An Australian Narrative Coordinating an Economic English Course During COVID–19

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A flu-like virus, COVID-19, has changed the course of tertiary education teaching and learning overnight. Universities globally, such as those in Australia, have been pushed to revise syllabi for face-to-face classroom teaching suited for online remote learning. This study adapts Connelly and Clandinin's narrative inquiry method to retrace the experience of an Economic English course coordinator's effort to quickly adapt to online education. It retells the coordinator's stories of engaging in the process under certain constraints and discusses the impact of COVID-19 in higher education. Implications and recommendations are given to conclude the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on a coordinator's experience of a postgraduate English course for economics communication purposes who transitioned it from an in-person classroom to emergency online remote teaching and learning (Bensalah, Bokhari, Commisso, & Nacer, 2000) triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. His experience converges into two themes: the experiences and actions taken to adapt to online education, and the lessons learned from the abrupt adaptation through this study's narrative inquiry. Meanwhile, the researcher joined the later part of the journey when he was recruited as the course's tutor during the second Covid-19 lockdown in late 2021. His participation in remote teaching the course eventually evolved into the current research project. The remainder introduces the course background and outline of the study.

In 2013, Alex (pseudonym) was aware that his management from the School of Economics at an Australian university had started discussing challenges that arose from an influx of international students who are speakers of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL), mostly mainland Chinese. According to the Australian government statistics on international student enrolment between 2000 and 2016, the enrollment rose from 190,000 in 2000 to a peak of around 240,000 in 2009. This figure followed by a slight drop to 200,000 in 2012 and rebounded to slightly more than 300,000 in 2016, a 33% increment (Department of Education and Training, 2018). Australia has become popular with Chinese students and is preferred to America and Britain. There are four crucial factors, including future migration opportunities after graduation, Australia's high quality of education, good reputation of institutions, and competitive lower tuition fees and cost of living, that attract Chinese students pursuing a university degree in Australia (Yang, 2007; Zhai, Gao, & Wang, 2019).

The discussions were put into action in a course proposal that the university subsequently approved. In late 2014, Alex was asked to create the economics communication course that would be offered in the first semester of 2015. One objective of the course should help address the needs of EFL/ESL overseas students. The overarching goal is to enhance all postgraduate economics students' communication capabilities. Studies found that lacking the expected or adequate English competency is the main obstacle in students' communication with lecturers in Australian universities (Ai, 2017; Banfield, 2006). Cultural factors, such as Chinese culture (Hui, 2005) and intercultural communication competency (Hong & Petraki, 2007), can also contribute to mainland students' learning difficulties in English as the medium of instructional context.

In January 2020, a mysterious new flu-liked human-to-human transmission illness was identified around late 2019 (Katella, 2021) and the first case of the

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