COVID-19 Changes Teaching Practices: An Autoethnographic Account of a Japanese EFL Teacher

Tomoko Hashimoto

Meiji University, Global Japanese Studies

Bio-profile:

Tomoko Hashimoto is a Ph.D. student at Meiji University in Tokyo and is a part-time EFL university teacher in Japan. She has a Master's degree in Global Japanese Studies as well as in International Education. She believes in the importance of linking theory to practice and is especially interested in the psychological aspects of language learning and cooperative learning of all ages. She can be reached at hondat1.th@gmail.com

Abstract

COVID-19 has affected university educators on a global scale, and Japan is not an exception. Many EFL educators, including myself, began the academic year with much uncertainty as to how things would unfold. And, like many other EFL teachers in Japan, my spring semester classes were taught fully online. This study intends to illustrate the experience of a Japanese EFL university teacher amid COVID-19. It portrays how I initially changed my teaching practices to cope with the difficult situation but ended the semester with an increased feeling of competence as an educator. This experience is described autoethnographically in a three-part journey: *Sho, chiku, bai*. As Chang (2008) points out, one danger in autoethnography is excessive focus on the self. In order to avoid this, artifacts and comments of the students whom I taught were used for analysis in addition to autoethnographic reflections. Results pointed to three obstacles that I faced. Rewriting the course syllabus, getting students accustomed to information technology and altering my teaching practices. However, by the end of the semester students appeared to have developed close interpersonal relationships amongst their peers, improved IT literacy, and increased their motivation to study English. These positive results boosted my feeling of efficacy as an educator. Findings imply that there may be ways to change this tough COVID-19 situation into an opportunity to grow as a teacher. The research may provide instructional ideas that could possibly be implemented into other Asian EFL educators' classrooms.

Key words: COVID-19, Japanese university EFL teacher, teaching practices

* Corresponding author

Tomoko Hashimoto, Graduate School of Global Japanese Studies, Meiji University, 4-21-1 Nakano, Nakano-ku, Tokyo, 164-8525, Japan

1. Introduction

The spread of the pandemic has changed what was considered to be "normal" on a global scale in various industries including education. In Japan, a state of emergency was declared in some parts of the country as COVID-19 spread at alarming rates in urban areas. This measure was enacted until May in Tokyo making schools delay the start of their academic year which usually starts in April. A national survey of higher educational institutions conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) revealed that as of May 20, (MEXT, 2020b) 90% of universities and technical colleges were delivering online classes. With this change, lecturers were forced to alter their method of delivery, rewrite their syllabus, and learn new computer systems. This study aims to investigate the process in which, I, a Japanese university EFL teacher in Tokyo, navigated through this dark tunnel caused by the pandemic. Using an autoethnographic approach, this study illustrates how I initially started the academic year doubtful and uncertain. It also portrays how I maneuvered through the spring semester, ending it somewhat unexpectedly with a sense of accomplishment and competence as a teacher. The pronoun "I" will be used to refer to myself throughout the paper. To avoid excessive focus on the self (Chang, 2008), artifacts (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) and student comments were used to recall the emotional journey I went through. The study offers insights into possible EFL classroom practices to cope with the challenges introduced by COVID-19.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teaching and learning amid COVID-19 in Asia

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020), it appears much research has been conducted in this area (i.e. Alaghbary, 2021; Khan & Hameed, 2021). Roughly speaking, these studies may be categorized into three according to its area of focus: teachers' experiences (i.e. Nugroho, Ilmiani, & Rekha, 2020; Yi & Jang, 2020), students' experiences (i.e. John, 2021; Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020), and teachers' and students' experiences (i.e. Mishra, Gupta, & Shree, 2020).

Out of studies that focus on teachers' experiences, I will introduce two which explore EFL teachers' experiences in Asia. The first is a research conducted by Nugroho et al. (2020)

and the other is an investigation by Yi and Jang (2020). Nugroho et al. (2020) probed the difficulties and insights of teaching online during COVID-19. They researched 17 Indonesian EFL university teachers using semi-structured interviews and self-written reflections. Results showed that the challenges experienced were: (a) deprivation of an e-learning platform, (b) time required to create online learning materials, (c) internet connection problems and limited quota, (d) lack of motivation and engagement of the students, and (e) required knowledge of digital technology. Some insights were suggested as well. These concerned the need for (a) financial investment by universities to build an e-learning platform and improve information and communication technology (ICT), (b) teachers to design modules which can continue to be used after COVID-19, (c) teachers to improve their teaching methods by creating lessons focused on student-centered learning, and (d) universities to offer regular professional development courses.

The second study which was conducted on EFL teachers is by Yi and Jang (2020). They explored two elementary school teachers' experiences in South Korea. The two teachers cotaught and had conducted remote teaching amid the COVID-19 breakout. They provided one to two video clips per week for their Grade 3 to 4 students to watch. Yi and Jang (2020) describe the practice and pedagogy of the teachers and conclude that remote teaching seems to make teachers reconsider their former teaching practices. Findings recommended that remote teaching allows teachers to (a) consider deliberate and effective use of their second languages, (b) negotiate more in order to develop the lesson plans and (c) take on new responsibilities as a teacher (i.e. making videos).

Results from Nugroho et al. (2020) and Yi and Jang (2020)'s analysis of Asian EFL teachers' experiences during COVID-19 provide noteworthy suggestions to educators. However, they do not fully illustrate voices of the teacher as an insider. One way to express teachers' inner voices is by using autoethnography. Autoethnography is an approach to research that construes personal experiences and tries to understand this in relation to society and culture (Ellis et al., 2011). In autoethnography, the researcher is an insider who tries to analyze how his or her personal experience contributes to understanding an environment or a particular situation (Chang, 2008; Yazan, Canagarajah, & Jain, 2020). In the next section, I will introduce autoethnographic research which reports personal experiences during COVID-19.

2.2. COVID-19 research conducted using autoethnography

A quick search on Google scholar using the key words "autoethnography" and "COVID-19"

reveal more than 3600 entries (as of May 18, 2021). This shows how much attention autoethnography is receiving as a method to report individuals' experiences during the pandemic. Much of the research in autoethnography appears to use collaborative autoethnography. In collaborative autoethnography, data are gathered from multiple sources (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). An example of a research conducted using collaborative autoethnography is one by Peters et al. (2020). They collected 15 autoethnographical texts of students at a university in Beijing and investigated how students who were connected virtually but apart from one another physically coped during the peak of the pandemic. The study provides accounts of the feelings and realities that students experienced and illustrates how they wrestled with the unexpected situation (Peters et al., 2020). Wilson et al. (2020) conducted another study which is smaller in scale. They studied four university students (from Australia and Singapore) individually and asked them to reflect on their experiences during COVID-19. Analysis of data suggested that the students appeared to find it difficult to build social connections and felt detached from their experiences.

Collaborative autoethnography is an effective method to provide multiple perspectives of a phenomena (Roy & Uekusa, 2020). However, autoethnography presented through the lens of a single individual may also be worthwhile as social context can be explored in more detail. An example of an autoethnography written by an Asian teacher on her account of teaching during the pandemic is one by Kim (2020). Kim (2020) does not explicitly state that she is conducting autoethnography. However, her account appears to be presented autoethnographically. In her study, she describes how she redesigned her preservice teacher education course in early childhood education, giving the students opportunities to teach children online in response to the pandemic. She describes her experience in three phases: planning, implementing, and reflecting. In addition to her autoethnography, she addresses preservice teachers' voices by including some of their written comments. Results suggested the importance of providing preservice teachers with the skills and opportunities to teach online.

Kim (2020)'s study contributes to a better understanding of an Asian university teacher's experience during COVID-19 and the process in which a teacher changed her teaching style under the unexpected circumstances. However, it is not in an EFL context nor is she situated in Asia. Furthermore, university policies during COVID-19 are not explicitly explained, making it somewhat difficult to understand the broader social context she was in. However, learners and contexts should not be treated as separate entities (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015). Therefore, the current study aims to provide insight into these domains by using an autoethnographic approach to elucidate an EFL university teacher's experience in

Japan during COVID-19 while not losing sight of its relation to the wider social environment.

3. Methodology

As described before, the research design employed for this study is autoethnography. According to Poulos (2021), autoethnography concerns "an observational data-driven phenomenological method of narrative research and writing that aims to offer tales of human social and cultural life that are compelling, striking, and evocative (showing or bringing forth strong images, memories, or feelings)" (p. 5). The methodology taken for this study is explained in the sections below. First, information of participants, duration, and data collection are provided. Next, data analysis and data presentation are described.

3.1. Participants

The participant of this study was a part-time Japanese EFL university teacher who teaches first-year EFL university students who major in early childhood education.

3.2. Duration

The duration of the autoethnographic account was spring semester of 2020. Spring semester for universities in Japan is usually from April to July. However, because of the pandemic, this was from May to August at the university where I taught at for AY2020.

3.3. Data collection

This study collected three forms of data: a) autoethnographic reflections, b) artifacts (in the form of emails and reflective journal entries and c) student comments (through written student accounts at the end of the semester). The first form of data were autoethnographic reflections. They contain intuitive reflective responses, which are said to ultimately lead to self-investigation and self-awareness (Cunliffe, 2016). These were written after the end of the spring semester as accounts looking back on my experiences. The second form of data were artifacts. Because autoethnography sees the individual as situated within a society, I tried to include a thick description of culture (Geertz, 1973) to increase understanding of the social context. This, in part, was done by analyzing emails sent to and from university administrators where I worked at, and reflective journal entries which were kept during spring semester 2020. Reflective journal entries were referred to in order to accurately retrieve emotions I was having at the time. The third form of data were student comments. At the end of the spring semester, students were asked to write about the following: How was your EFL course this semester?

Students typed this on their electronic devices and submitted this online. To maintain authenticity, students were told they could write in a language of their choice. All comments were downloaded in an excel file and reorganized with the student comment written next to the corresponding student's number who had written the comment. As student comments were originally written in Japanese, I translated them into English, which was double checked by a Japanese-English bilingual. Data gathering of the autoethnographic reflections were assisted by artifacts and student comments.

3.4. Data analysis

Data were investigated analytically. Ellis et al. (2011) recommends that autoethnographers recognize and write in a way that personal experiences illuminate cultural experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). This mindset was taken heed of when analyzing data for the current study. Emails were read and reread in chronological order of events as it was important to link this to government announcements regarding COVID-19. This was examined alongside the journal entries and student comments to see what kind of correlation between data could be seen. For example, in analyzing an email from university administrators, the kind of announcement made by the government before the email was received was searched, and journal entries were investigated. The journal entries reflected my teaching practice, and responses to this could be examined in student comments. The autoethnographic reflections sought to collectively describe the phenomena by analyzing the elements mentioned above comprehensively.

3.5. Data presentation

Results of the study will be presented in three phases: *sho, chiku, bai.* This is similar to Kim's (2020) approach. In reading Kim's (2020) journey, the three-phase composition made it easy to relate to her experience. It was believed that incorporating a similar approach would organize accounts in a clear and concise way.

The origin of *sho, chiku, bai* is said to be the Chinese phrase *saikansanyu,* meaning the three friends of winter. The Japanese words mean pine (*sho*), bamboo (*chiku*), and plum (*bai*). These three plants are evergreen and sprout beautiful leaves and flowers even during the harsh winter. They are strong enough to withstand the cold, and for this reason, represent rich vitality (Sho-chiku-bai, n,d,). The plants became a symbol of perpetual youth and longevity (*furouchouju)*, starting from the old to the new eras in Japan: *sho,* during the Heian Period, *chiku* in the Muromachi Period, and *bai* amid the Edo Period. Furthermore, in Japan, they are used to represent three tiers. *Sho* is the lowest tier, *chiku* is the middle tier, and *bai* is the highest

tier. It was believed that using these words would illustrate phases in my emotional journey of teaching during the pandemic. The situation brought on by COVID-19 had many challenges and obstacles, similar to a harsh winter. I started from a state of much fear and anxiety, which gradually started to ease as the academic year unfolded. A brief summary of the three phases is as follows. In the first phase, *sho*, it was announced that classes would be conducted fully online in the spring semester by university administrators. In this phase, I rewrote my syllabus to reflect the altered method of delivery. In the second phase, *chiku,* I started to teach students with uncertainty. In the third and final phase, *bai*, I began to feel more relaxed and in control of my new teaching practices. The next section provides a thicker description of each phase.

4. Results and Discussion

Sho

April in Japan is usually filled with joyful events: Entrance ceremony for schools and companies, and the cherry blossom season. Moreover, spring 2020 was supposed to be special. Tokyo was expected to be preparing for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. However, following the spread of COVID-19 everything was halted unexpectedly. Former Prime Minister Abe announced a state of emergency and requested that commencement of schools in some areas of Japan be delayed. As a part-time Japanese teacher who teaches EFL to first-year university students, I had gotten an e-mail from my employer at the beginning of March. The e-mail was to inform me that classes would start after "Golden Week," a period including four national holidays from April 29 to early May in Japan. Several days after receiving this e-mail, I attended an online meeting in which the Dean announced that all classes for the spring semester would be held online. It was explained that teachers should educate themselves regarding free web services. We were provided with a webpage link that explained how to use Google Classroom but without any further assistance. As many universities were taking similar measures I was not surprised. However, I was concerned. With this announcement, my chaotic semester began. It appeared that I had three main obstacles: (a) rewriting the course syllabus, (b) getting my students accustomed to internet technology (IT), and (c) changing my teaching practices.

Obstacle #1: rewriting the course syllabus

The first obstacle concerned the course syllabus. It was announced that all teachers were required to submit a new syllabus without changing the required textbooks indicated on the already submitted syllabus made before the pandemic. The rationale was that students had

already purchased textbooks prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. The timeframe given to teachers was 2 weeks. According to Murphy (2018), a syllabus can be a simple reminder of things to do. However, a well-written one "could provide a doorway into the pedagogical beliefs of the teacher" (Murphy, 2018, p. 1). The new syllabus had to be written for a real-time online class (real-time online class refers to online lessons conducted using a platform such as Zoom, where students and teachers attend at the same time). Moreover, continuous wireless connection for students was to be made as short as possible. Not the usual 90 minutes per lesson. This was because some of my Japanese students had wireless connection contracts which limited the amount of data transmission they could have. Although the mega telecommunications companies made 50 gigabytes in connection fees free for smart phone users up to 25 years of age ("Japanese telcos", 2020), certain conditions applied making this system inapplicable to particular students. Hence, the university suggested connecting real-time the first and last 20 minutes of class. With a completely new method and style of delivery, 2 weeks seemed too short to create a well-thought-out syllabus. Moreover, according to Nakata (2006), "there is a general consensus that the educational system has resulted in Japanese learners with weak English communication ability and low motivation to learn the language" (p. 166). Thus, I needed to figure out how to provide an online environment where my students could improve their communication skills and become motivated to study English.

To solve these problems, the question I asked myself was: What are the necessary English skills for my EFL students? I thought of the four skills in English, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Reading and writing skills are undoubtedly important. However, I concluded that for my students, strengthening their speaking and listening skills may be more useful to them as pre-service trainee early childhood educators. Therefore, I decided to focus on speaking and listening in my real-time lessons. If I had a time limit, it was inevitable that I be selective.

Obstacle #2: getting students accustomed to IT

Another challenge I faced with moving classes online involved IT issues. Many of my students had an iPhone or smartphone but did not have an accessible personal computer (A survey conducted on first-year students at the university in April 2020 revealed that 30% did not have such a device). In addition, students were not accustomed to using computers for their courses.

To tackle this obstacle, the question I considered was: What IT problems could I encounter in an online English class? One possibility was students having internet problems such as weak or sudden cut-off of wireless connection, but I had no idea as to what extent this

might occur. Another possibility concerned issues in students' typing skills. A survey conducted on the typing speed of second-year high school students in Japan revealed that students typed 24.7 words per minute on average (MEXT, 2017a). Nonetheless, it is said that one should be able to type 100 words per minute to create documents smoothly (Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) (JCCI, n.d.). Moreover, my students were not used to typing in English. (This last point may be a common issue among EFL learners.) For these reasons, I realized I would need to consider typing speed when calculating the number of hours it would take for students to complete their work, or if I asked them to write something in the chat message box during online lessons.

Obstacle #3: changing my teaching practices

Lastly, I felt I needed to change my way of teaching. In the previous year, I had incorporated many cooperative learning activities in the classroom. However, I had never conducted cooperative learning online. Working in groups is known to have many benefits in second language classrooms (Jacobs, McCafferty, & Iddings, 2006). However, I was unfamiliar with how I could do this over the internet. A new plan was required.

In an attempt to design teaching practices for online cooperative learning, the question I asked myself was: What kind of cooperative learning activities should be done in real-time online classes? The importance of authenticity in language learning has been stressed by previous studies (i.e. Ozverir, Osam, & Herrington, 2017). As it was likely that my students would be using English in real-time verbal communication after university as previously mentioned, I decided to consciously provide opportunities for them to talk with one another. After much consideration, I chose to focus on using think-pair-share, a cooperative learning strategy where participants are given a topic and are required to think individually before pairing up with a partner (Kaddoura, 2013). I gave them a question as homework which they were to work on alone and be prepared to discuss with a classmate in the next lesson. Individual thinking time seems to be especially important for Japanese EFL students as they develop foreign language anxiety in classroom situations (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018). Thus, I wanted to ensure that students are well prepared before placing them in groups.

In the *sho* phase, I identified three obstacles and thought of possible ways to overcome these. Once the new syllabus was completed, it was time to apply it to my classroom. I decided to start with a clean slate and unlearn my previous ways. In my mind, I was once again a first-year teacher in a new era of the pandemic. Although I was worried how things would unfold without a trial run, I had no choice. Online classes begun and I entered *chiku,* the second phase

of my journey brought on by the pandemic.

Chiku

By the end of "Golden Week," green leaves started to replace flowers on the cherry blossom trees. I was armed with a new course plan but was far from confident. I felt uncertain as I met students online for the first time. I had spent countless hours honing IT skills and preparing for my lessons up to and during "Golden Week," but I was still concerned. This may have been because I felt, as teachers often do, that I needed to be an expert in my subject area (Horwitz, 1996). However, I was just as unfamiliar as my students were when it came to online English lessons.

The online lessons

The first few lessons were very chaotic. I encountered four major problems. First of all, I received close to 90 emails from panicked students who wanted immediate replies. Many were simple questions such as "when is the deadline for the homework that you assigned?" or "I got a stomachache during class and had to excuse myself for a second. Will I get points deducted for this?" Another question which may be specific to EFL/ESL learners was "I couldn't understand what you said in English. Could you explain it again?" Although questions such as these would usually take a couple of seconds to answer in-person, each took several minutes to reply on a computer.

Secondly, I found myself having to multi-task, trying to teach while simultaneously replying to online chat messages sent from students during lessons. Sometimes their words were misspelled or I could not understand what the student meant. At these times, I had to stop my lecture and verbally ask what the student had intended to say.

Thirdly, I had not considered the housing situation in Japan. With Tokyo's average total floor area per home at 65.18 square meters (Statistics Division, Bureau of General Affairs, 2020), some students were joining lessons from shared rooms with siblings or parents. On one occasion, I had a student log-in from an outside staircase of her apartment building on a cold and cloudy day. After this incident, I reminded students that they would not be penalized for turning off their cameras and to let me know if they had any difficulties attending lessons. However, possibly due to the *haji* (shame) culture in Japan where individuals do not want to stand out, none of my students came to me about such issues. I did have a student who wrote the following comment at the end of the semester. "I am sorry that I could not turn on my camera sometimes. My sister was sleeping behind me after working a night shift." Another

wrote, "my wireless connection was very weak sometimes because my father and mother were also using Zoom while working at home. Thus, I could not turn on my camera."

The final issue I had, involved breakout sessions where students appeared emotionally disengaged. To combat this situation, I decided to use knowledge from a previous study I had conducted in organizing breakout sessions: when conducting cooperative learning, doing short, easy tasks in groups first is best, as this appears to make students' have positive perceptions about cooperation (Hashimoto, 2021). Combining this with think-pair-share, I had students prepare one-minute speeches ahead of time in English about themselves such as "how I spend my time inside the house." I made sure topics were easy to talk about even for EFL students. Then, as the next step, students were paired up and worked cooperatively in groups for a short period of time according to cooperative learning propositions (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). Previous studies show that while meeting the basic psychological need for relatedness in and of itself does not raise intrinsic motivation, it is an important element (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Realizing the importance of intrinsically motivating students especially in times when they are studying at home individually, I thought that this kind of activity was important to build students' relationships. The one-minute speech activity appears to have built interpersonal connections as I had intended. One student wrote the following comment at the end of the semester.

> *Concerning the one-minute speech that we did almost every week, at first I had a simplistic idea that it would be easy since it was just one minute. But it was a lot longer that I had imagined and I realized that I needed to go into great detail in order to talk for one minute. It was pretty difficult at first. But I got used to this after working on this task a couple of times. Pretty soon I was able to come up with a lot of things that I wanted to talk about and also became better at presenting in front of my classmates. Also, the content of my friend's presentations were also very interesting. Everyone shared something different that they liked in their presentations. I was able to learn a lot about my classmates in place of a self-introduction so it was a lot of fun!*

The new syllabus

As for my new syllabus, students seemed to enjoy and learn from working cooperatively as they worked together in breakout rooms. One student made the following comment about a reading activity I had conducted in the *chiku* phase. She had participated in an activity where she and her partner took turns reading a selected passage aloud to one another.

> *My partner was not good at English just like me but together we said, "what's this pronunciation?" and helped each other out. This allowed us to enjoy practicing reading in English. I thought maybe the dislike for English can be erased by a feeling of enjoyment when working together. I got stuck in some places, so next time I want to be able to read aloud smoothly.*

Although this student had never met her partner in person, she seems to have had a motivating experience online. This points to the possibility that students may be able to build positive relationships if teachers make a conscious effort to organize activities where students can get to know one another. As Stevick (1980) points out, whether or not one is successful in language learning depends more on what happens within an individual learner and between individuals in the classroom than on course content or method. Furthermore, Arnold and Brown (1999) indicate that what goes on between individuals and groups should be facilitated and cared for. These studies suggest that teacher's assistance is important for groups to work cooperatively. I realized that perhaps the fundamental principles of teaching are the same regardless of method of delivery, a finding which increased my confidence to teach online.

University administrators

During the *chiku* phase I continued to be reminded by university administrators to (a) persist in holding real-time online classes so students would feel connected to the university, and to (b) accommodate specific conditions such as bad internet connection and inability to purchase IT equipment. I was not guided on how and to what extent I should care for students, which made this somewhat challenging. This may be evidence on how university administration was also in chaos amid COVID-19 and unable to set down firm guidelines. Further examples of this can be seen in emails sent by university administrators to part-time teachers. On one occasion, I was notified that I should maintain the same grading system I had planned for and had written in my old syllabus. However, in an email sent out weeks later, I was asked to be flexible. With an increased sense of confidence, yet without a guiding light, I continued into the *bai* phase, which lasted from the middle to end of spring semester.

Bai

Bai started mid-June, when *tsuyu* (the rainy season), began in Japan. The rain usually dampens my spirit, but I was not as negatively affected this year. This may have been because I appeared to be seeing three positive results of my new teaching practices and syllabus. Firstly, students' IT skills seemed to have improved. At the start of the *bai* phase, students sometimes still had trouble logging into online lessons and had difficulty submitting their homework. However, by the end of this phase, it seemed that these issues rarely occurred. Secondly, more and more students appeared to willingly turn on their cameras during breakout sessions. Possibly in part, due to the lack of confidence that many Japanese EFL university students' have of their English skills (Yashima et al., 2009), my students did not turn on their cameras during lectures even in

the *bai* phase. However, a fair number of students began to voluntarily show their faces when placed in small groups with other students. Finally, I noticed that students seemed to have built stronger, more stable relationships. I became aware of this as I hopped in and out of breakout sessions. Laugher was often heard as I entered a breakout room and students would continue to talk even when I joined unexpectedly. In the previous phase, *chiku*, they would often stop when I entered.

In *bai*, I felt I was beginning to see positive signs of my new teaching practices. Some students even commented that online lessons were more beneficial than in-person classes. The following is an example of this.

> *I was able to talk to various students through online classes. I don't think this would have been the case if I were attending in-person classes. I probably would have talked to the same people and would not have become friends with so many students. In this respect, I think online classes are better.*

This student appears to have made a wider scope of friends through online classes than in-person classes. A possible benefit of online classes is the secluded break out rooms. When students are placed in these rooms, they are forced to only engage with a few of their classmates, whereas in in-person classes, they are surrounded by other groups. The seclusion of online breakout groups may have allowed this student to focus on building relationships within the group allowing her to form close bonds with people she would not have befriended otherwise. This positive comment I received regarding online classes made me feel that the hard work of planning and running classes had paid off.

5. Conclusion

As I am writing this paper (December, 2020), Japan is being hit by a third wave of COVID-19 outbreaks. Many other countries around the world also continue to struggle with the pandemic. Although some have begun to circulate a newly developed vaccine and other countries are expected to follow suit soon, an end to COVID-19 is expected to take some time (Solomon, 2020). For Asian EFL teachers around the world, this means that online classes, hybrid classes (a combination of face-to-face and online classes) or an alternation of online and face-to-face classes (in reaction to COVID-19 cases rising and waning) may become the norm. In an unpredictable environment such as this, increasing one's knowledge of how other EFL teachers coped or are coping with the pandemic may be worthwhile. This study is meaningful in this respect. However, there are limitations. The research covers only one semester which may not have been long enough to capture all the effects brought on by the pandemic. Furthermore, it lacks a description of personal struggles. Needless to say, a teacher is not only a teacher and

has a life outside of being a teacher. Bringing this element into the study may have added to an even fuller analysis of the COVID-19 situations teachers are facing. In addition, it may also have been beneficial if I had included more detailed information on which practices, I abandoned due to the pandemic or which ones I could keep even after COVID-19 settles. Fulfilling these limitations could have perhaps made the study richer and more in-depth. These are possible areas which could be explored in future studies.

Just as a welcoming spring always comes after a harsh winter, I felt that the end of spring semester was a new beginning for me as an EFL teacher. Experiencing and getting through a whole pandemic-stricken semester allowed me to gain confidence as an educator. Accounts of the obstacles that I faced and how I overcame these may provide lived experiences regarding teaching practices to other Asian EFL university teachers.

References

Alaghbary, G. S. (2021). Integrating technology with Bloom's revised taxonomy: Web 2.0-enabled learning designs for online learning. *Asian EFL Journal, 28*(1), 10-37.

Arnold, J., & Brown, D. (1999). A map of the terrain. In J. Arnold, (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 1-24). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethography as method.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Chang, H., Ngunjiri, F., & Hernandez, K.C. (2013). *Collaborative autoethnography.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Cucinotta, D., & Vanelli, M. (2020). WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic. *Acta Biomed, 91*(1), 157-160. https://doi.org/10.23750/abm.v91i1.9397

Cunliffe, A. L. (2016). Republication of "on becoming a critically reflexive practitioner". *Journal of Management Education, 40*(1), 747-768.

Dörnyei, Z., MacIntyre, P. D., & Henry, A. (2015). Introduction: Applying complex dynamic systems principles to empirical research on L2 motivation. In Z. Dörnyei, P. D. MacIntyre, & A. Henry (Eds.), *Motivational Dynamics in Language Learning* (pp. 1-10). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Authoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research, 36*(4), 273-290. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Hashimoto, T. (2021). Student beliefs about cooperative learning in an English as a foreign language course at a Japanese University. *Journal of Global Japanese Studies, 13*, 1-25. http://hdl.handle.net/10291/21564

Horwitz, E. K. (1996). Even teachers get the blues: Recognizing and alleviating language teachers' feelings of foreign language anxiety. *Foreign Language Annals, 29*(3), 365-372. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb01248.x

Jacobs, G.M., McCafferty, S.G., & Iddings, A. C. D. (2006). Roots of cooperative learning in general education. In S. G. McCafferty, G. M. Jacobs, & A. C. D. Iddings (Eds.), *Cooperative learning and second language teaching* (pp. 9-17). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) (n.d.). Tacchi taipingu jyoutatsu hou. [How to increase touch typing skills]. Retrieved from https://www.kentei.ne.jp/bus/typing

Japan telcos to offer discounts for students (2020, April 3), *Nikkei Asia*. Retrieved from https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/Japanese-telcos-to-offer-discounts-for-students

John, M. (2021). Students' challenges in self-study of an ESL listening and speaking course during the CoviD-19 pandemic. *Asian EFL Journal, 28*(1), 43-57.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Holubec, E. J. (1993). *Cooperation in the classroom* (6th ed.). Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Kaddoura, M. (2013). Think pair share: A teaching learning strategy to enhance students' thinking. *Educational Research Quarterly, 36*(4), 3-24.

Khan, M. I., & Hameed, P. F. M., (2021). An analysis of Wiki writing on writing performance in Saudi EFL learners: Exploring new pedagogies in COVID times. *TESOL International Journal, 16*(1), 57-72.

Kim, J. (2020). Learning and teaching online during COVID-19: Experiences of student teachers in an early childhood education practicum. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 52*(2), 145-158. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-020-00272-6

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2017a). *Jyouhou katsuyou nouryoku no chousa (Koutou gakkou) gaiyou* [Overview of information technology utilization skills (High school edition)]. Retrieved from https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/zyouhou/detail/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/01/17/1381046_01_1_1.pdf

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2020b). *Shingata corona uirusu kansenshou no jyoukyou wo fumaeta daigakunado no jyugyou no jisshi jyoukyou nit suite (Reiwa 2, 5 gatsu 20 nichi jiten) [Situation of class implementation at universities and technical colleges based on the status of COVID-19 (As of May 20, 2020)]*. Retrieved from https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20200527-mxt_kouhou01-

000004520_3.pdf

Mishra, L. Gupta, T., & Shree, A. (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open, 1*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100012

Murphy, R. S. (2018). The concept of syllabus design and curriculum development: A look at five major syllabus designs. In A. Faravani, M. Zerratpishe, M. Azarnoosh, & H. R. Kargozari (Eds.), *Issues of Syllabus Design* (pp. 1-23). Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Nakata, Y. (2006). *Motivation and Experience in Foreign Language Learning.* Bern: Peter Lang.

Nartiningrum, N., & Nugroho, A. (2020). Online learning amidst global pandemic: EFL students' challenges, suggestions, and needed materials. *Academic Journal of English Language and Education, 4*(2), 115-140. https://doi.org/10.29240/ef.v4i2.1494

Nugroho, A., Ilmiani, D., & Rekha, A. (2020). EFL teachers' challenges and insights of online teaching amidst global pandemic. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language Literature and Teaching, 4*(3), 277-291. https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v4i3.3195

Ozverir, I., Osam, U. V., & Herrington, J. (2017). Investigating the effects of authentic activities on foreign language learning: A design-based research approach. *Educational Technology & Society, 20*(4), 261-274.

Peters, M. A., Wang, H., Ogunnirran, M. O., Huang, Y., Green, B., Chunga, J. O., … Hayes, S. (2020). China's internationalized higher education during COVID-19: Collective student autoethnography. *Postdigital Science and Education, 2*, 968-988. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00128-1

Poulos, C. N. (2021). *Essentials of autoethnography.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Roy, R., & Uekusa, S. (2020). Collaborative autoethnography: "Self-reflection" as a timely alternative research approach during the global pandemic. *Qualitative Research Journal, 20*(4), 383-392. https://www.emerald.com/insight/1443-9883.htm

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness.* Guilford Press.

Sho-chiku-bai. (n.d.). In *Digital Daijisen.* Retrieved from https://dictionary.goo.ne.jp/word/%E6%9D%BE%E7%AB%B9%E6%A2%85/

Solomon, F. (2000, December 13). Vaccines are coming but they won't end COVID-19 anytime soon. *The Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/

Statistics Division, Bureau of General Affairs (2020). *Kurashi to toukei 2020* [2020 Living and

statistics]. Retrieved from https://www.toukei.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/kurasi/2020/ku20-29.htm

Stevick, E. (1980). *Teaching languages. A way and ways*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Toyama, M., & Yamazaki, Y. (2018). Exploring the components of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale in the context of Japanese undergraduates. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 3*(4), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-018-0045-3

Wilson, S., Tan, S., Knox, M., Ong, A., Crawford, J., & Rudolph, J. (2020). Enabling cross-cultural student voice during COVID-19: A collective autoethnography. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 17*(5), 1-21. https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol17/iss5/3

Yashima, T., Noels, K. A., Shizuka, T., Takeuchi, O., Yamane, S., & Yoshizawa, K. (2009). The interplay of classroom anxiety, intrinsic motivation, and gender in the Japanese EFL context. *Kansai Daigaku Gaikokugo Kyouiku Kenkyuu, 17,* 41-64.

Yazan, B., Canagarajah, S., & Jain, R. (2020). *Autoethnographies in ELT: Transnational identities, pedagogies, and practices.* New York, NY: Routeledge.

Yi, Y., & Jang, J. (2020). Envisioning possibilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications from English language teaching in South Korea. *TESOL Journal, 11*(3), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.543