

# Emergency Remote Teaching in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak: Pedagogical Adjustments of Community College ESL Lecturers in Hong Kong

<sup>1\*</sup>Wenli Wu; <sup>2</sup>Huiwen Shi

<sup>1&2</sup>*College of Professional and Continuing Education, Hong Kong Polytechnic University*

## Bio-profiles:

### <sup>1</sup>WU Wenli (Wendy)

Dr WU Wenli is currently a lecturer of bilingual communication. She received her PhD in Education from the Institute of Education, University of Warwick, England. Her current research interests include cross-cultural and intercultural communication, English for academic studies and using new technology in teaching and learning.

Email: wenli.wu@cpce-polyu.edu.hk

### <sup>2</sup>SHI Huiwen (Wen)

Dr SHI Huiwen is currently a lecturer of bilingual communication. Huiwen completed her PhD in the School of English at the University of Hong Kong. Her research on contemporary poetry won her the outstanding research student award in 2019. Her current research interests lie in contemporary poetics, life writing, service learning and English language pedagogy.

Email: huiwen.shi@cpce-polyu.edu.hk

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the education sector to explore dramatically different teaching modes. This article is a study of emergency remote teaching (ERT) in a community college in Hong Kong. It investigates the challenges that a cohort of 50 ESL lecturers encountered and the strategic responses they adopted in relation to ERT. Documents such as the college newsletter, post-teaching reports and meeting records were used to analyze the language teachers' context of adjustment, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with four participants from the cohort to explore their firsthand experiences. The analysis revealed the variety of challenges that the participants faced, including the development of technological skills, the preparation of online materials, the implementation of online assessment and marking, as well as interaction with students. In response to these challenges, the participants adopted diverse strategies to achieve pedagogical development in facilitating their teaching practices with students in synchronic online teaching. This article argues that language educators need to develop technological and online interactional competencies so that new pedagogical activities can be developed to enhance students' learning. In addition, training sessions should be provided to support their pedagogical adaptation and development of new

skills. Accordingly, it concludes that adjustment requires both individual and institutional investments.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, emergency remote teaching (ERT), ESL, pedagogical adjustment

\*Corresponding author

Dr. Wenli Wu, College of Professional and Continuing Education, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 8 Hung Lok Road, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China

## 1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, for the first time in history emergency remote teaching (ERT) has been implemented globally (Bond, 2020). ERT can be viewed as a temporary educational measure during a time of crisis before a return to normal modes, such as face-to-face, blended or hybrid teaching (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Hazaea, Bin-Hady and Toujani (2021) emphasised the *emergency* and *remote* attributes of ERT. An ‘emergency’ refers to unusual situations, such as pandemics, wars or catastrophes, while ‘remote’ denotes a distance mode of teaching (Hazaea et al., 2021). The current implementation of ERT provides both asynchronous and synchronous learning modes (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). Because it had not been anticipated and due to the circumstances of the pandemic, it involved a sudden shift from an established teaching mode to a remote one (Affouneh, Salha, & Khlaif, 2020).

Approaches to the conduct of ERT vary in practice. Firstly, teachers adopting an ERT approach can convert traditional face-to-face lectures into annotated PowerPoint presentations with a tutor’s voice-over narration available through a learning management system (LMS; see Moorhouse, 2020), or as “a three-stage lesson including pre-live-lesson task (office), live lesson (through VCS [video conferencing software]), and post-live-lesson task (on a [sic] LMS)” (Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2020, p. 2). Simply put, ERT can be conducted either synchronously with video conferencing software (VCS) such as Zoom, asynchronously with an LMS such as Moodle, or as a combination, to help students continue their learning during an extended crisis such as a pandemic. Nevertheless, as ERT is a new and sudden adaptation of modern technology to a global problem, despite sporadic evidence reported by a few pioneering studies (e.g., Cheung, 2021; Moorhouse, 2020; Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2020), no conclusive or generalizable findings on ERT can be derived from the currently available literature.

Furthermore, although ERT can be implemented in almost any subject and at any level, teaching synchronously online can be especially challenging for English language teachers because language is both the subject matter and the medium of instruction, and multimodal actions such as facial expressions and gestures operate in a very different way in ERT (Moorhouse, Li, & Walsh, 2021). Coincidentally, in the field of English language education, little if any research to date has rigorously studied how tertiary English language teachers have reacted to ERT since the first half year of 2020, and what strategic responses they have adopted in response to the pedagogical challenges they have encountered.

Different instructors conducting ERT can have different outcomes even within the same socio-cultural environment. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced schools to provide ERT to continue teaching since February 2020 (Chan, 2020), teachers in Hong Kong also experienced a social movement that resulted in temporary school closures in the last two months of 2019 (Wong & Moorhouse, 2020). The unique experiences of the 2019–2020 school year may have harmed teachers’ long-term commitment to their careers (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011) and it may have also led to negative effects on students’ well-being (Han & Yin, 2016). According to Ma’s (2017) application of Vygotsky’s social cultural theory, language is one of the most important higher-level cultural tools, serving “as a buffer between the person and the environment and acting to ‘mediate the relationship between the individual and the social-material world’” (p. 184).

Engstrom (1987) claims that the most important cognitive activity of human beings is developed through social and material development. Since English is the medium of instruction in all universities in Hong Kong, Hong Kong’s English language lecturers are key to developing tertiary students’ most fundamental medium of cognition—the English language—through interaction with students in instructional settings. The roles English teachers play during the pandemic are therefore central to students’ well-being and the successful implementation of ERT and it is essential to explore the experiences of these teachers in emergency contexts (Wong & Moorhouse, 2020).

This research addresses these issues by looking at the responses to ERT of English language lecturers at a community college in Hong Kong. We also wish to consider the potential pedagogical significance of these responses for English language education in the broader Asian context. The study thus aims to contribute to the growing line of research on ERT and to offer adjustment recommendations to ESL teachers in terms of their technological

preparation and pedagogical adaptation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Adjustment**

Many scholars have provided definitions of *adjustment*. For example, French, Rodgers and Cobb (1974) suggest that adjustment involves a working process between a person and an environment to achieve an acceptable fit. Another concept put forward by Searle and Ward (1990) is that there are two dimensions of adjustment. One is the psychological dimension, which refers to the psychological and emotional well-being of an individual (Ward & Kennedy, 1994); the other is the socio-cultural dimension, which describes how well an individual can “fit in” and negotiate the interactive aspects of a new culture, creating a feeling of comfort and being at ease. These two dimensions of adjustment have been widely accepted by researchers (e.g., Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006). Alongside these views, Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga and Szapocznik (2010) suggest that psychological adaptation could include various aspects, such as life satisfaction, reduced anxiety and depression, while sociocultural accommodation could include academic achievement, career success, social skills and so on. More recently, Schwartz et al. (2010) propose a third dimension in adjustment, which is health related. It includes not only low levels of somatic symptoms, such as headaches, but also high levels of physical activity and healthy eating. Given the current pandemic situation, this health dimension becomes even more important and relevant as a concern in ERT. The urgent adaptation to remote teaching is aimed at preventing a public health crisis, and rightly so. However, if such adaptation is not done properly, new health issues could arise because of ill-adjustment.

Adjustment involves several procedures. According to Britannica Academic (2020), there are four parts in the accommodating process: “a) a need or motive to change; b) the nonfulfillment of this need; c) activities or behaviours which are accompanied by problem solving; d) a response which removes or reduces the initial stimulus” (para. 2). This definition leads to a clear understanding of the evolution of each adjustment stage. Anderson (1994) echoes this in his view that modification is a process of overcoming and solving problems in a new situation. For people who want to shorten the time it takes to reach a final adaptation stage, Lynch (1992) suggests that risk-taking, a flexible mind, and a willingness to change oneself are essential psychological preparations or “adjustment engines”.

## **2.2. Pedagogical Adjustment**

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed education, as most universities and schools around the world have had to urgently adapt to online teaching to prevent the further spread of the virus (Tam & El-Azar, 2020). Like colleagues in other disciplines, English language teachers also need to find appropriate modes of teaching and interacting with students (Moorhouse et al., 2021).

Pedagogical adjustment is beneficial for students in ensuring that individuals who go through schools can achieve their best efforts towards their goals (Cooper, 1958). It is suggested that a change of curriculum, instruction and environment are three dimensions of adjustment in teaching, learning and assessment (NSW Department of Education, 2021). Curriculum adjustment refers to changes in the amount of content in a lesson or time allowance that students are given to complete the tasks. Instructional adjustment includes altering the ways that lessons are delivered. To be specific, it comprises using alternative ways to deliver teaching and learning materials, with the aims of arousing students' motivation to engage with skills (such as guided practice), providing additional modelling and offering an increased level of prompting. The environment adjustment dimension includes peer assistance, physical access needs, and so on (NSW Department of Education, 2021).

In line with pedagogical adjustments, Moorhouse et al. (2021) identified classroom interactional competence (CIC) as important in both synchronous online lessons (SOLs) and face-to-face language classrooms. To interact with students effectively in SOLs, ESL teachers need three key competencies: technological, online management and online teacher interactional (Moorhouse et al., 2021). These three key competencies are summarized briefly below.

### ***2.2.1. Technological Competencies***

Technological competencies include the utilization of various VCSs to increase interaction opportunities in SOLs. Asynchronous platforms, such as WeChat and WhatsApp, can be employed in sequence or in parallel with a VCS to increase interaction. In addition, various features of VCS platforms, such as annotation, written chat and “breakout rooms”, provide different interaction modes for learners (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020), so teachers are expected to employ them in SOLs. Further, competent language teachers can also combine a VCS with other tools, such as game-based platforms (e.g., Kahoot!) and collaborative software (e.g.,

Google Docs), to ensure that learning is conducted in an appropriate and successful manner.

### ***2.2.2. Online Management Competencies***

According to Moorhouse et al. (2021), specific capabilities, such as designing language lessons and materials, can help educators tailor the context for “in-class” and “out-of-class” times, in order to build rapport with and between learners who are located in different physical locations. Important strategies include setting context-specific routines and expectations, as well as accepting the differences between online and physical classrooms.

### ***2.2.3. Online Teacher Interactional Competencies***

Online teacher interactional competencies involve using multiple modes of communication in a VCS and other platforms, developing specific questioning techniques and providing longer wait times when eliciting questions (Moorhouse et al., 2021). Another strategy for increasing online interaction is to provide students with time to prepare replies in small groups, so that they can then present their answers to the whole class.

## **2.3. Challenges for ESL Teachers in ERT**

ERT offers unique challenges for teachers who need to adapt rapidly to a drastically different learning and teaching environment (Xie, Heddy, & Vongkulluksn, 2019). As such, there is an increasing need for research which focuses on the pedagogical challenges these teachers are experiencing, as well as how they cope with online teaching and management (Moorhouse, 2020).

Since the instructional support provided in ERT must be both reliable and easy to create during a crisis or emergency (Hodges et al., 2020), teaching synchronously online in ERT is particularly challenging to tertiary English language teachers, because interaction, which is of utmost importance in language acquisition, is not easy to facilitate in ERT (Huang, Shi, & Yang, 2020). Further, Moorhouse et al. (2021) point out that in ERT, teachers cannot “see” students because a VCS may limit the number of participants that can be viewed at one time and students may not want to turn on their cameras. As a result, interaction with students is less rich because paralinguistic features are lost (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions and hand gestures which signal turn-taking in class).

In addition to interaction, learner engagement is another challenge for language

teachers in ERT. In SOLs, teachers cannot monitor students directly; moreover, environmental distractions and technical issues make it harder for students to stay engaged (Peachey, 2017). In a survey of students' insights into online teaching in a university in China, Sun, Tang and Zuo (2020) found that students demonstrated low focus and restraint, which implied a need to improve the students' self-management skills and concentration levels. Moorhouse (2020) also showed that SOLs are more teacher-centred than F2F classes, and that shorter student responses and longer silences are common during group and whole-class discussions.

Taken together, the literature confirms that changes during the COVID-19 pandemic have created obstacles for English language teachers but also that adjustment is crucial to their survival and further development. So far, however, little research has investigated the emergency work adjustment triggered by the pandemic in the context of post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong (Cheung, 2021). Through studying how a group of English language lecturers adjusted their teaching successfully, we aim to deduce meaningful patterns and offer constructive advice to help the larger ESL teacher community adapt to crisis-prompted challenges smoothly in the future.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

- RQ1.** What pedagogical challenges did ESL lecturers have to face from January to June 2020 in their ERT in Hong Kong?
- RQ2.** What strategic responses did ESL lecturers adopt in response to the pedagogical challenges they encountered?

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the challenges and strategic reactions of a sample of lecturers who were teaching English as a second language in a community college in Hong Kong (HK) during the 2019–2020 academic year. A case study approach was adopted because we aimed to develop an in-depth description and analysis of one case, namely, teachers' adaptation experiences in the year 2020 (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

#### **3.1. Research Context and Participants**

The study took place in a community college in Hong Kong, a former British colony in which

English is learned as a second language<sup>4</sup>, because students have many communicative uses for the language outside the classroom (Wilkins, 1999). The college is a non-profit-making tertiary institution that offers sub-degrees to high school graduates. Most students in the college are secondary school leavers wishing to pursue bachelor's degree studies but who are not yet able to obtain a place due to unsatisfactory scores in the public university entrance examinations (Lo & Ip, 2021). Students at the college are academically-oriented because GPA is the most important criterion for their degree transferal (Lo & Ip, 2021). In the past three years, the matriculation rate of this college has been over 80%, a very high university admission rate compared to its local competitors. In 2020, the matriculation rate was 90.05%, which was the highest since the institution's establishment (Cheng, 2021. p. 1).

In 2020, there were 50 full-time English lecturers who taught mainly academic English to year-one sub-degree students (K. Chow, personal communication, September 7, 2020). All the lecturers were ethnic Chinese who had already received professional teacher training when they took up their teaching posts. All the academic English subject teams shared the same objective: to prepare students for successful academic studies in an English-medium post-secondary school learning environment (W. Tsang, personal communication, February 10, 2021). Due to the pandemic, an announcement of the suspension of face-to-face (F2F) teaching was made in mid-January 2020; two weeks later, the college enacted ERT to help prevent the spread of the virus while allowing students to continue their studies.

The criteria for recruiting participants for this study were that they were experienced frontline teachers who had at least 10 years of teaching experience and were popular among students. The term "popular" was operationally defined to mean the lecturer had secured an overall rating of four out of five or above consistently in the student feedback questionnaire (SFQ) administered by the college at the end of every semester. The participant selection criteria were set in this way because normally popular teachers have more willingness to make changes to cater to their students' needs, since better psychological preparation has been shown to have a positive association with behavioural adaptability (Yu, 2021). It was a homogeneous group because all our target participants were motivated to adjust. Invitations were sent to 10

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<sup>4</sup> English in Hong Kong is sometimes regarded as a 'foreign language' and sometimes as a 'second language' as speakers vary in their degree of usage and competence. This article uses "English as a second language" not only for consistency's sake but also because English is the second language for these lecturers we interviewed.



sought-after lecturers via email, and two male and two female teachers agreed to participate voluntarily in this research. Consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted.

### 3.2. Data Collection

We collected data<sup>2</sup> by accessing documents and conducting individual interviews, as described below.

*Documents.* We gathered seven emails from college senior management, 27 post-teaching reports from the academic English teams, six college newsletters, about ten college internal emails, two meeting memos and students' assessment results from the English teams. Three prompts were used to guide our document selection:

- (1) What reactions had the college and government shown towards ERT?
- (2) At the college, what were the English language lecturers' communication and learning experiences during the ERT?
- (3) What had the English lecturers done when facing difficulties during the ERT? These documents were valuable sources of information to enable the researchers to understand the core phenomenon in the qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2012). All the documents were identified by a unique code (e.g., "Email/C/020620" meant the item was an email from college senior management sent on 6 February 2020).

*Interviews.* Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with the four participants as part of the investigation. As our participants were experienced English lecturers who were popular in the college, they were comfortable talking with us. The interviews allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of our participants' experiences and perceptions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). A semi-structured interview form was used to guide the interviews. It covered the following main themes: adjustment towards class suspension, perceptions of the pandemic, strategies adopted, difficulties, and successful examples. Interview questions were developed by the researchers based on the literature in the field (e.g., Cohen et al., 2011) and were reviewed by an expert who had rich experience in using technology in ESL. We then ran a pilot study with a colleague who had also experienced ERT in another college. Explanations for each item were checked, suggestions for wording were induced, and the interview questions were

revised accordingly.

Each interview lasted around 90 minutes and was conducted and recorded using Teams (VCS). The interviews were conducted mainly in Cantonese, with English as a supplementary language to make sure interviewees could express their truthful feelings in the language in which they felt most comfortable.

<sup>2</sup>The interview data is not published here due to the word limit. The authors are willing to share the English transcription privately upon request.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

All the interviews were transcribed into English by our research assistant, who holds a doctoral degree in English.

The study adopted a thematic analysis, as we were looking for themes in the data. Both the interview and document data were hand coded; the steps commonly used in analysing qualitative data were then applied (Creswell, 2012). We approached the data without prior codes but were guided by the interview questions. When we read the interview transcripts, we wrote notes in the margins. These notes recorded our first impressions, such as “lecturers were given three days to learn VCS”. Initially, we created 21 codes (which were individually numbered); after revisions, we reduced the number of codes to five. With the final list, we coded the interviews by assigning information using the respective codes. The coded information from each interview was organized into tables. We then looked for themes in the data.

To ensure the accuracy of the data analysis, as recommended by Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell and Walter (2016), all the interview transcripts were sent back to the participants to see whether they wanted to correct, add or delete any of the information; the participants were also able to examine the findings and suggest corrections. One participant requested omitting some personal information from the transcript and findings.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that Hong Kong ESL lecturers experienced various challenges during the ERT. The challenges not only involve a range of problems that occurred at the initial stage of the ERT but also relate to interaction with the students and online marking. The experiential accounts also demonstrated that all the participants adopted different strategic

responses to various challenges in order to help students achieve satisfactory learning outcomes. The results are presented in accordance with the research questions.

**RQ1. What pedagogical challenges did ESL lecturers have to face from January to June 2020 in their ERT in HK?**

Obstacles relating to the lecturer's technology competency and the re-design of teaching materials for online teaching were found at the preparation stage of the ERT. As time went by, the major challenges became interactions with students, setting assessments and online marking.

***Technological Competency***

Shortly after the institution announced the policy that all teaching was to be conducted online, all the lecturers actively attended training sessions for synchronous and asynchronous online teaching and started to prepare for their online teaching. As it was necessary to switch to synchronous online teaching within a few days, teachers spent a large amount of time learning how to use communication tools (e.g., Microsoft Teams and Zoom) and other available software to meet the new teaching demands. This was illustrated by the following comment:

*I didn't know how to use Teams. In just a few days, we downloaded the stuff from the IT Unit website, and some colleagues tried the new tools. And then step by step with the instruction from the IT colleagues and instructors, I tried the online mode. I am not technologically savvy, and I was not very confident in controlling the new apps, the internet, the teaching rhythm, and even some emergent classroom incidents. (Sophia, pseudonym)*

As indicated by Sophia's interview excerpt, the lecturers were pushed to learn different software in a short time because they had no other choice. Students were informed of the forthcoming synchronous online teaching, and it seemed that most of Sophia's colleagues were able to learn to use the software quickly, so she had to spend days and nights learning in order to keep up with the others. All four of the interviewees confirmed that having a supportive learning community was crucial for them in learning the new technologies in a short period of time. This was consistent with findings from Siripol and Wilang's (2021) research, indicating that teachers in Thailand had to deal with many difficulties in adapting to a new digital era, such as managing online platforms. In a similar way, Al-Khresheh (2021) identified that

teachers need special skills, such as becoming familiar with new technology, in order to conduct effective ELF teaching during the pandemic. With the help of other colleagues and IT trainers in the college, Sophia learned the necessary skills within days. The data from internal emails and post-teaching reports of this college showed that all the lecturers from the academic English teams were able to use synchronous online teaching in the first week of the new online teaching mode. In this case, the training provided by the college played a crucial role as lecturers had to master specific professional skills to implement the ERT (Amarullah & Imaniah, 2020; Moorhouse et al., 2021). A lack of training could demotivate educators, as Siripol and Wilang (2021) reported in their research.

Compared with most other tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, the community college that was the focus of our investigation reacted to the need for online learning during the pandemic in a very proactive way, which directly affected the teachers' levels of pedagogical adjustment. This college began delivering Teams software lessons in the middle of February 2020, which was much earlier than most schools and tertiary institutions in Hong Kong (see Moorhouse, 2020; Pao, 2020). In addition, the college provided IT training sessions and equipment loan schemes to teaching staff during the preparation week. As the teaching staff observed that the college's response to the crisis was swift and timely, they also felt a need to adjust accordingly. This was quite unlike a case reported by Cheung (2021) in which one school's lackadaisical approach to e-learning contributed to teachers' apathy.

### ***Preparing Online Course Materials***

At the preparation stage of ERT, adapting teaching materials specifically for an online mode was another challenge that the teachers had to face. Because it was ERT, the college had announced that all the course materials should remain the same, in the hope that the pandemic would end soon, and all the courses would be able to go back to normal. Nevertheless, as experienced frontline teachers, due to the drastic change all the interview participants felt a need to change the ways in which they delivered their teaching materials. This was illustrated by the following comment:

*Teaching materials that I used for online teaching needed to be refined. For example, the PowerPoint presentations (PPTs) for students each week had to be complemented with some self-study elements, because some students might not be in HK and some were not fully online during lessons. Also, we had to provide PPTs with embedded voice-overs (Paul, pseudonym).*

This interview excerpt illustrates that teacher (at least the popular ones) were willing to adopt course materials that were desirable for ERT, though Egbert (2020) has claimed that during ERT, it was understandable if language teachers, in the short term, do not worry about how well the content is designed but focus just on providing access to it.

If they cared for students' learning outcomes, however, the teachers put effort into changing the course materials and spent much time on the adaption of materials. Though Paul was highly motivated to make changes and did not use any negative words such as "difficult" or "challenge" in the interview, he also agreed that his eyesight was impaired due to the extended online activities. This was in line with Alolaywi's (2021) study that explored English as a lingua franca (ELF) learners' perception towards online learning during the crisis and in which it was reported that excessive screen time resulted in eyesight problems.

When preparing online course materials, the teachers' major concern was time because they were given only a few days to learn the VCS, as well as adapting the PPTs with embedded voice-overs. As Sophia said, "*During the initial few days, I tried and tried without sleep*". Other interview participants also indicated the same issue with dealing with time constraints.

### ***Online Assessment and Online Marking***

During the ERT, evaluating the students' performance fairly raised another issue, namely: designing online tests and marking scripts online. This was illustrated by the following comments:

*Designing online tests, which had to be changed to open-ended questions, as those "all or none" questions are not appropriate when testing online (Paul).*

*When I set questions on my part, which was about grammar, I found it was hard to make them into open-ended questions (Sophia).*

*My teammates and I thought about how to do the online marking. "Using Apple pencil, printing for marking, or using the rubrics on Moodle?" I worked with IT staff, and my partner worked on the assignment. We didn't have enough sleep (Alice, pseudonym).*

From these three excerpts, we can see that the lecturers found it challenging to design the test questions and to grade students' test scripts, due to the limitations of online assessment and

their lack of experience. Sophia, for instance, stressed the obstacles to assessing students' grammar competences in the design of open-ended questions, as she had never had this experience, and there were no references to consult. Similarly, Al-Khresheh (2021) also reported that due to students' unethical behaviour during assessments, teachers found it hard to evaluate students' learning fairly during the pandemic. At this stage, again, one of the issues that all the interviewees reported was not enough sleep.

### ***Interaction with Students***

Between March and April 2020, when the teachers had become familiar with the different functions of Teams, the coding of all the interviews showed that interaction with students was the biggest challenge. This challenge arose due to the students' unwillingness to switch on their webcams and microphones. This was illustrated by the following comment:

*The classroom interaction, which I am used to, is hard to achieve in the online mode. I cannot see students' faces. Yet, switching on the camera all the time seems not possible for students. Also, in the F2F mode, I would walk around, but I can't do it while using Teams. (Terry, pseudonym)*

This interview excerpt demonstrates that the teachers felt that when teaching online, they lost normal interaction with students. This finding was consistent with the results of Rehn, Maor and McConney (2018), who reported that in the absence of physical proximity, facilitating interactions with students through a screen can be demanding.

### **RQ2. What strategic responses did ESL lecturers adopt in response to the pedagogical challenges they encountered?**

In this study, all the lecturers were able to make swift pedagogical adjustments because of their passion for good teaching, their commitment to self-learning and a very supportive learning environment. This was illustrated by the following comment:

*I learned and explored via clips of YouTube, and I found a lot of relevant clips, which I needed, such as how to use Kahoot. What is more important is it is only an idea when you learn via YouTube clips—it is just the first step of basic learning, but you have to practice and exchange experiences with others. That's why peer support is essential. (Sophia)*

Sophia's commentary shows a common strategy that all four lecturers employed: watching tutorials on YouTube to discover new teaching tools and to facilitate better online teaching. This puts the emphasis on personal dedication and commitment. It should be added that all the interviewees were full-time lecturers, so they also had pressure from the college management and their students. Although such pressure was not formally verbalized, the interviewees felt compelled to achieve excellence due to high expectations from different parties.

The interview excerpt from Sophia also stressed another strategy that was adopted by all interviewees: learning the norms of work adjustment and receiving emotional support by embracing a community. The department of all of these interviewees offered training sessions and sharing sessions; colleagues exchanged ideas and offered mutual support to those who worked on the same team. Such a supportive community contributes greatly to the interviewees' completion of their tasks. Therefore, we argue that actively joining a supportive community is an important strategy in the adjustment process, as it is vital to life satisfaction and psychological well-being. The supportive community that Sophia and her colleagues embraced can be seen as a type of *community of practice* because the members joined in common activities, and they learned through mutual engagement in the activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

## **5. Limitations and Recommendations**

It must be said that this study was conducted only with four "popular" ESL lecturers in one college and that because of this limited sample, the findings cannot be over-generalized. Rather, the major strengths of this research are its scope and the findings on strategic responses in relation to ERT. With the virus still spreading globally at the time of writing, we hope that more training will be provided to frontline English lecturers, so that they can have better synchronous engagement with their students. In addition, a variety of teaching modes, such as adopting flipped learning plus online consultations, could be feasible in the event of crises or emergencies. Facilitating online assessment and online marking are other areas that need further investigation.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has investigated a sample of HK ESL lecturers' strategic responses to pedagogical challenges during the ERT from January to June 2020. The analysis of interview data and documents suggests that ESL teachers encountered diverse challenges and adopted different strategies to deal with these challenges in order to help their students to adapt and learn during the pandemic. Of paramount importance in this process of facilitating successful pedagogical

adjustment were willingness to change and a supportive working environment.

While this study provides merely a glimpse into ESL teachers' emergency adjustment experiences, further research could involve a longitudinal study to explore ESL lecturers' strategic responses over time, especially with regard to ways of enhancing students' online engagement. This would provide a fuller picture of the adaptation process of ESL lecturers and help future cohorts in adapting to synchronous online teaching in different educational environments.

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## Appendix

Emergency remote teaching interview codes

	Sophia (pseudonym)	Paul (pseudonym)	Terry (pseudonym)	Alice (pseudonym)
1. first reaction				
2. feeling of class suspension				
3. adjustment				

toward class suspension				
4. motivation of adjustment				
5. personal development during pandemic				
6. perception of changing social context				
7. feeling toward ERT				
8. adjustment of teaching design				
9. technical preparation in ERT				
10. strategies adopted				
11. difficulties and success				
12. health concern				
13. communication with colleagues				
14. supportive community				
15. other comments				
16. creating a supportive community				
17. other information				
18. suggestion for institution				
19. advice for students				
20. suggestions for colleagues				
21. further adjustment				