



Editorial

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1 Introduction

Language education, acquisition, and policy currently occupy a pivotal position in global educational research. Accelerating digital transformation, intensified mobility, and growing linguistic and cultural diversity have challenged long-standing assumptions about how languages are learned, taught, and governed (Ayres-Bennett and Forsdick, 2025; García and Kleyn, 2016; Nechifor, 2025; Piller, 2016). At the same time, English continues to function as a global lingua franca, raising questions about equity, identity, and the relationship between global communication and local linguistic ecologies (Jenkins, 2014, 2015; Pennycook, 2017). These developments have intensified calls for research that is both theoretically grounded and responsive to local educational realities.

Within this context, postgraduate researchers play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of the field. Doctoral and early-career scholarship often sits at the intersection of innovation and critique, combining methodological experimentation with close engagement in specific educational contexts. The International PGR Conference on Language Education, Acquisition & Policy (LEAP 2025) was conceived as a forum for

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such work, providing a space for emerging scholars to contribute to ongoing debates across applied linguistics, language education, and policy studies.

The present volume brings together selected papers from LEAP 2025 and reflects the conference's central aim: to advance research that acknowledges the complexity of language learning in contemporary society. Rather than treating pedagogy, language acquisition, and policy as discrete domains, both the conference and this collection approach them as interrelated dimensions of educational practice. This editorial frames the contributions accordingly, offering an analytical overview that situates individual papers within broader scholarly conversations and highlights their collective contributions to the field.

2 Conceptual and Scholarly Context

Research in language education and acquisition has long been characterised by theoretical plurality. Cognitive, sociocultural, and ecological perspectives have all contributed to understanding how languages are learned and used, often emphasising different aspects of learner development and classroom practice (Dörnyei, 2009; Ellis and Laporte, 1997; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; van Lier, 2004). Central to these perspectives is the learner, often in an institutional setting. Comparisons between first and second or foreign language acquisition are therefore attractive, but challenging: while attempts are made to replicate the natural environment of first language learning (Krashen and Terrell, 1983; Krashen, 1985), learners must negotiate environmental and institutional constraints (Swain and Lapkin, 2000; Ellis and Laporte, 1997; Ellis, 2008).

In a context where English is the target language, the plurality of approaches and materials becomes especially pertinent. English may coexist alongside the learner's first language in varying degrees, serving as the official language of administration, the preferred choice for media and entertainment, or a key to social mobility (Brown et al., 2013; Ahn, 2013). This plurality raises questions of normativity along a continuum: at one end, the native speaker is often controversially positioned as the gold standard (Cheng et al., 2021); at the other end, English as a lingua franca is shaped by non-native users just as much, and in some contexts even more than, native speakers. (Phillipson, 2009; Hult, 2017; Delogu, 2025).



In recent years, this plurality has expanded further in response to digital transformations. The emergence of large language models has begun to influence evaluation and assessment practices, challenging traditional methods (Yavuz et al, 2025). Simultaneously, multilingual realities increasingly reject monolingual, native speaker norms as the sole model for learners (Cheng et al. 2023). Finally, shifting policy agendas emphasise that empowerment through language learning requires more nuanced and context-sensitive approaches (Contrera León and Chapéton Castra 2017).

The first challenge this volume addresses is the ever-changing classroom learning environment. Creativity by language teachers in designing lessons, activities, and materials, along with students' creative engagement with learning tasks, coupled with technological innovation, is reshaping language pedagogical practices, particularly in digitally mediated environments. The integration of technology into pedagogy has moved beyond questions of access to focus instead on how digital tools shape interaction, learner agency, and professional identity (Mishra and Koehler, 2006; Pegrum et al., 2022). With the availability of an increasing number of digital resources and learning instruments, instructors' methodological choices have grown exponentially in the twenty-first century (Camillieri and Camillieri, 2017; Hill and Hannafin, 2021) and have influenced lesson preparation and material selection, enabling diversified reading and listening resources, multimodal task design, more streamlined alignment with learning outcomes, and greater flexibility in adapting materials to learner needs. Creativity in this context is increasingly conceptualised not as an individual trait but as a situated practice emerging from the interaction of learners, teachers, materials, institutional structures, and technological affordances (Amabile, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Henriksen et al., 2016). This reconceptualisation aligns with broader calls in teacher education to prepare educators for adaptive, reflective practice in uncertain and resource-variable contexts. Out of these novel contexts arises a sustained interest in language teaching materials as key sites through which cultural representation is constructed and negotiated. Textbooks remain powerful mediating artefacts in many educational systems, shaping not only linguistic input but also cultural narratives and ideological orientations (Gray, 2010; Shah, 2023). However, the classic textbook is now increasingly accompanied by online supplementary resources, which lend themselves to frequent updating and the inclusion of automatically assessed exercises. Critical



discourse approaches have been widely used to interrogate how culture, identity, and power are embedded in instructional materials, highlighting tensions between globalised content and local values (Fairclough, 2010; Weninger and Kiss, 2015). Such work underscores the need to evaluate materials not merely for linguistic coverage, but for their social and cultural implications.

The second challenge this volume addresses concerns learner variability and task conditions in second language acquisition. Research on task-based performance has shown that factors such as time pressure, task complexity, and affective states interact in complex ways, influencing fluency, accuracy, and complexity in learner output (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 2018; Wang, 2014). Rather than yielding uniform effects, such conditions often produce differential outcomes depending on learner proficiency, experience, and learners' use of learning strategies. This insight has important pedagogical implications, particularly for assessment and classroom task design. Materials need to cater to different learning types and accommodate neurotypical variation. Diversified teaching (Johnson and Randolph, 2015), differential learning (Haniya and Roberts-Lieb, 2017), and equitable assessment practice (Scott et al., 2014) are at the forefront of deliberations on adapting the language classroom to the heterogeneity of its learners.

Equally central is research on multilingualism and sociolinguistics, which has challenged monolingual norms in language education. Contemporary multilingual theory emphasises flexible language practices, translanguaging, and the dynamic deployment of linguistic resources across contexts (García and Wei, 2014; May, 2022; Seltzer, Ibarra Johnson and García, 2025). These perspectives have reshaped understandings of competence, moving away from native-speaker benchmarks toward functional, context-sensitive models of language use (Hymes, 1972; Mootoosamy and Aryadoust, 2024). They also interact with longstanding concerns about language maintenance, heritage language loss, and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems embedded in endangered languages (Fishman, 1991; Harrison, 2007; Meighan, 2024). The greater appreciation for nuanced conceptualisations of the language competence of multi-lingual speakers in target languages, therefore, raises new questions around language learning, both inside and outside of the classroom.



Finally, language policy and inclusive education form a critical backdrop to many of the contributions in this volume. Many of our authors have a background in teaching English as a second or foreign language with the aim of taking their research insights back to their home countries and helping shape the language policies of the future. Policies related to English-medium instruction, diversity education, and curriculum design are increasingly scrutinised for their social consequences, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse settings (Alhamami, 2023; Shohamy, 2006). Research on language policy highlights the gap that often exists between policy intentions and classroom realities, reinforcing the importance of contextually grounded, empirically informed approaches to policy implementation. In light of this gap, research must set out how ambitions for excellence in teaching can meet challenges in infrastructure, resources, funding and complex political landscapes.

Together, these strands provide the conceptual foundation for LEAP 2025 and for the papers collected in this volume. They also reveal a shared concern with moving beyond binary distinctions, such as ESL/EFL, global/local, or digital/traditional, towards more nuanced understandings of language education as a complex, socially embedded practice.

3 Conference Context

The International PGR Conference on Language Education, Acquisition & Policy (LEAP 2025) was hosted by the Centre for Training and Research in Linguistics (CTRL) at the University of Aberdeen and held on 15–16 July 2025 at the Sir Duncan Rice Library. Designed as a hybrid event, the conference brought together postgraduate researchers, academics, and practitioners from across both the UK and a wide range of international contexts. This format enabled broad participation and facilitated exchange across geographical and institutional boundaries. Aberdeen itself hosts a large community of postgraduate researchers from across the world working on the key themes of the conference. Many of these researchers can look back on extensive teaching experience, and their doctoral research often feeds back into the educational processes and policies of their home countries. This uniquely situates this conference as a hub of international exchange between practitioners who seek to integrate their own experiences and



observed challenges into the scholarly landscape, with a view to helping shape language teaching and policy in the future.

The conference attracted a substantial number of submissions, reflecting strong interest in its thematic focus. Following a competitive abstract review process, 31 papers were accepted for presentation and organised into nine thematic sessions. These sessions were designed to encourage dialogue across subfields, allowing participants to engage with perspectives from applied linguistics, education, sociolinguistics, and policy studies. All papers considered for inclusion in the present proceedings underwent a rigorous peer-review process. From the full set of presentations, six manuscripts were selected for publication based on originality, methodological rigour, and relevance to the aims of the volume.

4 Themes addressed by this volume

In responding to the challenges set out in Section 2, the chapters included in this volume address several overarching themes linked to them. A unifying feature is the emphasis on context-sensitive inquiry, with contributors examining how specific social, cultural, and institutional conditions shape pedagogical practices, learner experiences, and policy frameworks. Whether focusing on teacher education in post-Soviet contexts, ESL/EFL classrooms in the Middle East, or multilingual communities in Southeast Asia, the studies resist universalising claims and instead foreground situated analysis grounded in specific social and institutional contexts.

Another cross-cutting theme is innovation under constraint. Several contributions explore how educators and learners navigate limited resources, institutional expectations, or policy pressures while seeking innovations in pedagogy and curriculum design. This perspective challenges narratives that equate innovation solely with technological advancement, highlighting instead the creative negotiation of institutional, material, and pedagogical constraints as educators and learners adapt practices, reinterpret requirements, and develop workable solutions within existing limitations.

Finally, the volume reflects a strong commitment to equity and inclusion. Issues of diversity, multilingualism, heritage language maintenance, and learner identity recur



across themes, underscoring the ethical dimensions of language education and policy. Collectively, the papers invite readers to reconsider dominant models and to engage with more inclusive, flexible, and socially responsive approaches to language teaching and learning.

5 Summary of the Papers in this Issue

The papers selected for this first volume of the LEAP proceedings collectively illustrate how contemporary language education research is increasingly characterised by contextual sensitivity, methodological pluralism, and theoretical integration. Rather than advancing isolated case studies, these contributions engage with broader debates on language education, acquisition and policy, while remaining grounded in local educational realities.

5.1 Creativity and Innovation in Language Teaching

Rokhatoy Boltaeva's qualitative case study of Digital Pedagogical Creativity (DPC) among teacher candidates in Uzbekistan offers a nuanced account of how creativity emerges at the intersection of technology, institutional structures, and sociocultural expectations. Drawing on established frameworks such as Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra and Koehler, 2006) and creativity models proposed by Amabile (1996) and Csikszentmihalyi (1997), the study moves beyond technocentric accounts of innovation. It demonstrates that pedagogical creativity is not solely determined by individual teacher competence, but is shaped by generational differences, infrastructural limitations, and centralised policy environments. This contribution aligns with growing scholarship that conceptualises creativity as a systemic, socially distributed phenomenon rather than an individual trait (Glăveanu, 2008; Glăveanu, 2014). Importantly, Boltaeva's findings challenge assumptions embedded in Global North-centric models of digital pedagogy by showing how creativity is negotiated in resource-constrained, policy-regulated contexts. The study thus contributes to teacher education research by foregrounding the need to adapt creativity frameworks to diverse institutional ecologies.



Building on the theme of technological innovation in language pedagogy, Anar Hamdan AlRuwaie's mixed-methods study on AI-mediated speaking practice in Kuwaiti higher education explores the potential of artificial intelligence to address persistent challenges in EFL proficiency. Situating the research within Kuwait's complex sociolinguistic landscape, where English functions simultaneously as a language of prestige, economic mobility, and educational stratification (Alsafran et al., 2020; Troudi and Al Hafidh, 2017), the paper foregrounds the tension between extensive institutional exposure to English and continued low communicative competence. Drawing on scholarship highlighting disparities between private and public schooling and the contested outcomes of English Medium Instruction (Alghasab, 2017; Alenezi, 2010), the study introduces the AI-based platform ImmerseMe as a pedagogical intervention aimed at expanding opportunities for authentic spoken interaction. Methodologically, the contribution reflects the volume's emphasis on innovation under constraint by combining quantitative proficiency measures with qualitative learner perspectives. In line with emerging research on digitally mediated language learning environments (Pegrum et al., 2022; Hill and Hannafin, 2021), the paper conceptualises AI not as a substitute for pedagogy but as a mediating tool that extends communicative practice beyond classroom limitations. Its findings suggest that immersive, feedback-driven platforms can support learner confidence, motivation, and oral fluency development, particularly in contexts where opportunities for real-world interaction are limited. At the same time, the study cautions against universalised claims of technological effectiveness, reinforcing broader calls for context-sensitive digital pedagogy in EFL education.

Complementing this focus on pedagogical conditions, Arwa Mohammed Alrashed's investigation into the impact of time pressure on Saudi EFL learners addresses a long-standing issue in second language acquisition research: the relationship between task conditions and learner performance. Building on mixed findings in literature (Ahmadian and Tavakoli, 2011; Wang, 2014), the study highlights how time pressure interacts with learner proficiency, affect, and strategy use rather than exerting uniform effects. By adopting a mixed-methods design, the paper bridges quantitative performance measures with qualitative insights into learner experience. This approach reflects a broader methodological trend in SLA research that recognises



the limitations of purely performance-based metrics and emphasises learner perspectives (Dörnyei, 2007). The study's pedagogical implications are particularly salient in contexts where high-stakes testing and timed tasks dominate assessment practices, suggesting the need for more differentiated and supportive instructional approaches.

5.2 Local Educational Perspectives and Language Categorisation

Rohib Adrianto Sangia's critical analysis of the ESL/EFL distinction in Southeast Asian contexts challenges the entrenched ESL/EFL binary in applied linguistics. Drawing on examples from ASEAN countries where English functions simultaneously as a school subject, a lingua franca, and a digital contact language, the paper demonstrates the inadequacy of traditional categorisations for capturing contemporary language use. By engaging with perspectives from World Englishes (Kachru, 1992), English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2015), and translanguaging theory (García and Wei, 2014), the study argues for a continuum-based understanding of English use. This reconceptualisation has significant implications for teacher education, assessment, and language policy, particularly in multilingual regions where rigid labels obscure actual classroom practices. The paper contributes to ongoing efforts to align language policy frameworks with sociolinguistic realities.

5.3 Sociolinguistics, Multilingualism, and Indigenous Knowledge

Ulfatmi Azlan's study of language contact among the Duano people and its impact on the menongkah tradition, a traditional shellfish-harvesting practice central to Duano cultural life, foregrounds the relationship between language maintenance and indigenous knowledge systems. Drawing on Harrison's (2007) work on language endangerment, this paper illustrates how language shift affects not only communicative practices but also livelihoods, oral traditions, and ecological knowledge. The study resonates with sociolinguistic research that frames language loss as a form of epistemic erosion rather than merely a decline in speaker numbers (Maffi, 2005). By linking heritage language shift to changes in cultural practices, Azlan's contribution highlights the broader social consequences of dominant-language encroachment and underscores the importance of community-based language revitalisation efforts.



5.4 Diversity, Attitudes, and Language Education

Barham Sattar Abdulrahman, Bahar Zayr Muhamad, Nyan Kamil Ghafour, and Basan Yaba's investigation into Kurdish EFL students' attitudes towards diversity following a dedicated Diversity Education course addresses the affective and ethical dimensions of language education. Using quantitative survey data, the study demonstrates that structured engagement with issues of gender, religion, nationality, and political beliefs can foster more positive attitudes and greater social awareness among EFL learners. This contribution aligns with research that positions language classrooms as key sites for intercultural learning and democratic education (Byram, 2008). The study's emphasis on contextual appropriateness is particularly significant, cautioning against the uncritical adoption of externally developed curricula in culturally distinct settings. It thus reinforces the argument that diversity education must be locally grounded to be pedagogically effective.

6 Scholarly Contribution of the Volume

Taken together, the papers in this volume contribute to a reframing of language education research as inherently interdisciplinary, context-dependent, and ethically engaged. Several shared orientations emerge. First, there is a clear move away from deficit models, whether of learners, teachers, or institutions, towards analyses that foreground structural constraints and sociopolitical conditions. Second, the contributions collectively challenge rigid binaries, including ESL/EFL, native/non-native, and global/local, advocating instead for more continuum-based and ecological perspectives.

Methodologically, the volume reflects a productive balance between qualitative depth and empirical rigour. Case studies, critical discourse analysis, mixed-methods designs, and curriculum proposals coexist, illustrating the value of methodological pluralism in addressing complex questions on language education, acquisition, and policy, with a particular focus on English in a globalised world. Many contributions foreground practitioner perspectives, reinforcing the relevance of research to classroom practice and policy implementation.



As a collection of postgraduate research, this volume showcases research that engages with current trends, anticipating the field's future directions. These studies engage critically with established frameworks while extending them to under-researched contexts, particularly in the Global South. In doing so, they challenge epistemic hierarchies within applied linguistics and contribute to a more inclusive knowledge base.

7 Conclusion

This editorial has framed the proceedings of LEAP 2025 as a coherent scholarly contribution rather than a collection of isolated studies. By situating the included papers within broader debates in language education, acquisition, and policy, it has highlighted their collective engagement with creativity, diversity, multilingualism, and inclusion. The volume underscores the importance of postgraduate research in advancing theoretically informed, context-sensitive, and socially responsive approaches to language education.

As language classrooms continue to evolve in response to global and local pressures, the research presented here offers timely insights into how educators, learners, and institutions navigate the complexities and ongoing changes in language education. We hope that this collection will stimulate further dialogue and inspire future research that bridges theory, practice, and policy.

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