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Bridging the Pedagogical Gap: From Cognitive Strategies to Cultural Resilience in English Language Education

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The gap between academic research, curriculum policy, and classroom reality is one of the most persistent issues in language education worldwide. Drawing on the empirical findings of the articles in this issue, this editorial argues that this tripartite gap, namely theoretical, policy-related, and practical can only be bridged through a holistic and collaborative approach. However, such an approach becomes mere rhetoric without acknowledging structural constraints and competing perspectives. Reviewing studies on curriculum–assessment alignment, teacher resilience and self-efficacy, critical technology integration, and the reproduction of cultural hegemony in instructional materials, this editorial proposes a threefold framework: curriculum–assessment alignment, teacher research networks, and critical digital literacy. It calls on all stakeholders including teachers, researchers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to view language teaching not as the mechanical implementation of curricula but as a dynamic, reflective, and profoundly human endeavor, and to engage in continuous dialogue aimed at empowering one another as agents of change.

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A Gap We Have Long Known

Fourteen years ago, when I first stood in a classroom at Farhangian University and looked at the eager faces of student teachers who had come to learn what it means to become a teacher, I asked myself: What distinguishes this classroom from a mere workshop on teaching techniques? Years later, I found an answer in research emphasizing the inseparable link between cognition, emotion, and identity in language learning. Khajavy and Vaziri (2024) have shown that affective and psychological factors are not peripheral to learning but lie at its very core. This insight transformed my understanding of the teacher education classroom: what learners *already know* is not

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merely linguistic knowledge; their beliefs, emotions, resilience, and cultural identity are also part of what is *known*.

Now, as Editor-in-Chief of the *Research in English Language Education Journal*, I pose the same question on a broader scale: We've known for a long time that there's a gap between what research tells us, what policy prescribes, and what teachers actually decide moment by moment in the classrooms. How can we transform that gap into an opportunity for dialogue and change? This editorial seeks to articulate a specific and actionable position for our professional community, drawn from the findings in this issue. But first, we must be honest: none of the proposals in this editorial operate in a vacuum. Structural constraints are real in all educational systems, and any change will meet resistance. The real question is not *What should be done?* but *Given these constraints, where can we begin?*

The Pedagogical Gap: A Systemic Issue, not a Teacher's Flaw

Khaef and Razmi (2026) in this issue examine a concrete example of the gap between a textbook and a national examination, showing that instructional goals and assessment practices can speak two different languages. This finding echoes a recurring experience in my fourteen years of teaching in teacher education classrooms: student teachers enthusiastically learn communicative and critical approaches, but when they enter schools, they encounter an assessment system that asks them to teach what the test measures not what learners need for life and thought.

This is not merely the problem of one teacher or one educational system; it is a systemic issue observed across many contexts. Let me be explicit: some scholars may argue that changing the assessment system before reforming the curriculum is dangerous, as it may lead to confusion and a decline in standards. This concern is legitimate. However, my experience in teacher education shows that the cost of maintaining the status quo which entails training teachers who learn to accept a permanent gap between what they believe and what they practice is far greater than the cost of change. The journal invites all stakeholders to move beyond merely publishing or reading findings and to actively engage with this question: How can change begin in a way that remains faithful to standards while also serving meaningful learning?

Humans Who Learn, Humans Who Teach

Teacher education is not merely the transmission of teaching methods; it is the construction of a professional identity. This insight is of paramount importance in any institution responsible for teacher education, from teacher training universities to in-service professional development programs. Recent research in language teacher psychology shows that teacher resilience and self-efficacy are not peripheral characteristics but central constructs of educational quality. Gregersen and MacIntyre (2024), two leading scholars in the field of language teacher emotion and wellbeing, argue that teacher wellbeing is not an individual trait but the product of an individual–institutional pact between the teacher and the educational institution. This finding has been repeatedly confirmed in my own teaching experience: we cannot nurture capable, confident learners unless we first nurture resilient, self-efficacious teachers. A student teacher who is not resilient in the face of academic and professional pressures will not be able to transmit resilience to their own students.

In one recent semester, I had a student teacher who began the term speaking with high confidence about her aspirations to become a teacher. But midway through the term, as she faced heavy workloads, high institutional expectations, and the pressure of practice examinations, she gradually withdrew from herself. She attended class, but she was not trulypresent. When I spoke with her, she said: "I thought becoming a teacher meant learning methods, not fighting a system that does not align with my methods." This experience showed me that teacher resilience, though essential, does not develop in a vacuum. She eventually regained her balance through peer support and reflection on small successes; but I also learned that without changes in institutional conditions, individual resilience alone cannot work miracles.

However, we must avoid oversimplifying this relationship. Teacher resilience is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. A teacher working in an environment with overcrowded classes, limited access to professional development, a centralized curriculum, and high-stakes examinations may be unable to create meaningful change even at the highest levels of resilience. Therefore, investment in teacher resilience must be accompanied by efforts to address these structural constraints not replace them. The journal seeks to foster a culture in which teachers are not merely executors of top-down directives but reflective practitioners who continuously evaluate and adapt their approaches based on their students' needs and their own socio-cultural context. This is our second priority: teacher research networks, in which teachers are recognized not as consumers of findings but as producers of classroom-based knowledge.

Technology: Tool or New Idol?

The digital transformation of education has brought both unprecedented opportunities and new forms of inequality. In my own experience, when I first used artificial intelligence to analyze a literary text in class, I noticed that students quickly sought the *right answer* in the tool rather than thinking about the text itself. This experience raised a fundamental question: The issue is not *Should we use technology?* but *In service of what purpose, by what criteria, and with what consequences?*

We propose three criteria: Purposefulness (every tool must serve a clearly articulated learning objective), Transparency (learners must understand how the tool works and what its limitations are), and Relationality (technology must be embedded within human interaction, not replace it). Yet we must acknowledge that these criteria meet resistance in practice: pressure to use technology at any cost, limited teacher time for critical evaluation of tools, and institutional expectations that often prioritize quantity over quality. Nevertheless, recent research in language education confirms that the ability to evaluate digital tools critically is itself a teachable skill. Tacelosky et al. (2025) in their study on critical AI literacy in language education demonstrated that cultivating this literacy is not a luxury but a necessity for preserving learner agency against undue reliance on generative tools. Technology must serve pedagogy and enhance the relational and emotional dimensions of learning, not replace them. This is our third priority: critical digital literacy, which must permeate the entire teacher education curriculum rather than being confined to a separate course.

Culture: Between Identity and Hegemony

Language education is never culturally or politically neutral. Recent research in critical language education, particularly the work of Pennycook (2021), shows that even

domestically produced materials can reproduce particular power relations and cultural assumptions. In my own experience, when I first selected an international textbook for my teacher education class, I noticed that student teachers unconsciously regarded it as more credible than domestically produced materials not because of its pedagogical quality, but because of the image of the West as the standard reference in their minds. This experience showed that critiquing hegemony does not mean rejecting intercultural dialogue, but it does mean being vigilant about hidden power relations in materials selection.

Byram (2021), one of the most prominent theorists of intercultural education, argues that intercultural competence is developed not through learning about another culture but through cultivating the ability to critically negotiate between one's own culture and other cultures. This insight clarifies the meaning of cultural resilience: the capacity of learners and teachers to maintain identity and critical awareness while remaining genuinely open to difference. Localization is not merely replacing Western content with local content; it is a critical process that asks: Whose knowledge is represented? What spaces exist for negotiating between local and global cultural frameworks? Every context with its own linguistic and cultural diversity, whether in Asia, Africa, or Europe, requires an education sensitive to this internal diversity, not merely to the national context as a whole. In teacher education classrooms, this means preparing teachers who can respect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of all learners equally in multilingual classrooms.

A Call to Action: Three Priorities for the Future

We make no claim to idealism. We know that teachers worldwide grapple with real structural constraints, and any change will meet resistance. But recognizing these constraints must not become an excuse for inaction. Change begins here: in the classroom where a teacher chooses to ask questions rather than mechanically implement a syllabus; in research that rises from the real problems of the classroom; in policy that accepts that assessment must reflect meaningful learning. To move forward, we propose three concrete priorities, the same three priorities that have run as continuous threads throughout this editorial, and which are empirically grounded in the articles of this very issue:

1. Curriculum–Assessment Alignment

A systematic review of national and international examinations is needed so that they reflect communicative and critical pedagogies rather than mere recall. This priority is particularly vital for teacher education institutions: if future teachers are trained in an environment where assessment is not aligned with communicative teaching, they will carry that model into their own classrooms**.** This is precisely the gap that Khaef and Razmi (2026) dissect in this issue, demonstrating how the Vision 3 textbook and Iran's National English Exam speak two different languages.

2. Teacher Research Networks

We must establish communities of practice where teachers can share classroom-based research and reflective narratives, because the teacher is not merely an executor but a researcher of the field. Teacher education institutions can serve as hubs for these networks, bridging student teachers, practicing teachers, and university researchers. The studies by Fattahinejad and Chalak (2026) on teacher resilience, and Shekarian Behzadi

and Bagheri Masoudzade (2026) on academic self-efficacy underscore why such networks are essential: they provide the psychological and professional support that individual resilience alone cannot sustain.

3. Critical Digital Literacy

Explicit instruction in the critical evaluation of digital tools and artificial intelligence must be integrated into both pre-service and in-service teacher education. This must permeate the entire teacher education curriculum rather than being confined to a separate course. The empirical findings in this issue, ranging from Ahmadi and Mafi's (2026) exploration of digital collaborative writing, to Shamsaldini and Forough Ameri's (2026) analysis of AI-assisted reading, and Madadi and Panahi's (2026) work on multimedia storytelling, all point to a single conclusion: technology must serve pedagogy, not replace it. Furthermore, as Ghaffari et al. (2026) and Ameri (2026) reveal in their studies on cultural pedagogy and hegemony, even our instructional materials are never neutral; therefore, critical digital literacy must also include the ability to interrogate the cultural assumptions embedded in digital tools and texts.

Conclusion

The articles in this issue converge on a single insight: effective language education is never a one-dimensional endeavor and requires an interconnected network of methodology, technology, cultural awareness, psychological resilience, and curricular coherence. The message of this editorial is simple: bridging the pedagogical gap begins not with a single grand reform but with three small yet interconnected steps: assessment alignment, empowering teachers as researchers, and cultivating critical digital literacy. Yet this insight gains meaning only when accompanied by an acknowledgment of constraints and competing perspectives. I invite you, whether you are a teacher, a researcher, or a policymaker, to view this issue not as a magnifying glass for scrutinizing the technicalities of others' work but as a mirror for reflecting on our own practices and policies. I am grateful to the authors who provided these mirrors, to the reviewers who polished them, and to the editorial board who helped bring this issue to light. It is only through this collective reflection that we can elevate the quality of language education in every context and nurture a generation of learners who are capable, critically conscious, and deeply resilient, learners whose teachers have also been trained to walk that same path.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest in writing this editorial. References to articles in this issue are made solely on the basis of thematic relevance.

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