

Why Professional Development Is the Key to High Quality Provision in EMI Higher Education EAP in the Age of COVID–19

Gareth Richard Morris
Perse School, Suzhou, China

Ji Zhang
Perse School, Suzhou, China

Xitong Dai
Perse School, Suzhou, China

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce readers to some of the ideas behind why professional development is essential for best quality provision in EMI higher education EAP courses. The chapter begins by discussing higher education, EAP, and professional development before focusing on the role professional development plays in ensuring EAP courses are as well designed and delivered as possible. It also goes on to consider some of the challenges education providers face in ensuring that high quality PD is available to EAP teachers before considering ways in which it can be provided even when circumstances are taxing.

INTRODUCTION

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) profession of a decade ago was a very different proposition from the one of today. One reason is due to technological advances which have supported a general move towards increased distance learning opportunities and online teaching norms. Another reason relates to the upheaval the COVID-19 pandemic created which necessitated an almost immediate and very painful shift to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). Then, EAP was still primarily delivered in a traditional classroom setting with technology used as a teaching aid for projecting PowerPoint slides in a manner not too dissimilar to the way in which overhead projectors had displayed handwritten notes a decade beforehand. However, in 2022 teaching now takes place, through necessity, by a combination of online and onsite delivery methods. Staff now deliver courses from any number of locations around the world as time zones, once a serious constraint, now prove little more than an occupational inconvenience on a professional scale. The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to other industry changes, such as greater refinement and additions in the area of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Given that the potential developments of emerging industries, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), may be a disruptive force to traditional teaching approaches and employment, and with global uncertainties only increasing the complexity surrounding the working reality of an EAP teacher, many tied to COVID-19, it is evident that greater support is required. What has not changed greatly in recent years is that the early career training that many practitioners engage with often still does little to prepare future EAP teachers with the skillsets and knowledge that they need when entering the job market (See Morris, 2015). It is for reasons such as these, alongside the pivotal role that EAP can play in many educational settings, that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is so important. This is not only for practitioners, but also for ensuring that high quality pedagogic provision features in transnational and English Medium of Instruction (EMI) institutions. On that note, this paper draws on experiences and insights over the past decade from a case study Sino-Foreign institution in the east of mainland China to consider EAP, professional development and the impact of COVID-19. It assesses some of the challenges that the pandemic has presented in terms of EAP CPD, drawing on personal experiences against the backdrop of an evolving field, and also provides some suggestions for the future which should be of interest to educators, managers and policy makers.

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