

## Introduction to OLJ Volume 27, Issue 4

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Once again, on behalf of OLC, it is my pleasure to provide a brief overview of the final issue of 2023. In addition to the special issue from the AERA Online Teaching and Learning SIG, the December issue of the *Online Learning Journal* includes five articles from our regular submission process. These articles cover a broad range of topics including the evolving role of writing centers in support of online learners, humanizing online pedagogy, learner readiness in online and other digital contexts, and an intriguing investigation of online and classroom student outcomes.

The first article in this section is “A Writing Center’s Hybrid Approach to Supporting English Academic Writing Skills among L2 Postgraduates” by authors Mary Newsome, Mohammad Mollazehi, Mounia Zidani, Randa Sheik, and Jumana Amiry of Qatar University, Qatar. In this paper we are reminded that graduate students are increasingly expected to publish their own research (or collaborate with others to do so) prior to graduation. This places a significant burden on second language learners who must simultaneously learn specialized language while gaining understanding of research design, methods, analysis, and reporting. This mixed-method comparative study examines historical data to gain insight into the influence of a writing center’s hybrid approach to supporting the development of English academic writing skills among postgraduate second language learners. The paper concluded that such students not only prefer a hybrid and flexible approach to writing support, but that their faculty are willing to assist with this method and that this approach is associated with higher rates of publication prior to graduation. The study has implications for other writing centers and the general support of second language learners in post-graduate settings.

In “Humanising Online Pedagogy through Asynchronous Discussion Forums: An Analysis of Student Dialogic Interactions at a South African University” authors Fatima Vally Essa, Grant Andrews, Belinda Mendelowitz, Yvonne Reed, and Ilse Fouche investigate online learning through a pedagogical lens that aims to support engagement, collaboration, belonging, connection, interactive social learning, identity building, and personalized learning. The authors argue that this humanizing pedagogy is well suited to the context of transitioning to online learning during the COVID pandemic, especially in South Africa with its previous history of apartheid. Through thematic content analysis of students’ dialogic responses in online discussions, the paper reveals how the specific online instructional tasks enabled humanizing pedagogy by allowing students to use their authentic voices, to develop social connections, and to reflect affective and personal experiences. The authors maintain that interactive, asynchronous online forums can be effective tools to support humanizing online pedagogy when these forums are designed to encourage dialogic learning, use content that is relevant to students’ contexts, and give students agency by allowing them to select texts for discussion and share their diverse perspectives.

The next paper is “From Online Learner Readiness to Life-Long Learning Skills: A Validation Study,” by Mary Ellen Dello Stritto and Naomi Aguiar of Oregon State University and Carolyn Andrews of Brigham Young University. Readiness to learn in online settings has been a topic of interest for decades as educators and researchers came to realize that online learning required additional knowledge, skills, and attitudes from students beyond what is expected for classroom learning. For example, in early models of student readiness there was a focus on access to technology and confidence in an ability to manage one’s own learning. Later models have added and consolidated constructs to include such constructs as technology self-efficacy, online learning task self-efficacy, communication self-efficacy, and self-regulation efficacy. The authors review the history of online learner readiness and devise a new scale that improves upon existing measures. Through large-scale survey research with more than 10,000 respondents at two universities, the authors propose and test a new model that includes a more parsimonious framework. Through a factor analytic approach, they identify self-regulation efficacy, locus of control, communication efficacy, and technology efficacy as the core components of online learner readiness.

The next paper is “A Study on the Relationship between Domain Specific Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation in e-Learning Contexts,” by Priyanka Gupta and Umesh Bamel of the IMI Institute in India. Focusing on the broader context of e-learning rather than strictly online learning and working in the context of India rather than the U.S., the authors develop a model that employs many of the same variables used in the previous study. However, these authors focus on a subset of constructs: academic self-efficacy and internet self-efficacy and their impact on self-regulation in e-learning contexts. Using a sample of more than 500 students and regression analysis, the findings highlight that academic and internet self-efficacy have a positive effect on self-regulation in an e-learning environment in a South Asian educational context.

In our final paper, Melanie Long of The College of Wooster, Karen Gebhardt of the University of Colorado, and Kelly McKenna of Colorado State University examine learning outcomes in “Success Rate Disparities Between Online and Face-to-Face Economics Courses: Understanding the Impacts of Student Affiliation and Course Modality.” Meta-analytic evidence suggests that online and classroom learning do not differ significantly in terms of student outcomes. This conclusion comes with a caveat—there is considerable heterogeneity of results across studies, with some studies finding better outcomes for classroom learners, some studies finding no significant difference, others finding online, and especially blended, students doing as well or better than purely classroom students do. The final paper in this section seeks to disentangle results indicating lower success rates by online students found in some studies by analyzing important student characteristics such as whether they are matriculated (affiliated/admitted/fee-paying), and whether they are fully online or mixing online and classroom instruction. Using both institutional data and survey data, the authors examine online versus face-to-face success gaps and student’s term modality (FTF, online, or mixed) as well as institutional affiliation (matriculation). They identify components using a fixed effects regression method and compare outcomes across four student groups: affiliated students who are enrolled in exclusively online courses, exclusively face-to-face courses, or in a mix of courses each term, as well as unaffiliated (external) students exclusively taking online courses. They conclude that although students in online courses are less successful on average, there is a lot of variance in

that group, and part of this gap is explained by the student's institutional affiliation and whether they exclusively take online courses. External students are the least successful in online courses while students who are affiliated with the institution fare much better. These findings have implications for student support and advising that could improve conditions for underperforming groups.

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