Transitioning to the New Normal:
Experiences From a Sino–British Institution

Gareth Richard Morris
Perse School, Suzhou, China

Jiaxin Xu
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Li Li
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7785-5339
University of Exeter, UK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter considers EAP language teachers' perceptions of the working reality English educators are faced with during the 2021-2022 academic year. It draws on experiences at a specific case study institution, namely a Sino-British one based in China. Adopting a qualitative study design and interviewing eight practitioners, the results from semi-structured interviews suggest that for EAP teachers in a time of technology-enhanced learning that a transition has occurred from pre-pandemic to today, a time in which the challenges of the pre-COVID-19 era now reside alongside the difficulties that the pandemic has presented. Some of these are global issues, such as how to integrate technology best and deal with new teaching norms and disruptions, while others may be more localised on a national and institutional level and include working around growing student numbers and expatriate departures which taken together can stretch resources. That said, technology, increased autonomy, and enhanced staff motivation (in some cases) are also positives that have been derived in some instances.

INTRODUCTION

Technology enhanced language learning has become increasingly popular (Li, 2017a), but a global pandemic necessitated the educational community to adapt to online education completely to tackle the challenges of school closure. Since early 2020, numerous studies have been carried out to investigate the effectiveness of online teaching in the COVID-19 context, as insights into educational values and pedagogies regarding online provision are important for stakeholders such as policymakers, material designers and teachers (Bernard et al., 2004). However, the majority of the studies were conducted to investigate students' perception of online learning (e.g., Hani & Saleh, 2020; Roy et al., 2020), whereas limited research was carried out to shed light on teachers' experiences (Wu et al., 2020). Zou et al. (2021) is one of the few studies that compare the experiences of students and teachers. They claim that teachers could deliver more effective online teaching and learning when they have more training, more skills, and more confidence.

This chapter adds to the limited studies by considering EAP (English for Academic Purposes) teachers' experience of shifting to online teaching at a Sino-British university in China. The significance of this study lies in two areas. First, educational communities have experienced challenges unlike anything before, and it is critical to understand teacher efficacy during the challenge. Teacher efficacy is defined as "judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). Understanding how teachers tackle challenges and how their beliefs are influenced and developed would be critical to improve teaching effectiveness. Second, addressing teachers' experiences during the pandemic enables the field to understand teacher resilience, which is vital when encountering challenges. Newman (2005) defined resilience as "the human ability to adapt in the face of tragedy, trauma, adversity, hardship, and ongoing significant life stressors" (p. 227). Focusing on teachers' experiences thus provides us with first-hand evidence of how teachers empower themselves and support each other throughout the pandemic. It is hoped that this research will offer institutions some insights into issues around online delivery so that issues that are critical to effective online learning will be addressed. The outcome of this study also has strong implications on teacher learning. As various research suggests that teachers need to be equipped with both pedagogical and technological competences in order to engage in technology enhanced learning (Li, 2017a). In addition, the outcomes might facilitate further reflective teaching among teachers.

In what follows, we will consider the higher education context that the university operates within before moving on to discuss the delivery of evolving EAP provision and the impact that COVID-19 has had at this institutional provider. We then highlight

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