

## Book Review

### **Teaching and Learning English in East Asian Universities**

David D. Qian and Lan Li (Eds.). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014. 460 pp.  
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The expansion of English in non-English-speaking countries in major domains such as education, family, work, and social life has been of enthralling interest to linguists, applied linguists and ELT (English language teaching) practitioners. While it appears inevitable that the use of English remains ubiquitous in places which were colonies of countries with English as their first language, the past few decades have also witnessed the growing importance of ELT and related research in countries without a colonial history such as Mainland China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan.

David Qian and Lan Li's '*Teaching and learning English in East Asian universities*' is a well-timed publication with an extensive collection of articles based on recent empirical research studies presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> *International Symposium on Teaching English at Tertiary Level*. This edited book comprises five sections, each carrying a theme related to a major research interest in ELT in tertiary education in East Asia. Section One on assessing language performance covers topics which are relatively widely studied, e.g. standardized graduation English tests (commonly known as exit test), major English proficiency assessment approaches, and innovative assessment practices. Section Two focuses on strategies for enhancing English writing literacy in higher education. Wang, Liu and Jia's chapter about applying theories to the development of course materials for teaching academic writing is an appropriate final touch.

Sections three and four both highlight the integration and influence of information technology in ELT. Section three targets learner autonomy, and strikes a very decent balance between independent-learning strategies (e.g. visualisation as a reading strategy and a Facebook corpus learning strategy) and the psychological side of learning. Section four investigates linguistic features among ESL learners through computational linguistics using corpus- and discourse-based approaches.

The last section of the book shifts its focus from the discussion of ELT development mainly in Mainland China to a wider context including the situation of EAP in Japan; an analysis of the pronunciation features of EFL learners in relation to the expansion of English as a lingua franca in non-Anglophone places; and some lesser examined research areas such as the motivation of international students to major in English in Mainland China and the use of poems by Chinese poets who write in English as a means to enhance English proficiency of associate degree students in Hong Kong, all are very captivating.

This book showcases the latest development of a broad range of issues related to ELT in tertiary institutions. With East Asia as a common geographical platform, practitioners and researchers are provided with a convenient ground for drawing commonalities among counterparts in neighbouring places, identifying uniqueness of own practices, and eliciting reflective thinking. Most chapters in the book begin with a succinct summary of the study rationale and the methodological approach adopted, and end with implications for pedagogical applications. The editors have meticulously and systematically selected articles to emphasise the practicality of the book. Many chapters offer direct guidelines to ELT professionals to facilitate the creation of EAP courses and the development of assessment mechanisms. For instance, chapter 9 presents the pedagogical rationale and a step-by-step guide to course design and materials development of an EAP course for university students in Mainland China. Chapter 7 introduces strategies which enhance critical thinking while writing in English, reorienting the focus from teaching grammatical accuracy and genre-appropriate writing conventions to developing cognitive abilities of university students while teaching them how to write.

A recurring theme of the book is the importance of cultural and contextual awareness in producing ELT materials and learning activities. Two notable examples include the challenges associated with the use of peer feedback as a learning activity in a foreign language classroom in Mainland China (chapter 6) and the interplay of historical and cultural elements with the promotion of English as an international language in Japan (chapter 22). This theme is particularly crucial for ELT professionals working in Asian contexts.

While this book provides expedient responses to concerns and queries shared by ELT professionals working in Asia, the small sample size of some of the studies challenges their representativeness and thus limits generalizability. This potential drawback can probably be overcome by exercising care in data interpretations and remaining flexible in cross-cultural adaptations.

The book is a beneficial read to novice and experienced EFL professionals alike and the articles are clearly relevant to researchers and teachers in East Asian universities. However, although all major parts of East Asia are represented in the studies there is a strong emphasis on Mainland China. While this probably reveals the growing prominence of EAP programmes within Chinese universities and their remarkable numbers of EFL students, more studies from outside China would have broadened the book's appeal, making it an even more comprehensive collection to enlighten ELT professionals in terms of research and teaching practices.

### **About the reviewer**

Joanna Lee is senior lecturer at the Centre for Applied English Studies of the University of Hong Kong. She is the English-in-the-Discipline programme coordinator for Social Sciences students. Her research interests include EAP/ESP, language and gender, and language policy and planning.