusive.

Adaptive Assessments and Feedback

AI's ability to process large amounts of data allows for adaptive assessments, which adjust based on a student's performance. Unlike traditional tests, AI-driven assessments can modify difficulty levels in real-time, providing a more accurate representation of a student's understanding.

Furthermore, AI enables instant feedback, reducing the time educators spend grading and allowing students to learn from their mistakes immediately. Tools like AI-powered writing assistants can offer suggestions on grammar, structure, and clarity, helping students refine their work before submitting it. However, while AI-generated feedback is useful, it should complement rather than replace teacher feedback, ensuring a balance between automation and human insight.

Automation to Support Educators

AI can alleviate administrative burdens by automating routine tasks such as grading, scheduling, and data analysis. This automation frees educators to focus on more meaningful aspects of teaching, such as mentoring students, fostering critical thinking, and creating engaging learning experiences.

However, AI should be viewed as a support tool rather than a replacement for educators. Teaching is not just about delivering knowledge; it involves emotional intelligence, empathy, and interpersonal skills – qualities that AI cannot fully replicate. The human connection between teachers and students remains essential for motivation, mentorship, and the development of social skills.

Ethical Challenges in AI-Powered Education

Despite its advantages, AI in education raises several ethical concerns, including data privacy, algorithmic bias, and educational inequality.

- **Data Privacy and Security** – AI systems require vast amounts of student data to function effectively. Without proper safeguards, this data could be vulnerable to breaches or misuse. It is critical for institutions to implement strict policies on data protection and transparency regarding AI's use in education.

> ...we can create a future where technology enhances education while preserving the essential human elements of learning.

- **Algorithmic Bias** – AI models learn from existing data, which may contain biases. If not carefully monitored, AI-driven assessments and recommendations could

The Five Big Ideas of AI

1. Perception
Computers perceive the world using sensors.

4. Natural Interaction
Intelligent agents require many kinds of knowledge to interact naturally with humans.

5. Societal Impact
AI can impact society in both positive and negative ways.

2. Representation and Reasoning
Agents maintain representations of the world and use them for reasoning.

3. Learning
Computers can learn from data.

Revised and adapted from Laupichler et al (2022).

unintentionally disadvantage certain student groups. To promote fairness, AI developers must prioritize diverse and representative datasets.

• **Educational Inequality** – AI-powered learning tools often require internet access and digital literacy. Students in underprivileged areas may lack access to the necessary technology, widening the educational gap. Policymakers must work towards equitable access to AI-enhanced learning resources to ensure that technology benefits all students, regardless of socioeconomic background.

The Need for AI Literacy in Education
As AI becomes a central part of education, both students and educators must develop AI literacy – the ability to understand, critically evaluate, and responsibly use AI technologies.

AI literacy should not be limited to programming skills but should include:

• Awareness of how AI models work and their limitations.
• Critical thinking about AI-generated content.
• Ethical considerations in AI applications.

Educators need training on integrating AI into their teaching while maintaining pedagogical integrity. Professional development programs can help teachers use AI effectively without diminishing the importance of human interaction in learning.

A Human-Centered Approach to AI in Education
To maximize AI's benefits while preserving human-centered teaching, educational institutions must adopt policies that prioritize transparency, fairness, and ethical responsibility. AI should enhance human connections, not replace them.

Key recommendations for a balanced AI-human approach include:

• **Teacher–AI Collaboration** – Educators should use AI as a tool to enhance, rather than replace, their role in the classroom.

• **Student Empowerment** – AI should be used to support critical thinking and creativity, rather than promoting passive learning.
• **Ethical AI Implementation** – Developers and educators must work together to ensure AI applications are transparent, unbiased, and accessible.

Conclusion
AI holds immense potential to revolutionize education by personalizing learning, automating tasks, and improving accessibility. However, its adoption must be guided by ethical considerations to ensure fairness, inclusivity, and human-centered teaching. By balancing AI's capabilities with the expertise and empathy of educators, we can create a future where technology enhances education while preserving the essential human elements of learning.

The goal is not to replace teachers with AI but to empower educators and students alike, fostering a more effective and inclusive educational experience.

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Improving Language Learners' Grammar and Syntactic Complexity Through Python, LLMs, and Other Digital Tools

Dr. Richard Rose, Yonsei University and HUFS

Language educators, from primary schools to universities, can greatly benefit from learning Python. This versatile programming language allows educators to analyze the text and audio samples that students produce with ease, using scripts designed to track progress over time. By leveraging Python, teachers gain detailed insights into the specific skills that students need to improve. Importantly, this data-driven approach shifts the focus of evaluation toward individual progress, rather than comparisons with peers or rigid adherence to criterion-referenced standards. This method, known as ipsative assessment, motivates students to compete against their own past performance, fostering a growth mindset. Large language models (LLMs) further enhance this approach by enabling educators to evaluate student progress on a weekly basis, providing timely feedback that encourages rapid and meaningful improvement in language skills.

Many educators might feel overwhelmed at the thought of tackling something as seemingly complex as computer programming. The very idea of working with Python scripts may fill some with dread. However, there's no need to fear – thanks to the capabilities of LLMs, these tasks are now more accessible than ever. Just as LLMs can translate text between languages with remarkable accuracy, they can also convert plain-language instructions into functional Python code. This means educators don't need to be coding experts to start using Python in their teaching practice. Additionally, if challenges arise while working with these tools, LLMs can assist, troubleshooting issues step by step until they are resolved.

Getting started with Python and LLMs can seem daunting, but I'm here to make the process manageable. Many educators are excited about the potential of LLMs and the growing array of generative AI services available online. While these tools offer incredible possibilities, they often come with steep costs and may not be perfectly tailored to the unique needs of educators. To address this gap, I've prepared a comprehensive presentation designed to help educators begin their Python experience. During the presentation, I will guide participants through creating self-grading assignments, organizing the resulting data, and analyzing the text and audio samples that students produce. By developing custom Python scripts, with support from LLMs, educators can streamline an array of classroom tasks, such as grading, tracking progress, and providing detailed feedback. This efficiency allows educators to spend less time on administrative duties and more time on what truly matters: connecting with students and helping them achieve their goals.

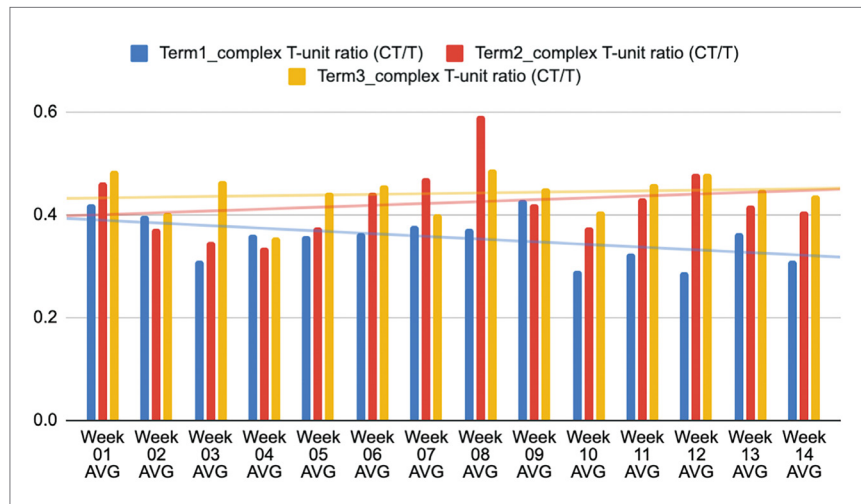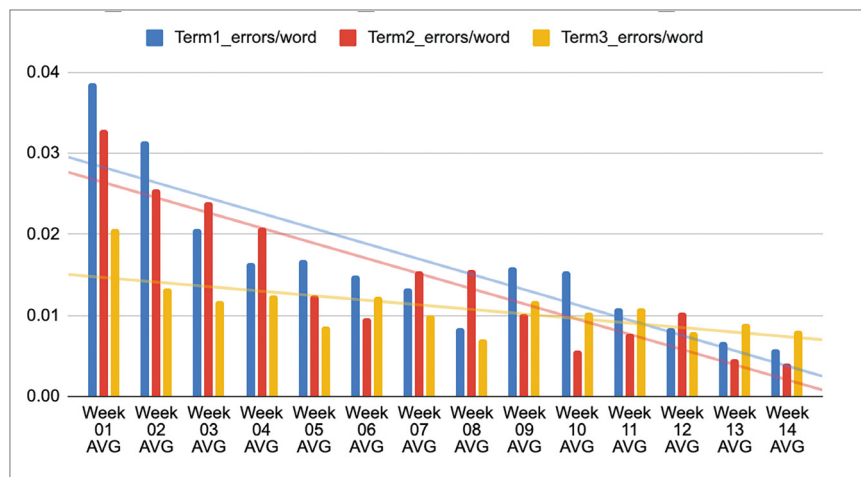**Figure 1.** Errors/Word Over Weeks 1–14 for Terms 1–3

Figure 2. Syntactic Complexity (CTT Ratio) Over Weeks 1–14 for Terms 1–3

This presentation focuses primarily on using Python to analyze text for grammar errors, providing educators with a powerful tool for identifying and addressing common grammar issues. However, the same approach can also be applied to measure syntactic and lexical complexity, as well as the fluency, intonation, and prosody of spoken language samples. Taken together, these analytical methods offer a comprehensive way to help students improve their language skills in three key areas: complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Moreover, collecting this data on a weekly basis facilitates action research projects, allowing educators to draw meaningful conclusions over time. After data collection, Python can also be used to clean and format the data, preparing it for further analysis either within Python or with external statistical tools such as SPSS. This versatility ensures that educators can not only measure progress effectively but also contribute to research that advances language learning practices.

understand their progress. These portfolios served as a dynamic record of their language learning journey, allowing students to see concrete evidence of their improvement over time. By assigning language tasks designed to enhance both the content of the portfolios and the underlying metrics of their skills, students were motivated to focus on areas needing improvement. This personalized approach enabled students to make substantial progress in grammatical
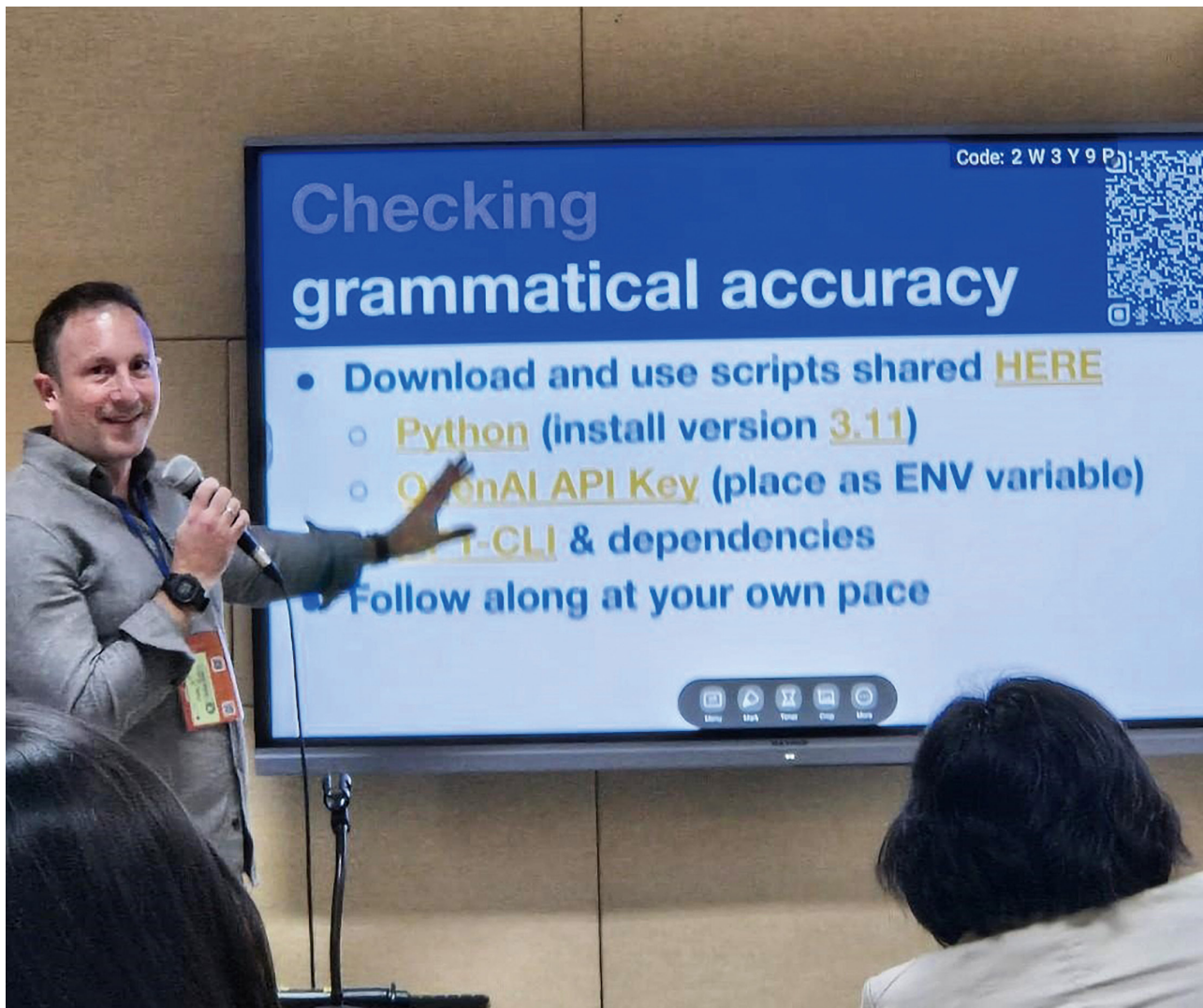
Dr. Rose giving a presentation at a recent conference.

areas: complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Moreover, collecting this data on a weekly basis facilitates action research projects, allowing educators to draw meaningful conclusions over time. After data collection, Python can also be used to clean and format the data, preparing it for further analysis either within Python or with external statistical tools such as SPSS. This versatility ensures that educators can not only measure progress effectively but also contribute to research that advances language learning practices.

To illustrate the potential of these approaches, I will highlight two research projects that successfully leveraged them to achieve measurable results. These projects demonstrated how the use of ipsative assessment and carefully targeted educational practices led to statistically significant increases in both grammatical accuracy (see Figure 1) and syntactic complexity (see Figure 2). Specifically, students were presented with their performance data through digital portfolios, which included visual analytics to help them

accuracy and syntactic complexity while fostering a deeper engagement with their own learning process.

Overall, my goal is to empower educators to transform their teaching practices by harnessing the power of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the classroom. Beyond individual classrooms, I hope to inspire educators to become creators and innovators, developing tools that address the unique challenges faced by teachers around the world. By sharing these tools, educators can contribute to a growing repository of resources designed to tackle common issues, such as assessing large groups of students, providing timely feedback, or personalizing learning pathways. Furthermore, I envision a vibrant, collaborative global community of educators who share a common goal: improving education for all. Together, by combining expertise, technology, and creativity, educators can drive systemic change, making educational practices more inclusive, accessible, and effective for learners everywhere.

Let's Make a Movie! – A Teacher's Guide to Creative Projects for Language Learners

Ashley Ford & Kinsella Valies
Nagoya City University & Jissen Women's University

Prologue

In 1922, Thomas Edison said, "I believe that the motion picture is destined to revolutionize our educational system." In the present, filmmaking is a valuable educational activity in our language classrooms that sparks creativity, builds technical skills, and fosters autonomy. By taking charge of the entire process – from scripting to editing – students can develop linguistic abilities while expressing their ideas. Filmmaking encourages collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving, making it an ideal tool for student engagement. When students are empowered to take ownership of their projects, they gain confidence in both their language skills and their ability to manage complex tasks.

Let's explore how we as language teachers can seamlessly integrate short filmmaking projects into our regular lesson plans. Film projects can be as big or short as you want them to be. A one-minute film can promote team-building and review language. A longer 3- to 20-minute project could help students make new meaning out of language or content-related class topics. A good example of such a project is rebooting a favorite film or adapting stories, articles, or novels read in class. Find us on Substack to learn more about this! (https://reelvoices.substack.com/)

The Basic Filmmaking Process

You can introduce the filmmaking process in the classroom by simply focusing on four key stages: pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution.

During pre-production, students brainstorm ideas, draft scripts, and create storyboards. Collaborative activities, like peer feedback sessions, help students refine their concepts and ensure their stories align with the project's goals. At this stage, we emphasize planning and organization, essential skills for all students.

Production involves bringing ideas to life through filming. Students use smartphones to capture scenes, experiment with camera angles, and explore creative expression. As teachers, we have limited flexibility and time. We can introduce filming techniques by showing or assigning film clips from YouTube and TikTok to illustrate use of varieties of shots, angles, and lighting.

In post-production, students edit their footage into cohesive films. Teachers are facilitators, offering guidance and feedback while encouraging experimentation. By taking ownership of the editing process, students develop autonomy and a sense of pride in their work. Teachers can reinforce the importance of revision and refinement, both in filmmaking and language learning.

Students, like filmmakers and other artists, want their creative works to have real impact on their surroundings. Distribution of their work within your class and institution or larger community could have a lasting impact on their self-esteem and allow them to make connections with other young people. Organizing a screening or joining a film festival is a great way for participants to get inspired by films made by other students, share their own achievements, and be part of something bigger than the classroom.

Basic Tools for Filmmaking

We can equip students with some basic tools and help them gain technical skills, such as recording, and improve the quality of their films. These days, you don't need a professional camera to make a film. An example of a Hollywood, feature-length horror film made using only smartphones is the hugely successful horror film Talk to Me. Most common devices already used by students, such as phones, tablets, and computers, come equipped with high-quality cameras.
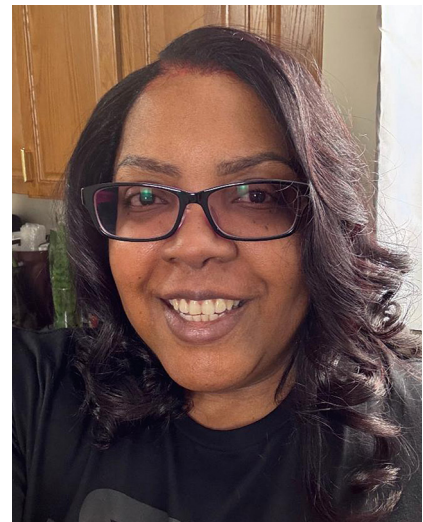
Stabilization tools, such as tripods, help achieve steady shots. Affordable options are available, or students can create DIY stabilizers using common household items, for example, a toy truck with rubberbands to create a moving shot. External microphones, like clip-on or directional mics, improve audio quality and are inexpensive. Another useful tool is a ring light. Some aspiring content makers in class may already have and use these items regularly. We as teachers can demonstrate how these tools enhance production value, encouraging students to take their projects seriously.

Editing software is equally important. Free apps like Cap Cut, iMovie, and In Shot are beginner-friendly. Most software have a user-friendly interface and even offer tutorials in various languages, making it easy for new filmmakers to start using their products.

Guidelines for Language Teachers
In the spirit of empowering language learners through filmmaking and the Reel Voices Language Learning Film Festival, we've put together five guidelines that we hope you find helpful for implementing meaningful filmmaking projects.

1. Let Students Lead
Students take ownership of their project when we allow them to make their own decisions. We can encourage them to take charge of key filmmaking roles, such as director, writer, cinematographer, editor, and actor. They can have more

Empowering Language Learners Through Filmmaking

Visit our website and follow us to learn more about filmmaking in the language classroom and how to join the film festival.

@reelvoicesfilmfest

reelvoicesfilmfest.org

opportunities to contribute to the film in creative ways and feel invested in the process. We act as mentors by listening to their ideas, answering questions, and giving constructive feedback and advice when they face challenges!

2. Set Clear Language Goals and Requirements
We can incorporate the language skills students need to develop into the project and set goals accordingly. For example, basic-level students might demonstrate a specific grammar point, communication strategy, or vocabulary when writing scripts. Independent-level students might write a script also aiming for natural dialogue and performing with appropriate pronunciation, intonation, and body language. Proficient students might also be expected to speak in the target language during collaboration.

It's also helpful to set clear expectations for the film itself. For example, how long should the film or script be? Should all students appear and speak in the film? These guidelines can help students stay on track.

3. Integrate Language Learning at Each Stage
The filmmaking process is full of ways to engage students with the target language, depending on your goals! Here are some possible ideas for various lessons or activities you could include:

- Development: Watch and discuss example films; review language and content related to film genres, characters, themes; brainstorm ideas in the target language; present a one-minute film pitch; write a logline (catchy one-sentence summary).
- Pre-Production: Write, revise, and edit a script or storyboard; rehearse the script; explain choices related to costumes, props, or shooting locations.
- Production: Review language related to shooting (*low, level, high, close-up, wide shot, over-the-shoulder shot, pan, zoom*, etc.) and directing (*Action! Quiet on the set please*!).
- Post-Production: Learn vocabulary related to editing (*cut, trim, split, fade out, transition, filter*, etc.) they might hear in tutorials or use to talk about their experience.
- Distribution: Create an audio commentary (reflecting and sharing their experience about the film), write a film review.

Many of these activities can also be great for incorporating into portfolios and formative assessments.

4. Teach and Learn Along the Way
Many of our students have never made a film before, let alone in a language they are learning. There will be times when they don't know how to do something. This is a natural part of the process, and a learning opportunity! We can provide mini lessons or hands-on practice in basic filmmaking techniques, such as camera angles, lighting, sound, or editing, and show them how to use basic equipment. Even if you don't know much about filmmaking, you can learn alongside students (this is how we learned motion tracking!). Teachers don't need to have all the answers. Don't forget that we are not their only resource in the classroom; students can be exceptional sources of knowledge too!

5. Celebrate Student Achievements
Creating a film is a huge accomplishment and students deserve recognition for it. We can help students to reflect on the experience of filmmaking and acknowledge their growth and contribution in the process, not only the final product. You can also encourage them to take pride in their work through showcasing, getting feedback from an audience, and sharing their experience. How about entering the Reel Voices Film Festival?

Epilogue
Filmmaking becomes a much more meaningful and rewarding experience when it is shared with others. This is why we created the Reel Voices Language Learning Film Festival – to create a community and platform for language learners who make films to connect, share, and celebrate their achievements. We look forward to talking with you more about filmmaking and our film festival at the KOTESOL International Conference and hope you feel inspired and ready to try it with your students. We can't wait to see their films at the next film festival to be held in early 2026! Visit reelvoicesfilmfest.org for more information

Me, Myself, and AI:
How Is Student Thinking Evolving?

By Dr. Robert Stroud, Honsei University

Introduction: Redefining the Classroom in the Age of AI

As I walk into my classroom each semester, I'm reminded of how much the world of education has changed in just a few years. The chalkboards and overhead projectors of my early teaching days have been replaced by interactive whiteboards, laptops, and now, a growing reliance on artificial intelligence (AI) tools. AI, with its promise of efficiency and personalization, is reshaping education as we know it. But is this change always for the better?

These are questions I grapple with daily as a professor in Japan, teaching English to university students. AI isn't just a tool anymore; it's becoming an integral part of how students learn, interact, and even perceive themselves. This transformation demands that we, as educators, pause and reflect. Are we fostering the kinds of critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration that our students will need in a world increasingly mediated by technology? Or are we inadvertently creating a generation of passive learners overly reliant on AI?

As many of you will agree, the classroom is more than a place to disseminate knowledge. It's a space to build relationships, nurture curiosity, and help students develop a strong sense of identity. AI can be a powerful ally in achieving these goals but only if we use it mindfully. Balancing its benefits with its potential pitfalls is no small task, but it's a challenge we can't afford to ignore.

Part 1: Classroom Interactions in the AI Era

One of the most striking changes I've observed in my students is how AI tools like ChatGPT has altered their approach to assignments. On the positive side, these tools lower barriers to participation. I've seen students who once hesitated to write even a single paragraph now confidently produce essays. They're less afraid of making mistakes, and as a result, they engage more actively in classroom discussions. Research by Guo and Lee (2023) supports this, highlighting how AI can encourage students to take more risks in their learning.

But, as we all know by now, the coin has another side. Some students seem overwhelmed by the sheer amount of AI-generated content. They scroll endlessly, searching for the "perfect" answer, only to give up in frustration. The ability to write effective prompts is still beyond many of them. Others disengage entirely, feeling that their efforts can't measure up to the polished outputs of AI. Nguyen et al. (2023) found that such dynamics can lead to exclusion from group work, particularly for students who struggle to process or contextualize AI-driven information as quickly as others. We need to keep a close eye on students who fall out of group work and become isolated in such ways (something I have seen for lower-level learners and also international students who cannot quite relate to the conversations of Japanese students).

What concerns me most is the rise of what I call "screen-lock" learning. Students fixate on their devices, their faces bathed in the glow of screens, while the richness of the classroom – its human interactions, its spontaneous energy – fades into the background. Screens are here to stay, but as educators, we must guide our students toward a more balanced engagement. For instance, I've started incorporating more group activities that encourage face-to-face interactions. In one such activity, students use AI tools collaboratively to brainstorm ideas, but the discussion and synthesis happen in real-time, without screens. This approach not only keeps the human element alive but also helps students see AI as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, their own thinking.

Part 2: Critical Thinking in the Shadow of AI

AI is clearly a double-edged sword when it comes to critical thinking. On one hand, it provides a wealth of information at students' fingertips. On the other, it can encourage superficial engagement. Students skim vast amounts of AI-generated text, often without pausing to evaluate its accuracy or relevance. Mohamed (2024) argues that this "data skimming" can undermine the deep, reflective thinking that is essential for true learning.

For example, when students use AI to draft essays, they often produce coherent but unoriginal work. AI, by its nature, regurgitates existing knowledge. Creativity and originality require students to go beyond this – to synthesize ideas, challenge assumptions, and generate new perspectives. Zhai et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of teaching students to critically evaluate AI outputs, a skill that is increasingly vital in today's information-rich world.

Interestingly, AI can also spark curiosity. I've noticed students diving deeper into topics they find intriguing, using AI to explore related ideas and ask questions they might not have considered otherwise – even as far as the dreaded "global warming" essays that feel very tedious for many students. This aligns with findings by Qiao and Zhao (2023), who suggest that AI can foster more self-directed learning. For example, one of my students recently used ChatGPT to explore better research questions for their graduation thesis, uncovering new directions and ideas that enriched our class discussions and debates on the same topic (interestingly, their topic was about the use of AI in education).

However, curiosity alone isn't enough. Students must learn to take ownership of their learning journeys, applying AI insights thoughtfully and critically. As educators, we have a responsibility to guide them, helping them develop the skills to navigate this new landscape with confidence and integrity. This might mean designing assignments that require students to reflect on their use of AI, documenting not just what they learned but how they learned it. I'm currently working on this myself for my own students with reflective assignments about the pros and cons of their experience with AI during our courses.

Part 3: Cultivating a Love for Learning in a Digital World
The paradox of AI-mediated learning is that while it captures attention, it often limits deeper connection. I believe that today's university students are now reading less from physical books and writing less by hand than back in my time as a student. These traditional practices, once central to English classrooms, are now at risk of becoming obsolete. However, as technology evolves, educators face a critical opportunity to reflect on what truly matters in fostering meaningful learning experiences.

This shift raises important questions. Are we losing something valuable in our rush to embrace digital tools? Or can we find ways to integrate the best of both worlds? Striking this balance will be crucial as we move forward. The tactile experience of holding a book or the deliberate act of forming letters by hand is more than nostalgia – it's tied to cognitive and emotional processes that deepen learning. For example, I've reintroduced handwritten journals in my classes. Students write weekly reflections on their learning, a practice that slows them down and encourages deeper engagement. Many have shared that this "old-fashioned" method helps them clarify their thoughts in a way typing never has. Some even describe the act of handwriting as "meditative" – a break from the constant stream of digital input.

At the same time, it's undeniable that AI-generated content offers unparalleled access to information. This abundance, however, can be overwhelming. Students often struggle to discern what's reliable, relevant, or worth their time. Teaching them to navigate and critically evaluate this flood of information is one of our greatest challenges – and opportunities – as educators. To address this, some teachers have integrated media literacy exercises into their lessons. Students analyze AI-generated responses, cross-checking them with traditional sources to evaluate accuracy and bias. These activities can spark lively discussions (or so I've been told), sharpening their critical thinking skills while fostering a healthy skepticism towards over-reliance on technology.

The sheer volume of information available also has a downside. Too much information, too quickly, can lead to burnout. I've seen students zone out or rush through tasks because AI simplifies them to the point of monotony. This "information overload" phenomenon, described by Kartal (2023), underscores the need for mindful technology use. By helping students pace themselves and encouraging moments of reflection, we can mitigate this issue. For instance, I've introduced structured "slow learning" sessions where students step away from screens to process what they've learned through discussion or creative projects. These moments not only reduce the risk of cognitive fatigue but also allow deeper connections to the material.

In addition, addressing "technostress" (Kohnke et al., 2024) is as much a part of our role now as teaching grammar or vocabulary. A constant use of technology to complete work can indeed make us feel stressed, as anyone who has tried to use AI to complete a large project will tell you. Small changes,

like scheduling regular screen-free class periods or integrating mindfulness exercises, can make a big difference. I've found that these moments of intentional pause not only reduce stress but also deepen students' appreciation for learning. I've heard of some teachers introducing a weekly "offline day" where students worked entirely without technology – writing essays by hand, consulting printed resources, and even engaging in oral debates (the "good old days" for some of us). I was told that the response was overwhelmingly positive, with many students reporting feeling more connected to their work and each other during these sessions.

Beyond stress and cognitive load, the cultural implications of shifting entirely to AI-mediated learning deserve consideration. Physical books, handwriting, and even face-to-face discussions hold intrinsic value in fostering a sense of community and identity in the classroom. These practices remind us of the human side of education – the part that technology, no matter how advanced, cannot replicate. When we combine the strengths of traditional and digital methods, we open doors to richer, more holistic learning experiences.
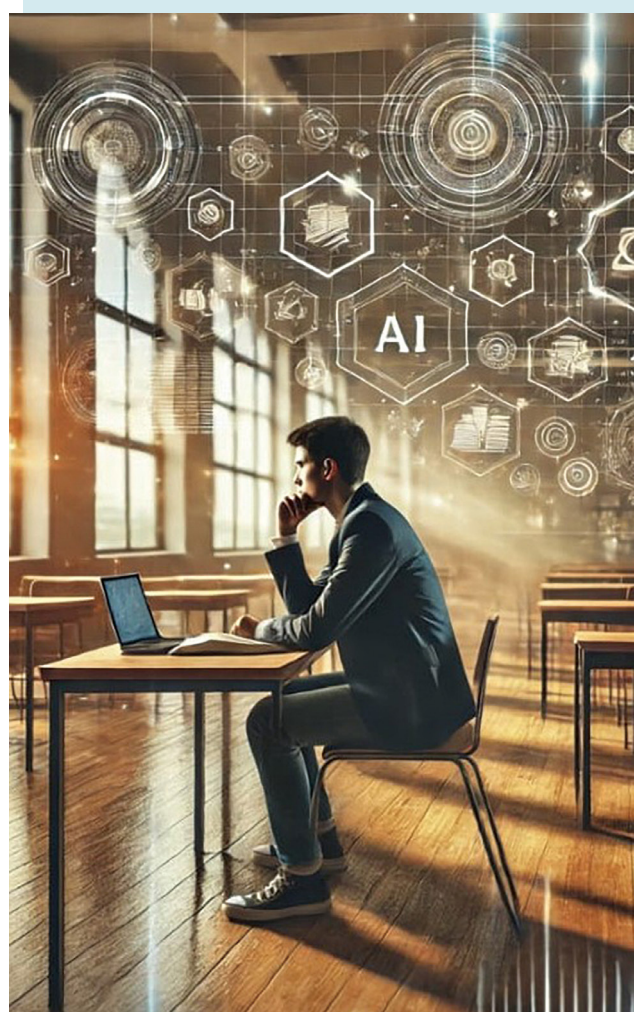
Ultimately, the key lies in striking a thoughtful balance. AI is a powerful tool, but it should enhance, not replace, the time-tested practices that build critical thinking, empathy, and resilience. By reintroducing elements of slower, more deliberate learning, we can counterbalance the speed and convenience of technology, ensuring that our classrooms remain spaces for deep, meaningful growth.

Part 4: Student Voices – What Do They Say About AI?
Building on the broader trends and implications discussed in Part 3 above, this section turns to a vital perspective: the

students themselves. Their voices reveal the lived experience of learning with AI, providing nuanced insights that bridge theory and practice. In a recent study I co-authored and will publish this year (keep an eye out for Stroud & Du, 2025), we explored how students perceive ChatGPT, uncovering a fascinating blend of enthusiasm, caution, and curiosity. Drawing from responses from 687 students across nine educational institutions, their reflections highlight both the opportunities and challenges AI brings to education.

Many students celebrated AI for its ability to save time and inspire creativity. One remarked, "What would normally take two hours can be done in 10 minutes." Another shared, "It gives you ideas and stimulates your imagination. It teaches me things I would never have thought of." These reflections underscore how tools like ChatGPT can serve as a catalyst for efficiency and innovation, offering new ways to approach tasks and reframe problems.

However, their enthusiasm was tempered by concerns. Some students worried about becoming overly reliant on AI. One admitted, "It's very useful for completing tasks efficiently, but depending on how you use it, it can reduce your thinking ability." Others raised questions about reliability: "It's a good way to get information, but it's not guaranteed to be accurate." Ethical dilemmas also surfaced, with some students expressing guilt about using AI for assignments. As one put it, "It automatically summarizes and translates, but I feel a little guilty about using it for schoolwork."

A recurring sentiment was that AI is a "double-edged sword." One student appreciated how ChatGPT sped up brainstorming but admitted feeling "lazy" after using it too often. This was echoed by others who worried about losing their personal "voice" in their work. While AI-generated content is polished and efficient, it can lack the distinctiveness of human expression, raising questions about authenticity and originality in academic settings.

Interestingly, a smaller but vocal group reflected on the emotional side of AI use. While they valued its convenience, some felt it disconnected them from the learning process. One student described it as "outsourcing the struggle," lamenting that the ease of finding answers often robbed them of the satisfaction of solving problems independently.

Despite these concerns, many students also shared stories of how AI enhanced their education when used thoughtfully. One student described using AI to brainstorm debate points, which led to richer, more nuanced discussions with classmates. Another explained how ChatGPT helped them visualize complex scientific concepts through analogies they might not have considered. For these students, AI was more than a tool; it became a springboard for exploration and creativity.

Conclusion: Charting a Path Forward
These diverse perspectives reveal a complex relationship between students and AI – one that balances excitement and caution, opportunity and challenge. As educators, we have a crucial role in guiding students through this terrain. By encouraging thoughtful practices, such as using AI for brainstorming while reserving final drafting for their own efforts, we can foster creativity, accountability, and deeper learning. Similarly, discussions around ethical AI use can empower students to approach these tools with both confidence and discernment.

Ultimately, student voices remind us that AI is more than just a tool; it is becoming an integral part of their educational journeys and their evolution as learners. By addressing fears of over-reliance, celebrating moments of genuine curiosity sparked by AI, and teaching students to critically evaluate its outputs, we can shape a future where technology supports rather than stifles growth.

The question is no longer whether AI belongs in the classroom – it is already here. The real challenge lies in determining how we will integrate it into learning in a way that preserves human connections, nurtures creativity, and fosters critical thinking. By adopting a mindful, balanced approach, we can ensure that AI enhances the educational experience while keeping the human element at its core. Let's continue to ask the hard questions – for our students and the future of education itself.

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"ELT in the Age of Technology and AI"

Professor Diane Rozells, Sookmyung Women's University

Diane Rozells, a professor at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, South Korea, brings over 12 years of experience in their MA TESOL program, where she also teaches undergraduate and doctoral courses focused on multimedia and technology in English teaching. This May, she will be a featured speaker at our international conference, presenting a session titled "On the AI Bandwagon – To Jump or Not to Jump? Navigating the Ever-Changing Landscape of AI and Technology in ELT." Her expertise spans CALL, reflective practice, and teacher beliefs. Recently, she shared insights in an exclusive interview with The English Connection. *— Ed.*

The English Connection (TEC): Professor Rozells, thank you for taking the time to speak with *The English Connection*, KOTESOL's ELT magazine. To start, could you share some background about yourself, particularly what your life and career looked like before moving to Korea?

Prof. Rozells: First of all, thank you for having me as one of the featured speakers of the conference, and sure, I'd be happy to share about my life and career experiences. Like many TESOL educators, I began my career in a totally different field. I started out as an occupational therapist, but as I got more and more involved in giving seminars and workshops at the hospital where I worked, I discovered that my passion lay instead in teaching – something I had previously promised myself never to go into because I come from a family of teachers. So I quit my job at the hospital, went to Australia where I did my MA in health science education at the University of Sydney, and after that, worked at the Center for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, where I later did my PhD in education. My PhD dissertation focused on teachers' conceptions of wisdom and how they conceived of wisdom in teaching. It was an area where I was able to harmoniously combine my interests in education, psychology, and philosophy into one big – and perhaps too big! – thesis.

My first university teaching job after finishing the PhD was in Korea, where I taught English conversation at Hansei University. A year later, I started working at the Graduate School of TESOL at Sookmyung Women's University, where I have now been working for the past twelve years. Working in Korea, my career shifted its course yet again to English teaching, and in recent years, I have focused increasingly on the use of technology in teaching English, teaching courses such as Language and Multimedia, Technology Enhanced Language Teaching, and English Through Multimedia at the BA, MA, and PhD levels. I also frequently give special lectures to Korean public school English teachers attending the Sookmyung Intensive In-service Teacher Training Program on using technology and AI to teach English.

So that's why I'm really excited about the theme of the conference, "Embracing Humanity in the Age of AI: Enhancing ELT Through Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovation," which actually brings together many of my interests – not only in using technology and AI in ELT, but also addressing its relation with the human person (emotional, social, creative, and ethical), thus enabling me to situate my interest in teaching ELT for wisdom in this age of technology and AI.

TEC: That worked out quite well indeed! Your main session at KOTESOL 2025 is entitled "On the AI Bandwagon – To Jump or Not to Jump? Navigating the Ever-Changing Landscape of AI and Technology in ELT." What can interested attendees expect from your presentation?

Prof. Rozells: I think a lot of teachers out there are both excited and at the same time wary and cautious about using AI in ELT. We've passed the stage where technology was a novelty in ELT, and we're now at the stage where technology is the norm in our society and therefore should not be excluded from the classroom. That is, we've moved from CALL (computer-assisted language learning) to TELL (technology-enhanced language learning), which means technology is not merely assisting language learning, but is part of the environment in which language exists and is used (Walker & White, 2013).

What's interesting is that before AI came into the picture, it was generally agreed upon that technology was a good thing to have in the classroom because, if used appropriately, it can lead to increased student engagement, more authentic and student-centered learning, and more opportunities for collaboration, with the main threat being only that students might get easily distracted, so many schools still banned the use of mobile phones in the classroom. Now, with the onset of AI, there comes a host of other issues, a major one being a lack of authenticity in content creation and therefore a threat to fairness in evaluation of student performance. Teachers are also faced with the dilemma of how much reliance on AI they want their students to have, and perhaps even how much they themselves feel comfortable relying on AI. At the same time, AI offers incredible learning opportunities, with its advantages far surpassing those I mentioned before, particularly in authentic and student-centered learning. AI also offers lots of promise for developing creativity and eliciting other higher-order thinking skills, which are crucial in this day and age.

So a lot of the time, teachers are faced with questions such as "Do I want to use AI in my teaching?" "If so, how can I integrate it into my classroom teaching and streamline it with the syllabus?" "How can I discover what kinds of AI tools are out there and keep up to date with everything new that keeps coming up?" "How can I use AI ethically and help my students use it ethically as well, and without it substituting their learning in the process?"

"How can I evaluate students' performance fairly given that they may be accessing AI tools?," and finally, "What kinds of AI and technological tools are out there that have been found to be effective for use in ESL/EFL classrooms, and how can I know if they are appropriate for my students?" These questions will be dealt with in my presentation, which will comprise a combination of practical and theoretical aspects. Practical in the sense that I'll be introducing AI and other technological tools like websites and apps that can be used for teaching the various language skills, and theoretical in the sense that I'll be introducing some conceptual frameworks that can guide teachers when thinking through those questions mentioned above.

TEC: As a follow-up question, what can be some of the pitfalls teachers may face if they don't "make the jump" to AI in trying to stay one step ahead of their learners, who presumably have already jumped?

Prof. Rozells: As I mentioned, technology is here to stay, and it is only going to become bigger and bigger, and so it's better not to get left behind. There is a well-known saying from Christine Meloni (1988) that goes: "Technology will not replace teachers. But teachers who use technology will replace those who don't." With the onset of AI, the 21st century skills we have been trying to develop in students just got bigger, and we need to include a new set of digital literacy skills, such as how to discern what's true and what's fake in the digital world, how to critique and reflect on the outcomes we get when leveraging on AI, how to utilize AI constructively to creatively and critically address real-world problems, and most importantly, how we can foster ethical practices through ethical decision-making when using AI. Teachers who don't develop their capacities in these areas will be at a disadvantage in the near future. As you rightly mentioned, students are generally ahead of teachers when it comes to being familiar with technology and AI, so teachers who can't keep up may not be able to engage, inspire, and challenge their students adequately enough to prepare them with the skills they would need in the near future.

Prof. Rozells slicing doughnuts for students at a class party.

TEC: Concerning the multimedia and technology courses you teach in the TESOL program, can you reveal to us the curricula you have created, and your unique perspectives, in light of your technology-based expertise?

Fostering reflection is critical in this age of technology and AI...

Prof. Rozells: I use e-portfolio assessments in all my multimedia and technology courses. Students create a website of their own using free online drag-and-drop platforms that do not require any programming knowledge. Each week, they are given a task for which they need to create a technological product that they upload to their personal website. Depending on the nature of the courses I teach, their weekly tasks could take the form of developing materials from AI and other technological tools to be used in classroom teaching, such as a speaking avatar, a webquest or online comics, or different multimedia products, such as making an advertisement or a fashion or sports column. I also use e-portfolios in my English for specific purposes (ESP) course, where each student makes their own ESP course website, for example, a business English course website, comprising different course components, such as the syllabus, sample materials, and sample lesson plans.

For the large majority of students, it is their first time making their own website, and though it is often challenging and time-consuming at the beginning, they get more proficient as time goes by and are all immensely proud of their websites by the end of the course. It's a great way to foster their creativity and digital literacy skills in addition to their English skills using a content-based approach. After each new task is uploaded to their website, they review each other's work, and they also get excited to see their classmates' new creations each week and share insights and feedback with one another. This fosters their critical thinking skills and collaboration, also because some of the tasks are done as a group. Portfolio assessment also requires that students write reflections about each task they create, and this helps them think more critically about the process of content creation and how they can apply these contents to real classrooms or real situations in the future. Fostering reflection is critical in this age of technology and AI because reflection focuses on the "whys" and "hows," and not simply the "whats" – in other words, the product itself – which may be, to a greater or lesser degree, created through AI or other forms of technology.

TEC: You have taught for 12 years at Sookmyung Women's University's well-established MA TESOL program (of which I have known several faculty professors and program graduates). It must feel deeply rewarding to be in that position.

Prof. Rozells: It is truly my joy and passion to teach and guide my students to be the best they can be, not only academically but in all aspects of their lives. I see my job as a service to others, and I feel particularly proud of my students when I see the quality of their work surpass that of my own.

TEC: Thank you for giving us your time, Professor Rozells, towards this enlightening interview. We'll be looking forward to seeing you at KOTESOL 2025!

Prof. Rozells: You're most welcome! I look forward to seeing you at KOTESOL 2025, too!

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Interviewed by Andrew White.

Conflict, Language Learning, and the Gift of Messy Humanness

By Cheryl Woelk, Collective Joy Consulting

"What does this say?" asked my four-year-old, pointing to words on a map in the background of his preschool English textbook. The map showed an outline of the United States with arrows pointing to Canada and Mexico beside the words "our backward neighbors." I felt surprise and disappointment to see this kind of US-centric image in a coursebook used in South Korea. Yet I told myself, "It's not a big deal."

Later, I felt uncomfortable thinking about it, my stomach tight and my palms itchy. I wondered whether to talk with the teacher. Saying something would require using Korean to clearly explain what I saw, why it bothered me, and what I wanted done about it, all with enough nuance not to seem like an overly picky parent. I would also have to understand the teacher's response and negotiate a solution in a way that would be helpful to both of us.

I gathered my courage, rehearsed what to say, and decided to try. Surprisingly, the teacher and I had a valuable conversation in which we expressed empathy, understanding, and gratitude for our discussion. Not only did she end up talking with the publisher about the illustration, but our communication improved dramatically after that. I felt more trust and appreciation for her role in my child's life and for the preschool community. I also noticed my Korean language skills significantly improved. Using language to address a seemingly minor conflict became a source of energy for growth in our relationship with a disproportionate positive impact on communication skills.

Messy Humanness and Conflict

This is the messiness of human reality. Even in interactions in relatively stable and safe contexts, we constantly choose how to respond to big or small conflicts we meet. Yet the outcomes of our decisions are rarely clear, and unintended consequences abound. As people interact with each other and our environments, we continually confront new challenges as part of the complex system that emerges. "Solutions" depend on how we define the problems we face, and we can't predict what will happen based on individual actions alone.

Added to this, each individual is a complex system. The brain predicts what the body will need in response to past

> **Language is pivotal to conflict escalation, de-escalation, and transformation.**

experiences and environments, then adjusts based on reality in whatever way necessary to find equilibrium (Kelly, 2020). So, human messiness is really a network of emergent systems of individuals embedded in larger emergent systems of cultures, societies, and our globe. Developments in AI for

analyzing complex systems might help to make sense of this messiness, but few efforts have been made so far in applying this technology to social issues. No wonder the idea of conflict resolution can seem impossible!

Conflict is a central concept when talking about our humanity, though. How we understand conflict shapes how we work through it. If we see conflict as a misalignment of patterns among two or more systems in the context of a larger system, it's not necessarily a terrifying thing (Miall, 2007). Instead, we can recognize conflict as a red flag pointing to important values that previous ways of doing things didn't address. It becomes information for all parties about what's going on in the system.

The trouble is conflict escalation (Burgess & Burgess, 2021). When attention shifts from behaviors that can be observed, to judgments about each party involved, and then to fear of loss of identity or survival itself, each party gets further away from getting what they really want. Conversely, conflict de-escalation shifts attention from certain strategies to their underlying interests, and then to collaboration on finding new ways that address the needs of all involved to the greatest extent possible. Maybe AI can help here too with forecasting escalation patterns (Murphy et al., 2024) and identifying points that might leverage de-escalation, but we're still a long way from that.

Embodied Experience of Conflict

Instead of computers, we have our human bodies as a resource for making decisions about responding to conflict. The complex system of each person has an incredible capacity that activates when our brains anticipate that we are not getting what we need. When we notice conflict, our sympathetic nervous systems kick in, getting us focused and ready for action. In this state, we might feel anger, fear, or excitement. If we know what we really need, this focus can propel us to get what is important to us. What does not work as well is complex cognitive function, nuanced language, empathy, collaboration, or perspective-taking. Conflicts can easily escalate. Trying to stay calm and talk things through at this stage is hard to do.

Likewise, when our sympathetic nervous systems have been activated for an extended period, we begin to tire. Our body begins to give us signals to back off, get away, and rest. We may feel discouragement, apathy, or sadness. In this state too, our capacity to express compassion for ourselves or others isn't easily accessible. Our linguistic abilities are also impacted.

Trying to keep at conflict resolution in this state usually doesn't work well.

What we need is a chance to regulate our systems and get our parasympathetic nervous systems activated again. In this rest-and-digest mode is also when we are usually most creative, linguistically expressive, curious, and open to possibility – all essential parts of effective conflict resolution. Through the interaction of the body's systems, the brain tries to get us to act in ways that get us what we need. By paying attention to the body's cues, we can more effectively make choices in conflict that support de-escalation and move us towards resolution.

Language in Conflict and Language Learning

So how does all this relate to language and language learning? In all this messiness, strong linguistic skills help us to navigate conflict well through honest and empathetic communication, creating space for relationships to not only be repaired but to deepen. For example, attending to the discomfort I noticed when I saw the illustration in my child's textbook created an opportunity with my child's teacher. Following up on my feelings through language allowed us to understand each other more clearly and deepen our relationship. It also impacted the larger community, including other teachers, the principal, and even the publishing company, who made a change to the illustration.

Even in this relatively small issue, using language to communicate about the conflict created the space to resolve the issue by transforming the whole context. Navigating conflict together through communicating in healthy ways can bring people closer in systems. Interaction within a community,
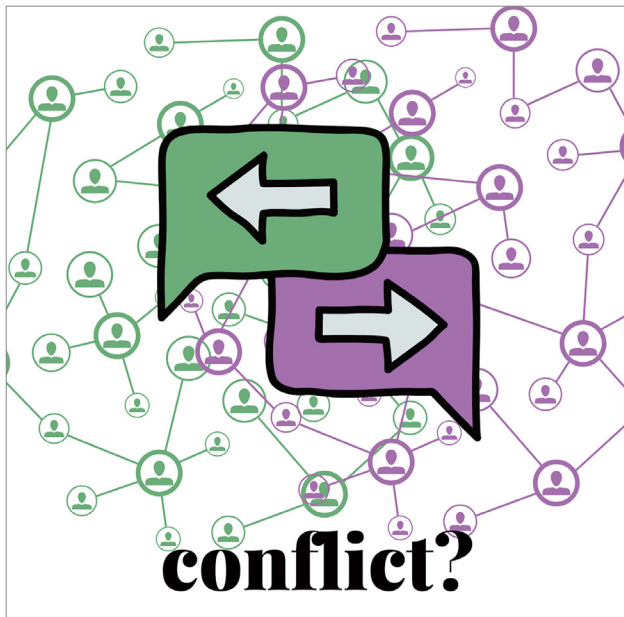

especially across cultures, updates the brain's predictive models, providing clarity on how to relate in ways that address what's important to each party involved. This establishes the context for more needs to be met, strengthening relationships and resilience in the community.

Language is pivotal to conflict escalation, de-escalation, and transformation. As we grow up, we learn from our families and cultures to make socially acceptable choices when conflict arises. These methods may or may not support what we really want to happen, and the brain uses these patterns to create models of how conflict goes. We may begin to automate our responses, reacting without thinking about what to say. Learned linguistic responses, such as blaming or shaming self or others, to escape the discomfort of conflict will disrupt

connections in the system, escalating the situation. On the contrary, language that expresses empathy and understanding for self or others restores connection and helps to de-escalate conflict. Using language to navigate conflict together based on our underlying values and interests creates space for deeper connection and conflict transformation in community.

When learning a language, though, we can move out of our default way of dealing with conflict. The brain doesn't have as many models of conflict in the new language and culture to rely on, so it needs to constantly update predictions. As learners, we are naturally slower, requiring more time in speaking and listening. We create more space during the communicative
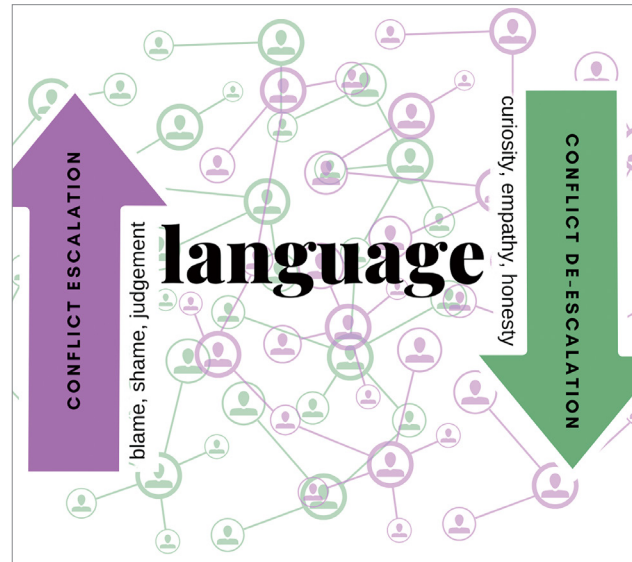
exchange, giving time to check in with our bodies, which can increase our awareness of the choices we have. We can listen for what's important, ask questions to clarify, and restate what we hear, supporting conflict de-escalation. We can consider our choice of speaking or not, and what kind of language to use to express ourselves with honesty. We can also carefully choose language for negotiation, creative problem-solving, decision-making, and checking in with each other. And all of this develops our language skills.

In the messiness of conflict, we can choose to move toward each other and what it means to be human. Tuning in to embodied experience can guide us to what truly matters in each situation, activating our focus to acquire the language needed to communicate on the levels of interests, needs, and values. The Korean I learned through addressing conflict with my child's teacher became a strong foundation to navigate issues and relationships in other communities as well. Language becomes not just a tool to get what we want but a pathway for deepening communication skills, nurturing relationships, and transforming community systems. Our messy humanness becomes a gift of growth and connection that reshapes how we engage with our world in all our languages.

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"Reflection Became Something of an Obsession for Me"

Michael Griffin, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

This Vietnam-based featured speaker is a name that many are sure to recognize. He spent nearly a decade teaching graduate courses at Chung-Ang University in Seoul. He was also a founder of KOTESOL's Reflective Practice Special Interest Group. Michael Griffin received his MATESOL at the New School (New York) and has taught numerous graduate courses there as well as at SIT (Vermont, USA). Now in Ho Chi Minh City, Michael is involved in numerous U.S. State Department-sponsored programs. The topic of his featured session at the International Conference is reflective practice. The following is the interview that Michael provided for The English Connection. *— Ed.*

The English Connection (TEC): Thank you, Michael, for finding time to do this interview. You're now based in Vietnam, and I know that you're involved in teacher training, consulting, and freelance teaching. Could you fill us in on the details of your current work? Is it mainly online or in person?

Michael: Thank you, Dr. Shaffer! It's nice to be back here in *TEC* and great as always to talk with you. It's also fun to reverse roles here a bit after I interviewed you on my blog (*ELT Rants, Reviews, and Reflections*) about five years ago.

My current work is something of a mix. Recently, I've been doing a lot of consulting and writing work for World Learning, mostly focused on curriculum development for teacher education courses. It's been great to combine my interest in materials development with my passion for teacher education.

Speaking of teacher education, in December 2024, I was in Jakarta, delivering a trainer-training program focused on helping instructors improve their ability and confidence in conducting workshops.

Since 2016, I've frequently worked on U.S. State Department-sponsored OPEN courses. I've taught "Teaching Grammar Communicatively," "CBI," and "Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting."

In more EFL work, since 2020, I've taught UGRAD scholarship students online in advance of their undergraduate studies in the U.S. as part of a program sponsored by the U.S. State Department and delivered by World Learning. It's been an incredible and rewarding experience to work with amazing student leaders from around Asia and the world.

While most of my work tends to be online, in the past few years, I've also at times taught EAP courses face-to-face in Ho Chi Minh City. As much as I love teaching and working online, I still appreciate the buzz of face-to-face classes.

TEC: Before moving to Ho Chi Minh City, you spent quite a few years in Korea at Chung-Ang University. What did your work there entail?

Michael: I honestly cannot believe it's already been more than five years since I left Korea! In my time at the Graduate School of International Studies at Chung-Ang University I generally worked with two types of students.

One type of student was those who were pursuing an MA in international studies. I designed and taught courses like "English in the News," "Academic Reading and Writing," "International Discussion," and "Professional Communication." The students I worked with in these courses were from a variety of countries and generally aimed to work in NGOs.

The second type of student I worked with at Chung-Ang was future interpreters and translators. The majority of my classes in the Advanced Interpretation and Translation Program were seminars in simultaneous interpretation. Each class was like a mini-conference where a few students would take turns reading speeches in Korean and their classmates would interpret into English or listen and give feedback on the performance.

In addition to the above classes at the graduate level, I also had occasion to teach a few undergraduate courses to (mostly) international students. These courses were "Korean Politics" and "Introduction to Korean Studies." I also taught "Business Management" to (mostly) Korean undergraduate students. Teaching these courses was surely a learning experience and something I enjoyed immensely. As you can see, in my nine years at Chung-Ang University, I had a wide range of experiences.

TEC: You certainly did! And your experiences outside the classroom widened that range of experiences. You were instrumental in establishing the KOTESOL Reflective Practice SIG. How did you first get involved with reflective practice?

Michael: Interesting question! I think I have vague memories of hearing the term for a while before I got serious about reflective practice. A 2008 talk by Thomas S.C. Farrell (hosted by KOTESOL) in Seoul was instrumental in igniting my interest even though Dr. Farrell and his work were brand new to me at that point. I started my MATESOL at the New School later in the autumn of 2008 and reflection was a key part of many classes and assignments. I was hooked! When I began teacher-training in 2009, reflection became something of an obsession for me. Becoming an SIT-TESOL trainer in 2010 and the subsequent work involved a great deal of reflection, which added to my already keen interest in RP. I found reflection extremely useful

for me as a teacher and trainer and wanted to do my best to share ideas on RP with others. Helping establish the RP-SIG and promoting RP in Korea was a great experience for me.

TEC: That segues nicely into my next question. Your featured session at KOTESOL 2025 is entitled "Reimaging Reflective Practice: Bridging Tradition and Innovation." Could you give us a sneak preview of how to build that bridge?

Michael: I will try to avoid spoilers but… I can say that in the session, I will aim to juggle looking forward and looking backward. I'll aim to account for criticisms of RP and offer ways that RP can be even more important in these rapidly changing times. While emphasizing the importance of RP, I will delve into ways it could possibly be done more effectively and will share some reflections on my previous experiences with RP as a teacher educator as well as co-facilitator of KOTESOL's RP-SIG. As John Dewey said, "We do not learn from experience… we learn from reflecting on experience."

I'll also aim to highlight ways we can, as a field, "celebrate and integrate the irreplaceable human qualities that educators bring to the classroom." Thus, "How can RP be revitalized to remain relevant and impactful in this ever-evolving field?" will be a central question.

Want more of a preview?

TEC: Sure!

Michael: The following quotes are likely to make an appearance:
- "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" — E.M. Forster (This one is frequently used by the aforementioned and legendary Dr. Farrell.)
- "Writing is not just a record of reflection. It is reflection in itself. The process of reflective articulation does not report pre-existing thought. It distills, clarifies, or even reframes an experience, situation, or event and increases awareness." — Steve Walsh and Steve Mann

- "Any teacher who can be replaced by a machine should be." — Arthur C. Clarke
- "Technology will never replace great teachers, but technology in the hands of great teachers can be transformational." — George Couros
- "Without knowledge, action is useless; and knowledge without action is futile." — Abu Bakr

TEC: This has definitely piqued interest in your featured session at the International Conference. Outside of presenting, how do you plan to spend your time at the conference and during your time in Korea?

Michael: I am very excited about returning to Korea after six years! I think my to-do list will be pretty long and at the top of it is reconnecting with friends and colleagues as well as with former students. Experiencing spring weather in Korea while hiking will be a highlight. All that plus a *chimaek* (chicken+beer) picnic on the Han River.

TEC: And what is on the horizon for you in 2025?

Michael: The first thing that comes to mind is that I plan to be in Kazakhstan for a month instructing and training on the C5 + ONE ED program. The goal of the program is to develop participants' teaching skills and English proficiency while creating a strong network of teachers in the C5 region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). I've been helping develop the curriculum and will teach a section online in advance of the face-to-face phase. I am very much looking forward to this and think it will be a great learning experience on many levels.

TEC: Yes, it sounds quite interesting. In winding things up, I would like to thank you for making time for this interview, and I am sure that many others, in addition to myself, are looking forward to your reflective practice session at the International Conference in May.

Interviewed by David Shaffer.

Jakarta training with Team Padang, February, 2024.

The Three "P"s: How Pronunciation Teaching Shapes Perception and Production

By Dr. Maria Teresa Martínez García, University of Valladolid

Have you ever taught a language learner who struggled to distinguish between the subtle sounds of *ship* and *sheep*, or who misplaced the stress in *record* as a noun versus a verb? Sometimes, no matter how many times you correct them, the errors persist, leaving both the teacher and the learner frustrated. Such challenges highlight the interconnected nature of two critical skills: speech perception and speech production, which are foundational for mastering pronunciation. By understanding how these skills interact, educators can enhance their teaching strategies, making the journey to fluency smoother and more effective.

As a bilingualism specialist, my research focuses on second language (L2) speech perception and production, particularly in learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, such as Korean speakers learning English. For example, a Korean student once shared their confusion upon hearing the word *desert* in a sentence. Was it the barren landscape (*desert*) or the act of abandoning (*desert*)? This confusion, rooted in lexical stress, underlines the need for targeted instructional strategies. Similarly, English orthography often puzzles learners, as words like *rough* and *through* defy consistent pronunciation rules. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating perception and production in teaching, offering practical solutions for English educators, particularly in South Korea, where learners face the difficult challenge of mastering a language with a completely different script.

This article builds on these insights and the methodologies I will present at the 2025 KOTESOL International Conference. It outlines a comprehensive approach to pronunciation teaching, highlighting innovative strategies that bridge theoretical knowledge with practical applications, paving the way for more effective pronunciation instruction.

Speech Perception: Hearing and Understanding

Speech perception is the ability to recognize and interpret sounds in spoken language. It involves discerning phonemes – the smallest units of sound – and mapping them onto linguistic knowledge to comprehend meaning (Gass & Selinker, 2013). For language learners, this task is often complicated by differences in phonological systems between their first language (L1) and the target language (L2). For example, Korean speakers learning English may struggle to perceive stress differences because Korean, in most of its dialects, lacks lexical stress – a critical feature in English for distinguishing meaning and grammatical categories (e.g., *record* as a noun versus a verb).

A memorable moment from my classroom involved a learner who was puzzled by why native English speakers laughed when they said, "I want to desert my job," intending to mean "quit." The misplaced stress on the first syllable of *desert* (instead of the second) inadvertently changed the word's meaning from "abandon" to "a barren landscape." This unintentional error not only confused the listener but also created an awkward and humorous situation for the speaker. Such experiences highlight the importance of teaching stress perception alongside vocabulary, enabling learners to communicate confidently and avoid unintended misunderstandings.

Another example comes from listening comprehension exercises, where many students struggle with distinguishing between the words *can* and *can't* in phrases like "I can do it." This misperception often arises from the reduced form of *can* in fast, natural speech, where it is pronounced with a weak, unstressed vowel (schwa), sounding like "k'n." In contrast, *can't* is typically stressed and pronounced more fully, making it easier to identify in slow, deliberate speech but harder in casual conversation.

For instance, during a classroom activity, a student confidently repeated the phrase "I can't do it," thinking they had accurately transcribed what they heard from a recording. When asked to reflect on their answer, they realized the context of the sentence ("I can do it if I try harder") contradicted their transcription. Such moments underscore how context and subtle intonation differences can confuse learners, especially when they are not accustomed to reduced forms and stress patterns in conversational English.

Addressing this issue requires targeted listening practice that focuses on recognizing reduced forms, stress, and intonation. Activities such as minimal pair discrimination exercises (e.g., *can* vs. *can't*), repetition drills with slowed-down and natural-speed recordings, and contextualized listening tasks can help learners tune into these distinctions. By teaching students to focus on both the sound and the context of speech, educators can significantly improve their students' ability to decode spoken English effectively, reducing such misunderstandings in real-world interactions.

In my research, I have investigated how Korean speakers learning English process lexical stress and orthographic features, which are essential for accurate perception and pronunciation. These studies highlight that targeted perceptual training significantly enhances learners' ability to identify these features, setting a strong foundation for accurate production. For instance, explicit training on stress patterns and their relationship to orthographic cues often improves learners' comprehension of spoken English. These findings emphasize the necessity of perceptual training, particularly in contexts like South Korea, where learners may lack exposure to naturalistic input.

Speech Production: Speaking Clearly

Speech production is the process of generating spoken

language, encompassing everything from articulating individual sounds to forming coherent sentences. Like perception, production is influenced by the interplay between L1 and L2 systems. Learners may transfer phonetic and phonological features from their L1, leading to accented speech (Flege, 1995).

I recall one learner, a Korean professional preparing for an international conference, who struggled with pronouncing the word *development*. Their repeated articulation as "dee-bell-op-ment" was rooted in syllable-level interference from Korean. Through targeted exercises that paired auditory models with visual aids, they were able to correct their pronunciation and confidently present their ideas. This anecdote highlights the reciprocal relationship between perception and production – hearing the correct model helped refine their production, and producing the word accurately reinforced their listening skills. To address this, we used targeted exercises combining auditory models and visual feedback. The learner listened to native recordings and used waveform software to compare their pronunciation with the correct stress pattern. Tapping out the stress rhythm while repeating the word further reinforced the correct pronunciation. After consistent practice, they confidently pronounced *development* during a mock presentation, paving the way for better recognition and production of similar words.

Another learner expressed frustration with pronouncing consonant clusters like "str" in *street*. They would often simplify the cluster to "sreet" or add an extra semivowel, producing something like "sutureetu." These adaptations are common among Korean learners due to differences in phonotactic constraints – rules governing how syllables are formed in a language. In Korean, consonant clusters are typically avoided or broken up with vowels (most syllables are formed by a consonant and a vowel-CV, while CVC are far less common), making English clusters particularly challenging. To tackle this, we broke the word into manageable chunks, first isolating the "str" sound and practicing it repeatedly with exaggerated articulation. Visual aids, such as phoneme charts, helped the learner understand the tongue and lip placement required for the correct sound. Once comfortable, they practiced the cluster in simple words before reintegrating it into sentences. For instance, after mastering *street*, they moved on to expressions like "The street is busy," gradually improving their fluency in natural speech.

Research shows that speech production benefits from improved speech perception (Best & Tyler, 2007). When learners can accurately identify sounds and stress patterns in English, they are more likely to produce them correctly. For example, incorporating stress placement exercises into classroom activities not only improves learners' articulation but also enhances their ability to identify stress patterns in others' speech, a crucial skill for real-world communication.

This insight is particularly relevant in South Korea, where English education often prioritizes standardized testing over communicative competence. A student once expressed their frustration about acing grammar tests but still struggling to order coffee at an English-speaking café – a situation many of us have likely encountered when living in a foreign country. Incorporating activities that connect perception and production

into the classroom can help bridge this gap, enabling learners to achieve more natural and effective spoken communication. Furthermore, emphasizing orthographic patterns that guide pronunciation, such as syllable stress or vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, can further support learners in developing accurate and fluent speech.

Teaching Pronunciation: Connecting Perception and Production

Teaching pronunciation effectively requires integrating both perception and production activities. Traditional approaches often emphasize mechanical drills and repetition, focusing primarily on production. While these methods have their place, they can overlook the critical role of perception in guiding accurate pronunciation. Moreover, pronunciation teaching should aim to help learners achieve more accurate and intelligible speech rather than striving for native-like pronunciation, which is neither necessary nor realistic for most learners. Recognizing this goal can alleviate pressure on both teachers and students, fostering a more supportive learning environment.

Additionally, pronunciation instruction should be integrated into the teaching of other skills, such as speaking, listening, and even reading and writing. Given the constraints of already packed curricula, embedding pronunciation activities into broader language tasks ensures that learners develop their phonological skills alongside other competencies without requiring additional instructional time. For example, practicing stress patterns during speaking activities or addressing common mispronunciations during listening exercises can enhance learners' overall communicative ability while making efficient use of classroom time.

Modern teaching methods, which will be discussed during my workshop at the upcoming KOTESOL International Conference, advocate for a balanced approach. Activities like minimal pair discrimination exercises – where learners distinguish between similar sounds (e.g., *ship* vs. *sheep*) – enhance perceptual skills. At the same time, guided production tasks, such as shadowing (imitating a model speaker), help learners refine their articulation.

One memorable success involved a shy learner who avoided speaking due to their perceived "bad pronunciation." Using

shadowing exercises with their favorite TV series, they not only improved their production but also gained confidence by mimicking natural speech patterns. Tools like Praat, which allow learners to visualize their stress and intonation compared to native speakers, can further enhance this dual approach. For instructors in South Korea, these tools offer accessible ways to engage students in active pronunciation practice beyond rote memorization.

Additionally, integrating technology-driven solutions like AI-powered pronunciation apps can provide learners with immediate feedback on their speech production, allowing them to correct errors in real time. My observations from working with Korean university students suggest that incorporating such tools significantly enhances both perception and production metrics, even within a relatively short period. For example, learners using apps to practice minimal pairs often report "light bulb moments" when they realize they've been hearing and saying certain sounds incorrectly.

Implications for Foreign Language Instructors in South Korea
Understanding the relationship between speech perception and production highlights the need for an integrated approach to teaching pronunciation. For South Korean educators, where English and other foreign language instruction is heavily influenced by test preparation, there is a growing need to emphasize oral communication skills. Educators should:

1. **Diagnose Learner Challenges**: Assess individual learners' perceptual and production difficulties to tailor instruction. For instance, asking students to record themselves can reveal pronunciation issues they hadn't noticed.
2. **Incorporate Perceptual Training**: Use listening tasks to build learners' auditory discrimination skills. One effective activity involves playing recordings of native and non-native speakers to help learners identify subtle differences.
3. **Provide Corrective Feedback**: Offer targeted feedback to guide learners toward accurate production. A teacher recounts how praising a student's improvement in "th" sounds boosted their confidence to tackle other challenging phonemes.
4. **Leverage Technology**: Utilize apps and other software to supplement classroom activities and provide interactive practice opportunities. For example, one class used a gamified app to compete on pronouncing tricky words, turning practice into a fun and engaging challenge.

For learners, recognizing the connection between hearing and speaking can demystify pronunciation challenges, encouraging them to focus on both input and output. For instructors, embracing these methods can lead to more dynamic and effective lessons, fostering real-world communicative competence in their students.

Practical Applications: A Workshop Overview
The methodologies and strategies discussed in this article will be explored further in my workshop at the 2025 KOTESOL International Conference. This session offers educators a chance to practice and evaluate four key pronunciation teaching methods:

1. **The Articulatory Method**: This approach emphasizes understanding and mimicking articulatory movements, helping learners grasp the physical aspects of sound production.
2. **Audiolingual Techniques**: Through repetition and targeted feedback, this method builds learners' accuracy in pronunciation.
3. **The Communicative Approach**: Pronunciation is integrated with vocabulary and grammar in meaningful, real-life contexts to enhance fluency and naturalness.
4. **The Verbo-Tonal Method**: By prioritizing perceptual training and prosodic elements, such as rhythm and intonation, this approach enhances learners' phonological awareness.

During the workshop, participants will engage in hands-on activities that highlight the strengths and limitations of each method. We will also address common challenges in pronunciation instruction, such as sound discrimination, coarticulation, and integrating pronunciation into spontaneous speech. By the end of the session, attendees will leave with an adaptable toolkit of strategies to enhance their pronunciation instruction and create engaging learning environments, regardless of their students' proficiency levels or target languages.
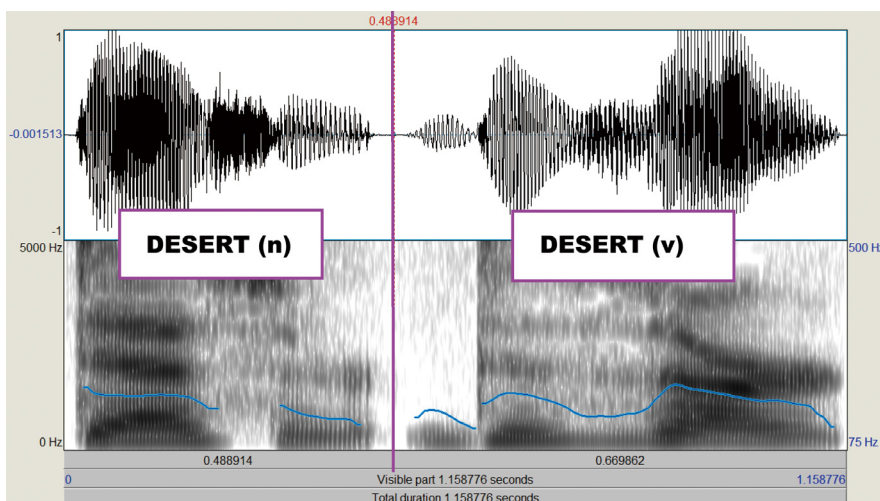
Waveform software can compare pronunciations.

Conclusion
Speech perception and production are two sides of the same coin, deeply interconnected in the process of mastering pronunciation. By addressing both, educators can create more effective and engaging pronunciation instruction, helping learners bridge the gap between understanding and speaking. This integrated approach not only fosters better language skills but also boosts learners' confidence in their communicative abilities. For instructors in South Korea, adapting these strategies to the local context offers the potential to transform the way pronunciation is taught and learned. Incorporating research-based strategies, enriched with relatable examples and practical methodologies, such as those explored in the KOTESOL workshop, can provide a roadmap for creating a generation of learners who are not only fluent but also confident in their spoken interactions.

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