

Book reviews

ENGLISH AND STUDENTS WITH LIMITED OR INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER PREPARATION AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Luis Javier Pentón Herrera (1st ed., Vol. 54).

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Jemima Rillera Kempster

University of Queensland

Upon resettlement in anglophone countries, students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) often face heightened exclusion and epistemic oppression instead of having access to inclusive, equitable, high-quality education with lifelong learning opportunities (Jensen, 2017). The edited volume *English and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education: Global Perspectives on Teacher Preparation and Classroom Practices* by Luis Javier Pentón Herrera contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to understand the complexities of supporting students who are learning the dominant language of their new settlement countries with little or no foundational literacy skills in their home languages. The term SLIFE, as popularised by Dr Andrea DeCapua and colleagues (2009) and Helen Marshall (2011), refers to migrant and refugee-background students whose educational experiences have been significantly impacted by various factors such as political conflict or instability, socioeconomic and cultural factors, natural disasters and forced displacement. Some of the challenges in supporting SLIFE in formal learning environments include adjusting to new cultural and educational environments, providing support for their emotional well-being due to traumatic experiences or difficult circumstances, lack of age-appropriate educational resources, and meeting educational level expectations in academic and literacy skills. This book focuses on the experiences of SLIFE in English-speaking learning environments and strongly advocates for holistic, culturally responsive, and strengths-based approaches to support their academic growth and advance epistemic access and justice.

The book is a collection of nineteen chapters and is divided into five parts. In the introductory chapter, Pentón Herrera establishes his positionality based on his cultural upbringing and professional experience, outlines the vision for this collaboration with fellow SLIFE advocates, and invites readers to be part of the dialogue regarding the unique challenges and needs of this cohort of students. A brief outline of the book is also provided.

The first part consists of a single chapter, but its significance in establishing the foundation for discussion about SLIFE cannot be overlooked. In Chapter 2, Pentón Herrera and contributors Christopher Browder and José Franco examine the multifaceted nature of the acronym SLIFE. The term can be a double-edged sword. While labelling types of students is integral to identifying their “needs” and determining appropriate support, it can also inadvertently result in stigmatisation, the perpetuation of deficient perspectives, and restrictions on opportunities for language learning and academic growth (p. 10). The construct of SLIFE has been previously raised by Browder (2019), arguing that “some people can become very educated without much formal schooling while others who are well-schooled can remain undereducated” (p.45). Given our expanding understanding of language learning, literacies, and education, discussing the inconsistencies in identification guidelines of SLIFE among educators, researchers, and institutions raise questions about our educational systems that tend to narrow the scope of literacy and English language learning to technical and quantifiable skills.

The second part of the book consists of chapters 3 to 6 and provides a comprehensive overview of SLIFE in educational systems across four anglophone countries: Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK. Chapter 3 specifically focuses on K-12 students. It identifies particular challenges such as issues of misplacement, compounded literacy demands based on the age of arrival or entry into the educational system, the development of literacy in home languages to support additional language and literacy learning, and varying degrees of parental support and involvement. Chapter 4 shifts our attention to adult learning contexts in the same four anglophone countries which receive a significant number of refugees. English language tuition for adult SLIFE includes various options such as government-initiated language and literacy programs in Australia to employment-focused adult

education, community-based organisations, community colleges, religious organisations and public schools in the USA, UK and Canada. Specific challenges identified for adult SLIFE include cultural and instructional differences, the variable focus of classroom curriculum, issues with language transfer and perceived lack of social capital. Chapter 5 draws attention to the crucial role of teachers across the lifespan as advocates for SLIFE, whether in ensuring inclusion and high-quality education for SLIFE in the classroom or advancing policy especially regarding the acknowledgement of heritage languages. Another important addition to this volume is a discussion on trauma by Montero and Al Zouhour in chapter 6, recognising that SLIFE's identity extends beyond singular identity markers such as trauma or limited education. While trauma plays a crucial role in the documentation, application and selection process for resettlement, these stories and experiences can also be empowering when SLIFE become authors and arbiters of their stories. The double-sided coin of trauma is stress and growth (p. 89), and the authors offer valuable recommendations on effectively incorporating trauma-informed teaching practices to support the well-being and education of SLIFE.

After an in-depth introduction to SLIFE as a distinct cohort of students, our attention is drawn to pre and in-service teacher education in Part 3. Chapters 7 to 10 address common concerns of teachers who feel overwhelmed and unprepared for teaching and supporting SLIFE. The functions of education encompassing acquisition of knowledge and skills, acculturation, and identity formation (Biesta, 2015) are evident in this book's elaboration on the role of teachers in supporting SLIFE in English-speaking learning environments. Chapter 7 presents two studies that examine state-level pre-service teacher education requirements and offer recommendations for pre-service teachers working with English language learners. While primarily addressing teacher preparation programs in the United States, the guiding principles can be adapted and applied to similar culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. In Chapter 8, the emphasis is on acknowledging SLIFE holistically: their identity, languages, cultures, knowledge, families, and social networks. DeCapua and Marshall remain steadfast in their message, reiterating the same themes concerning SLIFE in English learning environments: over-reliance on print

and literacy-centred approaches, the tendency to emphasise individual achievement and accountability, and the disconnection between school knowledge and real-world experiences (p. 129). The authors highlight the importance of learning materials that resonate with students' lived experiences and the need for a supportive and integrated learning community. Chapter 9 delves into resolving the tension between curriculum compliance and "meeting students' needs" (p. 147), while Chapter 10 highlights the benefit of early reading instruction for SLIFE, particularly for SLIFE adolescents.

In the last two parts of the book, the crucial role of teachers' judgments in the education process (Biesta, 2015) is brought to the fore. These sections acknowledge teachers as individuals and educational professionals and demonstrate how teacher judgment and decision-making are influenced by a teacher's expertise, experiences, assumptions, and insights. Part 4 consists of chapters 11 to 19 and explores the range of affordances and constraints teachers face when exercising their judgments in shaping the educational experiences they provide for their students. Chapter 11 focuses on effective classroom instruction that acknowledges and integrates community cultural wealth (CCW) of SLIFE from Latin America in the US, particularly focusing on unaccompanied minors. Through community projects or youth participatory research projects in Chapter 12, Trinh demonstrates how language learning environments can either silence or allow expression for marginalised queer SLIFE. Chapter 13 focuses on wordless books, which shifts the focus on print literacy in the investigative stage to students' full linguistic repertoire, including the target language (p. 232). Chapter 14 provides one of the many tangible examples in the book how SLIFE students were supported and enabled to do much more than in a "traditional" classroom. Through problem-based service learning (PSBL), adolescent SLIFE were positioned as "consultants" proposing solutions and strategies for real-world problems faced by their "client", the community (p. 250).

Chapters 15 to 19 in the final part are devoted to issues concerning adult SLIFE, also referred to in literature as LESLLA learners (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults). Chapter 15 promotes the co-creation of learning and encourages responsiveness to oral cultures among adult SLIFE.

The chapter provides a thorough explanation of the Mutually Adaptive Learning Program (MALP), integrating a “collectivist education paradigm and of Western-style education” (p. 267). Based on case studies in an adult refugee education centre in Israel, Chapter 16 argues for explicit instruction with adult SLIFE, emphasising the need for a curriculum “which both breaks down and logically sequences content and skills” and specialist teachers knowledgeable in content and capable in delivery to students (p. 298). Chapter 17 explores various multimodal projects using participatory digital visual methods (PDVMs), which include Photo-elicitation, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking, encouraging co-construction of knowledge with adult SLIFE. Chapter 18 argues for grammar as the foundation for reading comprehension with adult SLIFE and finally, Chapter 19 focuses explicitly on the challenges and experiences of refugee women, touching on the global issue of adult illiteracy which disproportionately affects women.

Overall, the book has covered an impressive and wide-ranging exploration of issues and topics which showcase SLIFE and the breadth and depth of their knowledge, experiences and attributes. The book effectively captures the concepts, complexities, and considerations for supporting SLIFE from early primary to adult education in English-speaking countries. While many of the contributors to this book are based in North America, their collective experience in teaching and supporting SLIFE extends across the globe. The issues they address are not limited to a specific language or geographic region; thus, their insights are relevant worldwide to SLIFE teaching contexts. The contributors also encompass diverse backgrounds, from seasoned researchers, doctoral students and practising teachers, all of whom bring valuable knowledge and experiences that contribute to our understanding of SLIFE and effective strategies for supporting their learning in formal educational settings.

For teachers and educational institutions working with SLIFE, the book provides a well-rounded blend of theoretical insights and practical strategies that can be implemented in the classroom. Throughout the book, readers will find compelling research from innovative and wide range of methodological approaches that will inspire pedagogical approaches and practices for extending students’ literacy skills, from grammar-focused

lessons to creative avenues that foster holistic learning experiences beyond reading and writing. The strategies can be as complex as project-based learning or as simple and accessible as using mini-whiteboards to check for understanding in explicit instruction. It is encouraging to read many examples of how transformative learning can happen across the lifespan, even with the constraints of standardised assessments and rigid curriculums.

As a practitioner-researcher working in the field of LESLLA, I appreciate how the book underscores the immense role of educators in engaging with SLIFE and facilitating their integration into educational and sociocultural contexts. The book consistently emphasised the need for teachers to recognise and tap into their students' full linguistic competencies, minimising over-reliance on printed materials, and utilising the rich resources of their students' oral and collectivistic cultures. The reflection questions at the end of each chapter serve as helpful prompts for further exploration and rich discussion about SLIFE. This book extends an invitation for all teachers to create inclusive and welcoming spaces for learning, remain open to new knowledge, and actively encourage the development and growth of their (SLIFE) students' identities.

References

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