



“As a Teacher, COVID-19 Means...”: Stories of How English Teachers in Asia Developed Resilience During the Pandemic

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The focus of this study was to provide the accounts of primary and secondary English teachers in Asia regarding their struggles and efforts during the pandemic. In particular, this study provides an in-depth view of how the educational contexts changed as a result of the spread of COVID-19 and their reflections of their experiences through a metaphor. A total of eight English teachers (four primary and four secondary) from Bangladesh, China, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia provided their stories of how they built resilience during the pandemic. In terms of their educational contexts, the sudden change to online platform seemed to have caused confusion among teachers, students, and parents; however, the teachers accepted such changes as the new normal and took necessary measures to adapt to the transformed context. They also provided additional support for students to lessen the learning gap. As for the reflections of their experiences, the teachers were able to develop professionally by stepping out of their comfort zones and exploring new possibilities. In addition, their optimism and passion for teaching encouraged them to continuously search for ways to guide their students despite various obstacles. In many ways, the teachers never lost hope and moved forward toward the light at the end of a dark tunnel we call COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, English teaching, reflective teaching, on-line teaching

Introduction

The goal of professional development is to provide empowerment which can be the force that releases worldwide, education has experienced unprecedented disruptions due to COVID-19. UNESCO (2020) reported that schools at all levels in 187 countries were closed during the initial outbreak of COVID-19, and it impacted around 1.7 billion students globally. The data as of September 2020 presented by UNESCO tells us that schools in about 80 countries continue to be closed nationwide or locally, and about 1.1 billion students are still critically affected. In 2020, education experienced unprecedented disruptions due to COVID-19 worldwide. According to UNESCO (2021), nearly 1.5 billion students worldwide have been affected by the lockdown and the unexpected change from offline to online learning and more than 800 million students have experienced difficulties due to this sudden shift in mode of education. As we responded to this pandemic crisis, we began to question whether we have made timely efforts to ensure that our short-term measures to respond to the pandemic will also allow our future generations to learn. Unless timely action is taken, this global pandemic may hamper hard-earned educational development at all levels, despite many efforts to respond to this pandemic globally and



nationally (Schleicher, 2020). Therefore, it is argued that effective strategies and solutions that integrate mid-to-long-term support be considered to provide immediate relief and enable recovery of the education system (Asian Development Bank, 2021). We expect that this approach helps build resilience internally and reactivate the education system.

To this end, this study looked into the English teachers' experiences at classroom levels in Asian countries through their voices. We listened to eight school teachers in Asian countries, including four primary school teachers and four secondary school teachers from Japan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, China, and Korea. Listening to their voices regarding what challenges they have faced and how they have overcome such difficulties gives us a picture of how teachers, students and parents struggled with this unexpected crisis and further inspiration of what consideration we need to take into for our future education. In order to illuminate their experiences, the following research questions were considered:

1. How did the English teachers manage their class during the emergency remote teaching period due to COVID-19?
2. How did the emergency remote teaching experience affect their perspective of their teaching practice, classroom learning, or other teaching and learning related factors?
3. How do the English teachers conceptualize their experiences?

Teaching during COVID-19

As 90% of all countries that have undergone lockdown adopted remote learning policies (UNICEF, 2020), teachers worldwide were forced to plan their classes in accordance to this sudden shift. While online teaching and learning is not new to the foreign language classrooms, (Bailey & Lee, 2020), the type of remote teaching during the pandemic was different. Moser et al. (2021) point out that the participants in the studies related to online teaching before COVID-19 "chose to learn a language online by educators who chose to teach online" (p. 2). Furthermore, Hodges et al. (2020) clarify the difference between online teaching and emergency remote teaching as the former being carried out with a well-made plan while the latter being administered as a result of crises.

A number of studies have provided a macro view regarding the emergency remote teaching in Asian countries and the findings have shown that regardless of the difference in educational context, similar challenges such as lack of preparation, difficulties in teachers and students adapting to the new normal as well as the threats to students' physical and mental well-being were found (Batubara, 2021; Byun & Slavin, 2020; Churiyah et al., 2020; Emon et al., 2020; Nae, 2020; Ramij & Sultana, 2020). From a micro view, while some studies such as Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) focused on general challenges and opportunities of the changing classroom, other studies focused on the teachers' experiences and how they are coping with the shift in teaching practice. Lie et al., (2020) found that an interplay of five factors such as learners, teachers' prior exposure to online learning, technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and the support system was found to be crucial in Indonesian English teachers' online learning engagement. Talidong and Toquero (2020) provided findings of the teachers' anxiety due to the global shift to online learning by administering a survey and Erarslan (2021) analysis of the findings from 69 research studies related to English teaching and learning carried out in different countries showed that "while some teachers saw emergency online teaching as an opportunity to increase their expertise and knowledge in the remote teaching of English," others perceived it "as an obstacle which raised their anxiety level" (p. 11).

As these studies have shown, there seem to be mixed results in terms of how teachers perceived their experiences and as "how teachers' interpret that experience plays a remarkable role in bringing about changes in terms of behaviors, beliefs, assumptions, judgments, and change of mindset", it is necessary to find out what they had to consider when managing their class, how their experiences affected their perspectives of teaching, and how they conceptualize their experiences (Noor et al., p. 181).

Methods

Participants and Settings

A total of eight in-service teachers (four primary and four secondary) from Bangladesh, Japan, Korean, and Indonesia participated in this study as shown in Table 1. All of the participants in this study are given pseudonyms.

TABLE 1
Participants

Country	Primary No. (Teaching experience)	Secondary No. (Teaching experience)
Bangladesh	1 (15 years)	1 (15 years)
China		1 (16 years)
Japan	1 (7 years)	1 (10 years)
Korea	1 (8 years)	1 (18 years)
Indonesia	1 (15 years)	
Total	4	4

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected from a teacher panel discussion in November of 2020 during which the participants provided their stories regarding how they managed the class from March to September. The panel discussion was conducted via Zoom and the participants were asked to prepare their responses on the following issues prior to the discussion event:

- i. Explain how you managed your class during the emergency remote teaching period due to COVID-19.
- ii. Explain how your teaching experiences during the emergency remote teaching period affected your perspective of your teaching practice, classroom learning, or other teaching and learning related factors.

In addition, a question was asked in the form of a sentence completion as in the following to help participants probe their experiences by using a metaphor so that they can “communicate and make explicit salient features of their tacit conceptions” of how COVID-19 affected their view of teaching and learning (Thomas & McRobbie, 1999, p. 4):

- iii. Fill in the blank with your own response: As an English teacher, COVID-19 means _____.
Then explain your response.

Each participant provided their responses of the questions and further questions were asked to clarify issues as regarded necessary. The panel discussion sessions were recorded and transcribed by the researchers. Data were organized in accordance to their relevance to the research questions

How Educational Contexts Changed Due to COVID-19

This section intends to convey the voices of Asian teachers of English about how English education in Asian countries are responding to the pandemic crises at classroom levels, where teachers and students are struggling with this unforeseen situation, and what efforts teachers have made to rejuvenate teaching and learning with new tools and technologies, especially to expand online education to complement face-to-face learning in pedagogically effective ways, and to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the post-COVID-19 era.

Primary

Bangladesh: *All teachers are not IT teachers who deal with gadgets.*

The Bangladesh primary school teacher has a 15-year of teaching experience and is working in a private primary school. Her classes before the COVID-19 were full of children's voices, participating in various pair and group works. Her lessons included project-based learning, extempore speech, games, debates, and so on. As the pandemic made the country lockdown, the classes should transfer into the online platform. Her school decided to use Google classroom with Google Meet. Three hundred teachers and around 2,500 students were given G-suite accounts.

In this unfamiliar teaching context, IT technology was necessary for teachers to provide various online class activities. She said,

All teachers are not IT teachers. We are English subject teachers... We had to deal with gadgets... having lots of difficulties in managing with our own laptop computer and other online teaching tools... Teachers should stay up to date with technologies, teaching virtually.

She also mentioned the challenge of monitoring the progress of students' learning since some students would copy and paste their answers in tasks which were linked to online assessment. The issue regarding the ethics and ways of online assessment was raised at all school levels in many other countries. To sort out these issues, her school used various channels for assessing students' academic achievement, such as Google form, screen recorder, online timer, and weekly formative assessment. The summative assessment was also implemented every third week.

Facing this unexpected and sudden move from offline classrooms toward the online platform, schools, local and national governments supported various areas. Teachers, students, and parents were given training programs for the online classes with the support of IT teams. In addition, teachers were given brand new touch screen laptop computers and a mobile SIM card with a 30 GB internet data package each month to all faculty members.

She told us an interesting point regarding the intervention of parents in online classes. Some teachers could have had difficulty in getting used to various types of interventions of some parents during online class such as watching the screen or looking over the students' shoulder to see what they are doing in the class. The current situation in which online classes were implemented without any preparation left teachers no choice but to open up their classrooms. This points out the urgent need to provide systematic support to reduce teachers' psychological burden and workload.

Indonesia: *How can I manage the sudden changes?*

The Indonesian primary school teacher has taught English for about 15 years. Her school also transferred from offline classes toward online classes, using various online apps and platforms. As a result, sudden changes came to schools, teachers, students, and parents. Her main concern was how to manage the sudden changes, helping students and parents.

Her school has a special program, LLI (leveled literacy intervention), a popular literacy program in Australia and New Zealand. Before COVID-19, her school implemented ten levels of literacy programs with reading logs. Students allotted into ten levels participated in this reading program, mainly in the library. During COVID-19, her school decided to move the reading classes to the online platform, like other schools in many other countries, using Get Epic, Rivet, and My On applications. It is interesting to listen to her voices on the transfer from offline reading class to online reading. She highlighted that this online reading promoted students' independent learning, school mission, and self-motivation with more engagement on learning than offline reading. She emphasized that students in her online reading classes were guided to understand what to learn, how to learn, and how to become an independent learner.

Interestingly, she said,

I think this pandemic makes them become more independent learners.

It is also worth noting that her school provided additional online classes for weak or less motivated learners during the lunch break and learning aids such as materials for projects, stationery, healthy food, printed reading, and hands-on learning at home through a drive-through system. Her school was shown to have considered the widening learning gap among the students due drastic changes in the educational context. Such efforts were implemented to narrow the learning gap as well as promote a step forward in educational development.

Since the pandemic has caused not only teachers and students but also parents tremendous stress, she was concerned about how to provide the necessary support to ease their stress. In particular, various tasks aiming at the students' independent learning at home often require active support from parents. For example, successful learning through these project-based classes at home may not be quickly expected without proper support from the parents. This seems to be one reason why Anne and her colleagues are concerned about how to support students' and parents' stress. Having Webinars is one of the efforts to reduce students' and parents' stress in her school.

Japan: How will my students speak English at home? Who is going to teach?

The Japanese primary school teacher in this story is working in a private school in Tokyo. She has experience teaching English for about seven years. Before the pandemic, she usually took a variety of speaking activities in her classroom. However, since the lockdown of schools were put into force due to the pandemic in Tokyo, her school decided to provide online classes with Google Suite using google slides. Like other teachers throughout the world, she was also unfamiliar with the online English language classes and was very concerned about how the students will speak English at home, how they can learn new vocabulary and phrases effectively, and who is going to teach them.

Google slides allowed her to upload the video clips that she made to make her English classes operated. While doing this type of class, she and her colleagues became aware that one-way teaching without interactions between teachers and students using Google slides was highly likely to lower students' motivation and ineffective in learning foreign languages. In the beginning stage, technical issues were also raised.

She and her colleagues decided to add Google Meet to Google slides to sort out this problem, which succeeded in having the students get more speaking opportunities with their teachers and friends. It also allowed them to have group activities. She made groups based on the students' levels and provided them with various game activities. An interesting part of her story was about one of the English teachers in her school who acted out the vocabulary words to help young learners develop interest in learning new words and phrases. Such effort reminds us of the multitudinous roles teachers need to play in the classrooms.

Her story shows us how her concerns about the English language classes in the beginning stage of the pandemic transferred to confidence in teaching while questioning what she was doing and exploring and attempting unfamiliar ways to motivate students to engage in speaking activities with colleagues in a collaborative way within schools. We cannot forget what she said, 'COVID-19 makes people connected'.

Korea: Online classes focus on students' basic academic skills, but they need to learn to communicate and solve conflicts. How?

The teacher from Korea teaches in a state primary school in Seoul having about eight years of teaching experience. An interesting part of her story was about one of the English teachers in her school who acted out the vocabulary words to help young learners develop interest in learning new words and phrases. Such effort reminds us of the multitudinous roles' teachers need to play in the classrooms. Korean school

schedules varied depending on each school's situation, considering size, local situation (pandemic cases), teachers' will, and school years. It is interesting to listen to her story since her story illustrates what was going on in the classroom where students were taking offline classes during the pandemic.

She presented three main teaching methods before and after her students came back to the school: Videos and assignments in online class platforms, online conference applications through Zoom, and offline classroom. Although teachers and students have offline classes, she still uses an online platform to provide students with video-recorded lessons, Google survey quizzes, electronic textbooks, and electronic reading materials. Students can prepare for the classes before and after the offline lessons. To answer the quiz, her students need a certain level of knowledge, creativity, and collaboration.

An interesting program that she carried out before coming back to the school was Morning Book Café. Her students were asked to sit down in front of the camera before the regular class started at 9:00 and read some books that they chose and played some games relating to the books. She said that this special morning activity was designed to encourage students to enjoy their learning. She also provides an online conference through Zoom once a week. This online conference includes talks about various issues with students and a variety of games.

Since her students came back to school, she has provided them with hands-on and team-based activities, as she did before the COVID-19. While having a variety of experience with the COVID-19, she could learn education technology skills like a YouTuber and observed her students could sometimes gain knowledge online more effectively than offline classrooms. She, however, questioned, "How can I help my students learn values and thinking skills, not just knowledge? Does learning mean acquiring knowledge?" Students could gain knowledge using Google or other technology. She argued that they should learn whether the knowledge they learned from the textbook was useful or correct information creatively and critically. She further highlighted that our students should learn how to communicate and solve conflicts. She also mentioned that this process needs to include parents' roles. This issue should be taken into consideration in redesigning our future education.

Secondary

Bangladesh: What and how should I change my teaching methods?

The Bangladesh secondary school teacher is a senior teacher with 15-year teaching experience. Before the COVID-19, his English classrooms were full of noise with his students' engagement in the classrooms. He very often used TPR (Total Physical Response) method, and the classrooms were dynamic and active. Like other teachers in the world, he also had to teach English online during the COVID-19. He said, 'I was teaching alone, lonely.'

While unsure of what and how he could or should change in this unexpected pandemic situation, he had a critical event, which inspired him. One day, he made a video clip to show how to make soaps, uploaded it online, and told his students that he shared them with his family and neighbors, emphasizing hygiene to wash hands frequently. A few days later, one of his students showed a video clip uploaded by herself. She made soaps and told him that she had shared them with her family and neighbors. This critical event made him start to do something new for his students.

He revised his TPR teaching method, which he used in off-line classrooms before the COVID-19 toward TVR (Total Virtual Response), as he named, during the COVID-19. He did not know how to use Google classroom, but he was very willing to learn how to use online classes. He could record the lessons and get used to online classes. He had a particular interest in assessment. After being accustomed to the online classes, he made a pop-song blank activity for the listening test and let his students fill in the blanks online. He also asked his students to make more pop-song blank activities, and they made it. As many other teachers have said, "Students are amazing."

China: How do I encourage my students motivated in my online classes?

The Chinese secondary school teacher in this story has experience teaching English for about 16 years. Her school was closed for about eight months and had online courses. The online courses had two types: live and recorded lessons.

Her live classes were through Zoom. Classroom management was an issue in online classes. Like the Japanese students, her Chinese students also wanted to have an off-camera. She kept asking her students camera on to see her students' faces. She should be patient since it took longer than half a minute to get the students' responses to her questions than in her off-line classes.

Recording and uploading lessons weekly were also another issue. The recorded lesson did not provide the students with interaction with them. She used made WeChat groups for each class to get more interaction with her students to sort out this issue. WeChat groups often were used for pre-study in China.

Access to technology was another issue before the students came back to the school. The level of IT development in China is various depending on the areas. The Chinese government provided nationwide courses through China Education Television, which was very useful for Chinese students who had some difficulties in accessing the internet. Also, she pointed out the importance of students' preference in having online classes successful. She found that some students preferred recorded reading and grammar lessons to live classes. She pointed out that the apps to collect students' assignments are still used even after returning to school.

Japan: How do I manage online classes with new technology for distance learning?

The secondary school teacher who had an interview is working in a private secondary school in Tokyo. He has about 10-year teaching experience as a native-speaking English teacher. Before the COVID-19, his school used CHaT Net (Children, Homes and Teachers Network), a personal school email system to communicate with his students. He also often used the website to provide more learning materials. His school did not allow students to use any electronic devices within the school. Before Covid-19, his school decided to use Google Classroom to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Using Google classroom seemed to have some students happy. They did assignments very well. But the difficult situation for grading in this situation

Even simple class routines, however, were not so simple in online classes. Google classrooms and distance learning were new for the teachers and students. In the beginning stage of using the Google classroom, it took 15 minutes for roll call. He should ask his students to turn on their camera and microphone, respond to their names, and not turn off the camera or microphone after roll call. He also needed to try to find out absent students. He and his colleagues were worried about how to teach students in this distance learning circumstance. Technical difficulties were also a critical obstacle. Some students used their cell phones, not computers since some homes had no internet connection/wi-fi or shared one home computer.

He prepared for the tasks as simple as possible to reduce the teacher's and students' burden in carrying out the classroom tasks in the beginning stage of using the Google classroom. He set up the goal to help his students present self-introduction using visual aids and past tense. As time went by, Steven and his students used a Google form to check in for attendance, which reduced the time for roll call, and they used gestures to build rapport. While struggling with the sudden change of teaching and learning environment, Steven had to experience something he did not intend and shared some learning points with us.

Technology is not the panacea for COVID-19, but it was better than I expected... Tools and teachers are helping each other and making new teaching and learning ways.... And the students are amazing. Giving students the cognitive and technological skills they need can produce wonderful things. But, they must go hand in hand.

Korea: How could I motivate my students to engage in learning?

The Korean secondary school teacher in this story has taught English for about 18 years. Before the COVID-19, he used various interactive activities, particularly drama-based activities, participating in the Global Culture Network. Through this network, he and his students were actively engaged in various interactive activities with other students from various cultural backgrounds.

In the early stage of the COVID-19, he was unsure what he should and could do through online classes. He used EBS (Korea Education Broadcasting System) television programs and Google classrooms. Gradually, he started to find out how he helps his students learn with Global Culture Network. He kept trying to motivate his students in learning English and used drama-based activities, even online.

His experience of doing co-project with teachers from various countries during the COVID-19 is worth paying attention to if we accept the positive role of the COVID-19 in terms of the expansion of communication through online channels. He showed us the possibility of a global scaled project with our young students to help them become global citizens.

Summary

With the outbreak of COVID-19 causing local blockades and school closures, school education, which had been focused on face-to-face education, was challenged. The primary response to school closures was to provide online classes instead of face-to-face classes. Before the COVID 19, the world was thrown into chaos as online classes used to supplement classroom classes or for class innovation had to be used entirely. However, although there were differences between regions, the response to switching to online classes was swift. First, the video conferencing system used in the private sector was replaced by online classes. In this process, Google and Zoom were used extensively. In addition to the use of private programs, the governments of each country also provided video education systems in the public sector. For example, in Korea, educational broadcasting and the Korea Research Information Service provided online learning systems to support online classes.

The provision of online programs required users' ability to use them. Teachers, the primary users of online classes, were suddenly exposed to the online class environment and were given tasks to plan, implement, and even evaluate online classes. English teachers from different countries gave vivid voices about the difficulties teachers faced in this environment and how they overcame those crises. It has become essential for teachers to learn how to use and utilize online programs. The task given to them was to improve the teaching method so that English education could continue even in the online classroom environment.

The primary school teacher in Japan shows how they overcame difficulties in implementing a variety of speaking activities in her classroom conducted before COVID 19 in the COVID-19 environment. The decision to provide online classes with Google Suite using google slides resulted in one-way teaching without interactions between teachers and students using Google slides. She solved the problems by adding Google Meet to Google slides. She reports that she has gained confidence in overcoming the challenges posed by the pandemic by continuing to work with her fellow teachers to motivate and engage her students in speaking activities, even in an epidemic environment. As a result, she created a new achievement called "COVID-19 makes people connected." The primary school teacher in Bangladesh reported that in the course of teaching using Google classroom with Google Meet, various technical support and training programs provided by schools, the Office of Education, and the Ministry of Education, and online classes were conducted using the latest laptop computers. She said that she experienced new challenges involving parents in online classes at her home. The primary school teacher in Indonesia reported the promotion of students' independent learning, the mission of her school, and self-motivation with more engagement on learning as an outcome that was not achieved in the face-to-face class while conducting the reading class that had been conducted in the face-to-face class online. In addition, additional online classes for weak or less motivated learners during the lunch break and learning aids such as materials for projects, stationery, healthy food, printed reading, and hands-on learning at home through a drive-through system are online classes conducted at her school. It was an active effort at the school level for students from disadvantaged classes affected by the environment. Three main

teaching methods before and after her students come back to the school are Videos and assignments in online class platform, online conference application through Zoom, and off- Reported line classroom.

The secondary school teachers seem to be more concerned about preparation for online classes and class activities in an online environment than elementary school teachers. The secondary school teachers in Japan and Bangladesh reported the difficulties encountered in the process of transitioning to an online environment, such as online access, attendance check, and class management in the early days of online classes. Considering this, the teacher in Japan tried to find a way for effective teaching while reducing the burden on students in online classes. The secondary school teacher in Bangladesh showed his will to use it. The Chinese secondary school teacher pointed out the difficulty of maintaining students' concentration in online classes and accessing technology. She suggested that online classes in consideration of students' preferences be effective. The Korean secondary school teacher tried to motivate students through the Global Culture Network, which helped his students communicate with other teachers and students having various cultural backgrounds while using the EBS broadcast program or Google classroom during COVID 19. He believes, paradoxically, that COVID-19 has had the effect of expanding communication through online channels.

What Does COVID-19 Mean to You as A Teacher?

Primary

Bangladesh: *COVID-19 taught me life lessons both personally and professionally.*

Before the pandemic, her classes were engaging, active and had many activities such as project work, presentation, speech, debate and games as well as field trips. Thus, she felt lost when she was no longer able to carry out such activities. In the beginning, she struggled with numerous challenges of teaching online such as lack of familiarity with IT, monitoring student progress, and assessment. But with the support of her colleagues and school, she was able to overcome the difficulties and discover new ways of teaching. She was able to find ways to increase students' involvement online and provide opportunities for students to become responsible for their own learning. She also continuously searched for proper ways for online assessment. Through this struggle, she discovered that COVID-19 actually taught her "life lessons":

I should never stop learning, we need to be open to technology and be ready to transform anytime for the betterment of the students.

She stated that, now, she always asks herself "What else could I do to make students happy to learn?" since her definition of happiness is "seeing the smile on a child's face as they learn."

Indonesia: *I used the opportunity to change and stay positive.*

As soon as online classes began, her school started multiple programs to help students cope with the unstable conditions including online reading programs, "drive-thru" events to give out learning aids such as materials for projects, stationary, and printed reading materials and healthy food "to make them happy.", and webinars to stay in touch with the parents to help them stay positive and learn from this situation so that "they can think well and not become stressed." In addition, in order for students to adapt to the new online learning context, she provided extra classes for students who needed additional help. She emphasized the need to change because "change is painful, but nothing is as painful as staying stuck." Therefore, she claimed that as a teacher, COVID-19 "is the time to change, change our mindset, change our life style, change our way of teaching." She also pointed out that her collaborative effort in

making this change helped her become more optimistic since it proved “that we can stay positive in this negative situation, depending on how we respond.”

Japan: *For me, COVID-19 was a reflective opportunity.*

Prior to the pandemic, she was not confident about having her students work in groups as she doubted the learning effects of group work:

Before, I was unsure of doing group activities and pair work because my students tend to speak in Japanese when they are talking to their friends.

However, the rigidity of online classes made collaborative learning a necessity. Upon seeing how the actual “messiness” of group work is beneficial for students and simply having the chance to participate in groups encourage the students to take active roles in their learning, she explained that she provides as much opportunity as possible for her students to work in pairs in her class. She also emphasized the importance of communicating in person and the value of offline classes which she had taken for granted before the pandemic. The sudden shift to online classes pushed her to try new methods and reflect on her experience as a teacher. This opportunity allowed her to gain new perspectives and as well as confidence as a teacher.

Korea: *COVID-19 was like a time machine that took me to an unknown future I was not prepared for.*

Her metaphor of COVID-19 as a Time machine that had placed her in the future which she was not prepared for vividly illustrated the panic she must have felt as she was caught in the swirl of events during the early stages. However, her optimistic perspective of the situation led her to realize what she needed to do to guide her students through the unknown situations: Stay connected and keep learning:

We were on a time machine and we arrived in the future, 10 years later, and the teachers, students and parents never experienced or felt the need for future education. We were not prepared. Nothing was ready. However, challenge was accepted, and we fought against it, and now we are almost catching up.

She also explained that she had become much more tech smart than before, but soon realized that “it’s not the technical tools that matter the most in education, but the values and thinking skills [that matter].” She realized that communicating and solving conflicts are decisive factors in education. While she began her journey in the unknown future with uncertainty, she had gained the wisdom that would help her go through this tunnel.

Secondary

Bangladesh: *COVID-19 gave me an eight-month long training.*

Before COVID-19, the teacher from Bangladesh explained that his classes were teacher-centered and his activities were mostly consisting of TPR and pattern-drill practices. When he had to teach online, he referred to himself as a “zombie” because he was not familiar with online teaching and online platforms. Thus, he taught classes as though he had transferred his traditional classroom to the online platform by grammar explanations both in asynchronous and synchronous classes. Then, one day, as he was concerned about his students’ safety during the pandemic, he uploaded a video explaining how to make liquid hand soap at home. This approach to his students allowed him to build a more personal rapport with the students. He mentioned that had he been in his offline classroom, he would never have interacted with his students in such a way. Another transformation in his teaching was his perception of assessment. He pointed out that as he had continuously searched for ways to assess students online, he became much

more aware of the importance of “assessment for learning” concepts. In these ways, he was able to gain a new perspective of his teaching practices as he was placed out of his comfort zone. He described his experience during the pandemic as a “training period”:

COVID-19 gave me an eight-month long training where I have learned resilience, empathy, responsibility, use of technology, collaboration, critical thinking, [and] self-motivation.

His passion for teaching was able to turn a crisis into a learning opportunity, which ultimately strengthened his professional development.

China: *COVID-19 reminds me that I still need to learn.*

The teacher from China described her initial period of online teaching as having multiple struggles interacting with her students as they did not turn on the camera, not responded during online class. She also had difficulty in managing time as she had to deal with technical issues. Despite such obstacles, she was able to find ways to stay connected with her students by keeping in touch with them through online chatting. She also found ways to take advantage of the benefits offered in online platform. For example, she found out that her students enjoyed the recorded reading and grammar lessons since they can watch it repeatedly. Also, having students upload their answers prior to class was found to be helpful since she can consider them when preparing the next lesson. She stated that she plans on uploading the videos and interacting with students more actively online even when the offline classes become stable. She considered every obstacle during the pandemic as a chance to learn and grow as a teacher:

[COVID-19] reminds me that I still need to learn. I need to keep up with the most advanced technology so as to know how to teach in the most effective way.

She also emphasized that it gave her an opportunity to reflect on how much she loved her students:

And when the school was closed, when I could not talk to my students face to face, it reminded me that, I love my students, I loved face to face communication so much. And it reminds me that I should treasure them better when we are finally back.

As online teaching reminded her of the values of teaching, she said that her struggles “were not all bad.”

Japan: *COVID is COVID.*

The secondary teacher from Japan had a matter of fact stance regarding his experience as a teacher during the pandemic as he took the events as they were. He explained that he tried not to wallow in the situation and simply tied his shoe laces and got ready for the race as he continuously searched for ways to keep moving forward:

COVID is COVID. Next generation will have something else. The important thing is [asking], what we [need to] do now to get through it.

He provided an example regarding how his persistence transformed his teaching practice. He experienced technical problems in the beginning when managing class and was not able to interact with the students online. But he did not give up and went through numerous trial and error. Later in the semester, the teacher was amazed to see that his students had improved in various aspects as they also did not give up. The teacher explained that he was able to move away from traditional classroom practices

such as teacher-centered teaching and focus more on student-centered methods as a result of his struggle during online teaching. The persistence of the teacher was able to encourage students to move forward.

Korea: COVID-19 opened new doors and created new opportunities.

Before the pandemic, the teacher from Korea was carrying out a local project which focused on teaching students using drama-based activities. When the offline classes shifted to online classes, he felt lost at first since he was not able to carry out most of the activities. However, he began to build teachers' network both locally and globally as online platforms opened new doors and created new opportunities. Thus, he explained that moving everything online "broke down the walls of the classroom and connected with the world." In particular, he claimed that "not being able to physically move and visit the countries actually made online participation increase" as the pandemic "made teachers desperate to find ways to motivate students." As such, he was able to narrow the gap between countries as he used the opportunity to connect with other nations and build a global culture network in developing and carrying out drama-based activities. His search for new opportunities to enhance his students' learning as well as expand their experiences allowed him to use the advantages of online learning and establish a global network which would have been impossible without the shift to online teaching.

Summary

Both primary and secondary teachers have provided a vivid picture of their own struggles as English teachers during the early stages of COVID-19. Though each teaching context was unique, their coping strategies were relatively similar. All of the teachers were shown to have practiced "critically reflective teaching", which Larivee (2000) defines as moving through various stages that require teachers to "face the conflict" and "surrender what is familiar" so that they are able to transform their way of thinking (p. 305). Although COVID-19 forced the teachers to move out of their comfort zones, the teachers used the situation as an opportunity to get a bird's eye view of their teaching practices by reflecting on their teaching practices and whether they still fit the current situation. As noted by Thompson and Pascal (2012), this type of reflexivity is crucial in practicing reflective teaching and the teachers' decision to focus on their own teaching practices seemed to have helped them cope with the situation more effectively. The teachers who told their stories in this chapter all used this opportunity to develop as professionals and apply their newly gained perceptions to make the necessary changes in the teaching practice.

From their stories, it seems clear that they all shared a common source of energy to continuously search for the light at the end of the tunnel: Optimism. All of the teachers were shown to have adopted a positive attitude to use it as a driving force to keep moving forward. Their optimistic view allowed them to develop the necessary persistence to search for appropriate measures during the turmoil. Furthermore, some teachers used the online platform to explore ways to blend online and offline teaching to better meet future demands. And most importantly, their passion for teaching and love for their students motivated them and encouraged them to perceive the obstacles as another learning experience and opportunity to reflect on their teaching. As the secondary teacher from Japan pointed out, there will be numerous obstacles in the future, and COVID-19 is just one of them. As the teachers in this chapter have shown, we need to strengthen our resilience and remember to keep moving forward.

Implications and Conclusion

This study tried to see what is going on in English language teaching at classroom levels in Asian countries by listening to school teachers in Asia to achieve the aim of learning lessons from the experiences we have had since the outbreak of COVID-19. Through the voices of eight primary and secondary Asian teachers of English from five countries, the challenges and responses brought by COVID

19 to the school education field, especially the English education field, and the changes in education and new challenges are summarized as shown in the Figure 1.

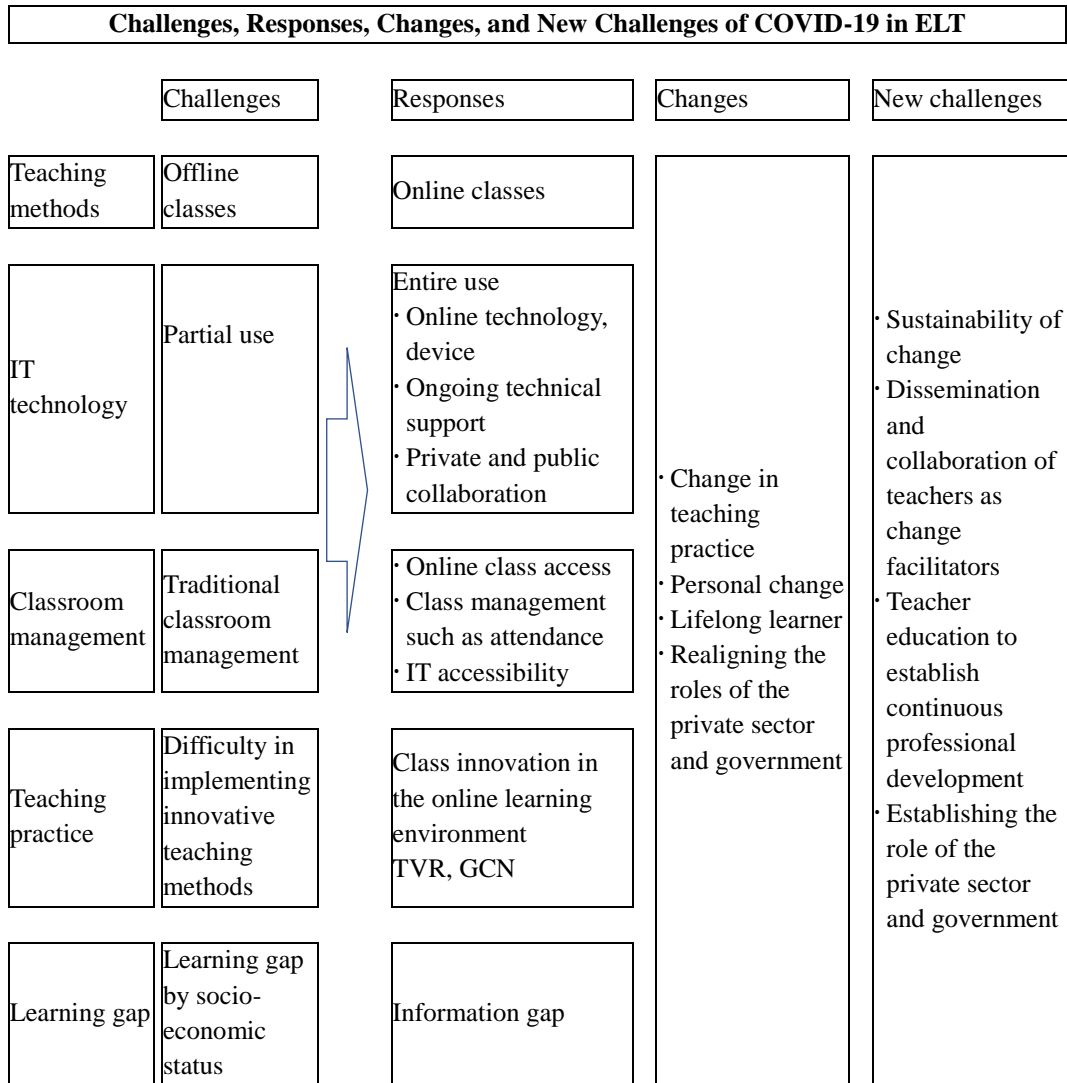


Figure 1. Challenges, responses, changes, and new challenges of COVID-19 in ELT.

It was found that the challenges brought to the education field of COVID 19 and the responses to them had an impact on five areas: teaching methods, application of IT technology to the education area, classroom management, teaching practice, and learning gap. The most significant change is that school education has shifted from traditional face-to-face classes to online classes. As a result, a total change was made in the school education environment. In an environment where IT technology was partially utilized, IT technology was applied to all educational activities. As a result, information technology was used extensively to create an online learning environment. To support the online learning system introduced in the school field, laptop computers were widely distributed, and technical support was continuously provided. The response to this demand was achieved through cooperation between public institutions, including the government and the private sector. The next task is for classroom management. Difficulties that teachers did not experience in the traditional face-to-face class management method appeared in online class management. There was a delay in online access depending on the internet environment, and it took a lot of time to check attendance. Home-based online classes experienced a new phase of classroom management involving parental involvement. Above all, it is noteworthy that online learning in COVID-19 can be a

touchstone to determine whether class innovation is possible. The possibility of facilitating class innovation is also being shown in the process of overcoming the difficulties encountered in the online learning environment of various class innovations attempted in face-to-face classes. Attempts to convert traditional English classes centered on TPR (Total Physical Response) to TVR (Total Virtual Response) and the use of Global Culture Network in English classroom to overcome the difficulties of communicative language teaching were identified as examples. Lastly, there is concern that COVID-19 will deepen the learning gap according to the socioeconomic status of students in the form of information gap.

Through the challenges and responses to COVID-19 in English language teaching in Asian countries, changes have occurred in schooling, and new challenges associated with these changes have emerged. First, there is a change in the teaching methods of teachers. The possibility has been shown that class innovation, which was attempted in traditional face-to-face classes but did not make any progress, can be promoted in an all-encompassing online learning environment. However, it is unclear whether these changes will be sustainable after COVID-19. Therefore, efforts are required for the sustainability of change in teaching practice at classroom levels.

Teachers and students have been experiencing changes as they have experienced COVID-19. A number of negative factors such as corona depression, decrease of academic standard, widening learning gap, and lack of social skills were pointed out. However, the possibility of changes in English language teaching and learning at the school level brought by teachers who have led to educational innovation and the self-directed learning experience of students that can change the one-way teaching method show new possibilities for change for the future education. It is worth noting that this possibility leads to sustainable change of Asian teachers of English through collaboration with colleagues as change facilitators.

Another significant change that has occurred to Asian teachers of English is the discovery of teacher identity as a continuous professional learner. The possibility of continuous professional development has been suggested through the acquisition and use of IT technology for online classes and collaboration with colleagues. In the future, establishing an ecosystem to be sustainable in connection with teacher education within countries and cross countries is needed.

Lastly, in the process of applying IT technology to education, the private and government collaboration experiences have been made. This is an area where the role of the private sector and the government needs to be re-established in the future.

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(Received May 30, 2021; Revised August 20, 2021; Accepted September 18, 2021)