

## LatinCALL Special Issue: CALL Challenges and New Horizons in the Age of AI

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### Introduction

The field of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has undergone a profound transformation over the past three decades, shaped by rapid technological advances, evolving pedagogical paradigms, and shifting socio-cultural realities. Within this dynamic landscape, regional associations have played a crucial role in fostering dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. The creation of LatinCALL, the Latin American Computer-Assisted Language Learning association, at the 2018 WorldCALL Conference in Concepción, Chile, represents a milestone in the global CALL community, not only in terms of regional representation but also in the breadth of scholarly contributions emerging from contexts often underrepresented in the literature. In addition to providing greater visibility, CALL also helped strengthen research networks throughout Latin America and collaboration between institutions that had previously worked in silos. Such an approach not only increased the scope of the investigation produced within the region but also highlighted the CALL research conducted in Latin America and the region's ability to impact international teaching, technology, language policy, and research through pragmatic scholarly work.

The present special issue of *CALL-EJ* brings together eight peer-reviewed papers originally presented at the first LatinCALL online conference. Collectively, these contributions illustrate the richness and diversity of contemporary CALL research, spanning contexts from Latin America to Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, while maintaining a strong connection to the LatinCALL initiative. They address topics of pressing importance for CALL research and practice, including the integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into language education, the affordances of digital platforms for interaction and learning, the theoretical frameworks guiding technology use in teacher education, and the role of CALL in fostering intercultural dialogue and democratic competences.

This editorial situates the eight contributions within the broader field of CALL and synthesises their insights into three interrelated thematic clusters: (1) **AI and generative AI in language learning and assessment**, (2) **digital platforms and tools for interaction and skill development**, and (3) **intercultural competence and global citizenship through CALL**. The discussion highlights how the papers collectively advance our understanding of CALL at a historical juncture characterised by the emergence of generative AI, the consolidation of online and blended learning environments, and renewed attention to intercultural dialogue.

## AI and Generative AI in Language Learning and Assessment

Few developments in CALL history have generated as much attention as the advent of generative artificial intelligence. Since the public release of large language models such as ChatGPT in late 2022, educators and researchers have grappled with both the promises and the challenges of these tools for language education (Callanan, 2024; Deng & Lin, 2023; Feng Teng, 2024). The special issue includes four contributions that explore this topic from complementary perspectives: learner perceptions and barriers to AI adoption, AI-assisted academic writing, thesis writing, and professional communication.

Maleki's study on psychological barriers to AI language assessment adoption among EFL learners (this issue) fills a critical research gap by shifting attention from teachers' acceptance of AI tools (see Davis, 1989; Guo, Shi, & Zhai, 2025) to learners' own experiences and perceptions. Drawing on a mixed-methods design with Iranian learners across different educational contexts, the study identifies perceptual, emotional, and contextual barriers that shape learners' attitudes towards AI-based assessment. Importantly, emotional factors emerged as the most significant obstacle, underscoring the affective dimensions of CALL adoption often overlooked in policy and design discussions.

Three additional studies examine the integration of generative AI into writing tasks, a skill traditionally recognised as one of the most challenging in EFL contexts (Fareed et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2024). Rebolledo Font de la Vall's paper on multimodal GenAI tools for refining EFL essay writing (this issue) presents a structured intervention with pre-service teachers in Chile, combining multiple AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, NotebookLM, and a custom GPT) across six sessions. By employing dual thematic analysis, the study demonstrates how AI tools can provide scaffolding for structural organisation and grammatical accuracy while simultaneously provoking reflection on creativity and authorship. The efficiency–creativity paradox identified in the findings resonates with ongoing debates about balancing AI's technical affordances with the cultivation of learners' critical and original voices (Barrot, 2023).

Complementing this contribution, Pokrivčáková's study on GenAI-supported thesis writing (this issue) documents Slovak students' perceptions and practices regarding AI use in undergraduate theses. The comparative design, involving two cohorts surveyed in 2024 and 2025, captures the rapid evolution of attitudes towards AI within a short time span. While positive perceptions and widespread adoption increased significantly, the study also reveals a persistent tension between ethical awareness and actual compliance, raising questions about institutional policies, training, and the boundaries of acceptable AI assistance in academic writing (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Krumsvik, 2024).

Finally, Di Sarno-García's paper on the role of ChatGPT in students' homework writing tasks (this issue) focuses on professional communication, analysing Spanish university students' use of ChatGPT to draft cover emails. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach with over one hundred participants and highlights both the benefits (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, organisation) and the limitations (e.g., lack of personalisation and creativity) of ChatGPT for professional genres. The emphasis on peer assessment and originality underscores the pedagogical importance of guiding students towards integrating AI support while retaining individual voice and authenticity (Barrot, 2023; Woo et al., 2024).

Taken together, these four papers illustrate the multifaceted impact of generative AI on language learning and assessment. They reveal both the opportunities for scaffolding and personalisation, and the pressing need for pedagogical, ethical, and psychological frameworks that ensure responsible integration (Zhang, Zou, & Cheng, 2023).

### **Digital Platforms and Tools for Interaction and Skill Development**

While AI has captured recent headlines, CALL continues to draw on a broader ecosystem of digital platforms that shape how learners interact, practice, and develop linguistic skills. Three contributions in this issue investigate the use of platforms such as Zoom, text-to-speech (TTS) systems, and digital tools framed by established pedagogical models.

Shamsipour and Cardoso's paper on Zoom as a platform for language learning (this issue) is theoretically grounded in Long's (1996) Interactionist Approach. By mapping Zoom's affordances -such as breakout rooms, polls, and chat functions- onto the requirements of interactionist theory (input, output, feedback, negotiation of meaning), the authors provide a systematic exploration of how videoconferencing can support L2 learning. Their analysis demonstrates that Zoom is not merely a pragmatic solution to pandemic-related constraints but a platform with pedagogical affordances that align with well-established theories of SLA (Gass & Mackey, 2006; Swain, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978).

Al-Shami and Cardoso investigate text-to-speech in high-variability phonetic training (this issue), focusing on Arabic-speaking learners of English in Kuwait. Their study compares exposure to multiple synthetic voices versus a single voice in the development of phonological awareness of past-tense allomorphy. While both groups improved significantly, the lack of difference between them suggests that even low-variability TTS input may effectively support pronunciation learning. This finding has practical implications for scalable CALL applications, especially in contexts where access to multiple native-speaker recordings may be limited (Bradlow & Bent, 2008; Lively et al., 1993).

Vančová's paper on technology use in ELT through the lenses of TAM, SAMR, and TPACK (this issue) examines Slovak in-service and pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital tools. By triangulating three influential frameworks (Davis, 1989; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Puentedura, 2006), the study offers a nuanced view of how teachers balance acceptance, pedagogical knowledge, and transformation of practice. The findings underscore the importance of professional development and training, particularly in aligning teachers' preferences for classroom management and pedagogical accuracy with learners' desire for interactive and engaging tools (Nguyen & Habók, 2024).

Together, these contributions foreground the enduring relevance of CALL research beyond the current AI moment. They highlight how videoconferencing, TTS, and multi-framework approaches continue to provide valuable insights into interaction, pronunciation, and teacher training.

### **Intercultural Competence and Global Citizenship through CALL**

The final thematic strand represented in this issue addresses the intercultural dimensions of

CALL. Fernández-Peraza, Furumura, and Maruyama's paper on UNESCO Story Circles in a virtual exchange (this issue) connects CALL to the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Barrett et al., 2018). Drawing on a case study of Costa Rican and Japanese students, the authors demonstrate how structured storytelling activities foster respect, listening, and intercultural curiosity. By embedding Story Circles within a virtual exchange, the study illustrates how CALL can go beyond linguistic objectives to cultivate democratic and intercultural competences, thereby contributing to global citizenship education (Byram, 1997; O'Dowd, 2021).

This paper serves as an important reminder that CALL is not only about technology-enhanced language practice but also about using digital affordances to foster dialogue across cultural boundaries. In the Latin American context, where issues of diversity, inclusion, and democratic participation are particularly salient, such research highlights the transformative potential of CALL in promoting values aligned with the broader educational missions of UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

### Regional Contributions and Global Significance

Although the eight papers span multiple geographical contexts -including Iran, Costa Rica, Japan, Kuwait, Slovakia, Chile, Spain, and Canada- their inclusion in the LatinCALL conference and this *CALL-EJ* issue underscores the growing role of Latin America in shaping global CALL research. The conference provided a platform for scholars from within and beyond the region to engage in dialogue, exchange perspectives, and showcase innovations that respond to both local and international challenges.

Importantly, the contributions reveal thematic convergences across regions: concerns about AI adoption are evident in both European and Latin American contexts; videoconferencing as a learning space resonates globally after the pandemic; and intercultural competence is a shared priority across continents. At the same time, the studies foreground local realities, such as pre-service teacher preparation in Chile, learners' affective barriers in Iran, or intercultural dialogue in Costa Rica. This combination of global themes and local insights exemplifies the dual mission of LatinCALL: to situate Latin American research within global debates while ensuring that local voices, contexts, and needs remain central.

### Future Directions

The contributions in this issue collectively point to several directions for future CALL research and practice:

1. **Towards responsible AI integration:** As generative AI tools become increasingly ubiquitous, research must move beyond documenting benefits and limitations towards developing pedagogical frameworks, ethical guidelines, and institutional policies that support responsible use (Zhu et al., 2023). Issues of authorship, creativity, and originality remain central.
2. **Affective and psychological dimensions of CALL:** Maleki (this issue) highlights the importance of learners' emotions and perceptions in shaping technology adoption.

Future work should more systematically address affective factors, including anxiety, trust, and motivation, as part of CALL design and implementation.

3. **Sustainability and scalability of CALL tools:** Studies on Zoom and TTS reveal the potential for scalable and flexible solutions. Research should continue to explore how such tools can be integrated sustainably across diverse educational contexts, particularly in resource-constrained environments.
4. **Teacher education and professional development:** Vančová (this issue) underscores the need for teacher training that goes beyond technical proficiency to encompass pedagogical integration and critical reflection. Preparing teachers for a rapidly evolving technological landscape remains a priority.
5. **Intercultural dialogue and democratic competences:** The work of Fernández-Peraza et al. (this issue) illustrates how CALL can foster intercultural awareness and global citizenship. Future research should expand on this agenda, particularly in regions where issues of inclusion, equity, and democracy are central to education.

## Conclusion

This special issue of *CALL-EJ* marks the beginning of a tradition: the publication of selected papers from the first LatinCALL online conference. The eight contributions demonstrate the intellectual vitality and diversity of CALL research today, addressing themes as varied as AI adoption, academic writing, pronunciation training, teacher education, and intercultural competence. Collectively, they underscore the transformative potential of CALL when grounded in rigorous research, sensitive to local contexts, and open to global collaboration.

As the CALL community moves forward, the LatinCALL initiative will undoubtedly play an increasingly important role in ensuring that Latin American voices are heard in global debates. At the same time, the research showcased here contributes to advancing CALL as a field that is at once technologically innovative, pedagogically sound, and socially responsible. We hope that this special issue will inspire further dialogue, collaboration, and critical reflection, reinforcing the commitment of CALL scholars worldwide to shaping a future of language learning that is inclusive, sustainable, and globally connected, highlighting the importance of contextualizing technological adoption within local and situated realities, valuing linguistic diversity, and addressing the social and educational inequalities that continue to shape access to digital learning opportunities across regions.

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