
Editorial: Making a difference in students' academic performance

Editorial

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I have the distinct honour to introduce the first issue of the 18th Volume of the LTHE Journal ushering yet another year in its valuable contribution to the academic community. The research papers included in this issue serve as testament to the breadth of the teaching and learning issues that have become the subject of scientific inquiry in various higher education institutions in the Gulf region.

The focus of the region on delivering quality education has prompted researchers to direct their efforts in examining the factors that influence student academic performance and then make recommendations on effective pedagogies to enhance learning.

In an effort to determine the study habits that contribute to high academic performance, Yousef Almoslamani investigated the use of learning strategies by Saudi university students. The study looked at a range of micro-strategies, memorization and cognition strategies, study habits and emotional support strategies across male and female students of different levels of academic performance. The study found that students who are high achievers use significantly more learning strategies than low achievers, while females outperform males in the use of effective learning strategies, thus making a case for increasing students' awareness of learning strategies and providing training and support for their use.

In their paper, Maura A.E. Pilotti, Halah Alkuhayli and Runna Al Ghazo examined whether the memory skills that Arab students develop through their habitual practice of memorization and recitation of materials are connected to academic performance. The impetus for their study was to provide evidence that memorization and acquisition of information are not mutually exclusive. Their findings showed that verbatim memory skills help students retain information and play an important role in all complex cognitive activities that contribute to academic achievement.

The third paper in this issue is also dedicated to investigating factors influencing students' performance. Muhammad Waleed Shehzad, Md. Kamrul Hasan, Rida Ahmed, Shazma Razzaq and Shehzad Ahmed investigated two aspects of grit, namely, perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, as well as self-efficacy beliefs as important psychological variables in EFL learners' pronunciation performance. The researchers found that both dimensions of grit have a significant and positive association with learners' self-efficacy beliefs and pronunciation performance signifying the important role that non-cognitive factors play in students' academic performance.

The last two papers in this issue are classroom intervention studies designed to improve student learning. Abduljalil Nasr Mohammed Hazaea and Sultan Saleh Almekhlafy investigated the use of timed reading activities (TRA) in helping students in mixed-ability classes improve their academic reading speed and reading comprehension. They found that the five-week TRA intervention with Saudi EFL students significantly improved their reading skills and raised their awareness of effective reading strategies.

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Intercultural sensitivity was the focus of the intervention designed by Tanju Deveci, Glenda Elgamal, David Dalton and Donald John Langille. The study looked at how the different experiential activities and topics in an undergraduate intercultural communication course can help develop students' intercultural sensitivity and self-confidence, their awareness of other cultures and barriers to effective communication. The study also provided evidence to support the need for more experiential learning to bridge in-class and out-of-class experiences and further facilitated the development of students' intercultural competence.

Last, but not least, this issue would not have been possible without the support of the 43 peer reviewers from 15 countries around the world, who devoted their time in reviewing the 75 research papers submitted to the journal and helped chose the ones that appear in this issue. As always, their contribution is greatly valued and appreciated.

With best regards,
Prof Dr Christina Gitsaki
Editor in Chief
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