



Cambridge Assessment
English

Research Notes

Findings of the Action Research in ELICOS Program 2020

Issue 81

August 2021

ISSN: 1756-509X



**Cambridge Assessment
English**

Research Notes

Issue 81/August 2021

Guest Editors

Professor Anne Burns, Professor of TESOL, University of New South Wales

Sophie O'Keefe, Professional Development Manager, English Australia

Senior Editor and Editor

Siân Morgan, Senior Research Manager, Research and Thought Leadership Group,
Cambridge Assessment English

John Savage, Publications Assistant, Research and Thought Leadership Group,
Cambridge Assessment English

Typeset in the United Kingdom by Abound Creative

Research Notes: 81

CONTENTS

2 Editorial

3 Action research: Transformation in the first year of a pandemic
Anne Burns

8 Professional insights into the journey of changing from a classroom teacher to an online teacher
Kirsty Phease

17 Scaffolding presentation skills for an online EAP program
Paul Williams

28 Examining learners' roles in blended learning modes: An opportunity for enhanced engagement
Ashley Starford

40 Implementing and comparing online delivery methods in reading and writing activities
Kerrie Beros and Peter Higgins

52 Video vs written feedback on writing
Enrico Chiavaroli

67 Teachers' attitudes to moving online quickly
Jennifer West and Rebecca Matteson

Editorial

Welcome to issue 81 of *Research Notes*, in which we present six papers from the English Australia/Cambridge Assessment English Action Research in ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) Program.

In her thought-provoking introductory article, Professor Anne Burns discusses the notion of transformation and how it relates to action research (AR). She reflects on how the Covid-19 pandemic has led to unexpected transformation in education at institutional and personal levels for teachers and students expecting something quite different in 2020/2021. She compellingly concludes that a tolerance of ambiguity is necessary during the messy business of transformation in order to allow new insights to emerge.

This year's cohort of action researchers had to respond flexibly to accommodate the need for social distancing. The process of transferring their teaching and training from the classroom to online is captured in the descriptive and reflective papers presented here.

Kirsty Phease's plan for giving in-class support for teachers had to be adapted to something else entirely. She adopted a pragmatic approach, providing support to teachers, many of whom were unsure with educational technology, as and when they needed it. She found that building a bank of bite-size, shareable multimedia training worked best in the emergency remote teaching environment.

Paul Williams wanted to prepare his students for giving an oral presentation in an online environment. When the systematic scaffolding required for developing language skills proved to be problematic in emergency remote teaching, he used student feedback to develop authentic task-based activities that allowed students to collaborate in online lessons. The result was greater task engagement and more peer support and self-correction.

Ashley Starford's original plan was to focus on students particularly 'at risk' of disengagement in their English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing class. However, the pandemic prompted him instead to focus on the engagement of *all* students, as the move to online learning was new and potentially disruptive to the whole class. The study investigates whether students preferred written or screencast feedback on their writing.

Kerrie Beros and Peter Higgins originally intended to compare blended and traditional approaches to reading and writing, but with the onset of Covid-19 decided to shift their focus to various online delivery strategies. The rich suite of annotation tools at their disposal, and collaborative platforms designed for content creation, enabled them not only to monitor progress, but also to observe both writing process and product.

Enrico Chiavaroli also focuses on online feedback on writing. The switch to online teaching gave him the opportunity to compare student reaction to written feedback given in Cycle 1 of his study to feedback given with screencasting software in Cycle 2. He found positive responses to the screencast medium as well as a decrease in the number of errors, and signals possible future areas of inquiry for feedback using this method.

Jennifer West and Rebecca Matteson's original plan was to study teachers' attitudes to blended learning and prepare them for a transition to a new learning system. However, the pandemic meant they had to revise their focus to exclusively online teaching. Their account of teachers adjusting to the new experience of teaching remotely and their willingness to adapt to changing circumstances exemplifies the tolerance of ambiguity cited by Anne Burns in the introductory article, and is a testimony to the resilience of teachers generally.

We hope that you will enjoy this edition of *Research Notes*. Many thanks to our contributors who made this special edition possible in an unprecedented year.

Action research: Transformation in the first year of a pandemic

Anne Burns University of New South Wales

Introduction

The theme originally chosen for the 2020 Action Research in ELICOS Program was blended learning – a thoughtfully targeted and interesting topic, given that more and more institutions and teachers in the Australian ELICOS sector were being asked to mix modes of program delivery. However, as the year began and the Covid-19 pandemic began to overtake what had initially seemed to be a perfectly reasonable and 'normal' area for research, transformations in thinking and practice became urgent and inevitable.

In this short introduction to the articles in this issue, I explore the notion of transformation and how it relates to action research (AR). I also briefly consider how the participants in the program both modified their own practices as teachers and also their own learning about themselves as practitioners. I also consider in what ways the Program itself needed to transform in order to continue to operate.

Transformation

The term transformation can raise images of a sudden and dramatic change or realisation – a kind of 'road to Damascus' enlightenment. However, from a learning perspective, Jack Mezirow's theory of transformation (1991), developed from his work with adult learners in the 1970s, envisages it as a more gradual and profound process, cognitively situated in a significant cultural and social environment. Mezirow (2009:22) states that 'transformative learning may be defined as *learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change*' (emphasis in original). He also sees transformation theory as constructivist, in that the way people interpret and reinterpret their experiences, and the mindsets they construct from them, lead to changes in meaning-making and learning. Transformational changes are social as well as cognitive in that they are achieved through reflection and discourse with others.

Transformation thus relates to the adjustment of perspectives from which people view their current learning situations and occurs through different types of changes: psychological (changing one's understanding of oneself), convictional (reframing one's belief systems), and behavioural (changing one's actions and lifestyle).

Mezirow (1994, 2009) argues that the most significant learning occurs as a result of critical reflection on premises about oneself. From empirical studies on transformational learning, he proposes various phases that are shown to occur (Mezirow 1991:168–169). These are listed below with a brief explanatory gloss:

1. *A disorienting dilemma*: a situation where what one believed or took for granted previously no longer holds. The dilemma may be challenging or uncomfortable but is a catalyst for transformation and learning.
2. *Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame*: disorientation leads to self-examination, with potentially uncomfortable emotional dimensions, as you attempt to connect past experiences with the current dilemma. A transformation in perspectives begins to occur, where you begin to understand that your perspective may not be the only one from which to view the situation.
3. *A critical assessment of assumptions*: past assumptions are reflected upon more comprehensively and subjected to critical review. As you come to understand that previous assumptions were perhaps wrong or misguided, it becomes possible to accept new information and insights. This creates a transformation in perspective as a more unbiased view of past beliefs develops.
4. *Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change*: interaction in the social environment leads to greater understanding that a disorienting dilemma or change may have caused others to adapt too and that new mindsets are forming.
5. *Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions*: a process of finding new ways to operate begins to occur and you start exploring alternative ways to relate to colleagues, students and others in your teaching and learning context.
6. *Planning a course of action*: gaining deeper understanding that previous assumptions and beliefs may have been misdirected leads to planning new courses of action and considering strategies to learn more about dealing with problems or situations. This, in turn, leads to developing different perspectives, involving new participants, and expanding previous roles and relationships.
7. *Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan*: as plans begin to get put into action, further transformational learning takes place. New learning and different perspectives continue as you consider what is needed for change to take place. The work and effort involved is where real learning occurs.
8. *Provisionally trying out new roles*: through enacting plans, you adopt new roles and explore their effectiveness. Exploration is critical as it leads to greater understanding of changes and whether they are successful. Transformation goes beyond just learning about something; it means experiencing, understanding and enacting new ways to operate and to learn.
9. *Building confidence and self-competence in new roles and relationships*: gaining confidence in the new behaviours, roles and relationships you are developing for yourself helps to further transform beliefs and understanding. Confidence leads to a greater sense of self-competence and agency, where you make your own decisions based on reflection and deeper understanding. In this way you can continue to practise this transformative cycle.
10. *A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspectives*: the new learning provides a strong basis for transformed perspectives that can create a different mindset and way of operating on a daily basis.

The Covid-19 pandemic created the conditions for enormous educational change around the world. Not only did it dramatically reconfigure what could be regarded as a normal 'classroom', it focused attention on what media and methods could meet the challenging situation where a majority of teachers around the world became physically separated from their students. It drove educators to transform previous assumptions and mindsets about how teaching and learning should take place and laid the ground for innovation and creativity in ways that had not previously been envisaged.

As readers of the articles in this issue will discover, the teachers involved in the AR in ELICOS Program had to reconfigure their ideas about blended learning and were catapulted into a new environment of exclusively online learning. In most teaching centres this change occurred with very little notice and with very little preparation time for adapting materials, activities and assessment processes (see for example, Matteson and West, this issue). Teachers were required to draw much more expansively on their technological skills, at whatever level they were, to teach their students. For some teachers this was a daunting and anxiety-provoking challenge, while for others it meant extending their existing knowledge and skills in new directions (see Phease, this issue). Moreover, their students were often located in different contexts, some still in Australia but many offshore (see Chiavaroli, and Williams, this issue). While some students had chosen to study at a distance, others had decided to return home. Others had not been able to return home quickly because of restrictions on leaving the country, and had found themselves having to remain in Australia for longer periods than were originally planned. Thus teachers were faced not only with very different teaching situations from before, but also with the psychological and emotional impact on themselves and their students (see Starford, this issue). As Higgins and Beros state in this issue, for the teachers in this Program, in so many ways the 'research focus shifted to the study of various online delivery strategies'.

Action research and transformation

The processes of AR, which are emergent and dynamic as practitioners progress through cycles of change and new understandings, also mesh with the notions of transformation outlined above. In this respect, Kurt Lewin's (1947) theoretical concepts of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing capture the transformative learning that takes place. Lewin is sometimes referred to as 'the father of action research' because of his use and development of this term in his sociological work on group decision-making, and organisational change management.

Unfreezing refers to an acceptance of some kind of loss and the beginning of a process of exploration. Loss occurs when assumptions about a previous situation no longer hold and participants in the social context are driven to seek alternatives. This creates the experience of moving into liminal or transitional spaces, which can cause discomfort and resistance. Participants usually confront two kinds of resistance deriving, firstly, from taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions in the personal and the larger social environment; and, secondly, from an inner resistance to the uncomfortable process of change. *Changing* means wandering in and exploring an uncertain space. Participants must grasp for solutions to the new circumstances, which requires experimenting, and also potentially failing and retrying, to reach satisfactory new values and accepted ways of operating. *Refreezing* refers to gaining collaborative and accumulated new learning that can (re)form an alternative world view. From an organisational perspective, this process requires group discussions in which individuals experience others' views and perspectives, and begin to adapt their own to achieve new values.

The action research Program and transformation

This kind of transformation and change was also necessary in the way the Program could be conducted under the new conditions of a 'disorienting dilemma'. The teachers participating in the Program always come from different states in Australia, and fly into Sydney to attend the workshops. While the first of the three workshops held annually was still held face-to-face before the situation worsened, it quickly became clear that it would not be possible to continue as before. The first decision that needed to be taken was whether the Program could proceed at all¹. Some of the original participants decided they could not continue under the new circumstances, while two other sets of participants who had not previously been involved agreed to join and conduct their research, even though that would mean beginning later in the process. The second and third workshops where the teachers could collaborate with me and English Australia needed to be online. This meant renegotiating the structures of these workshops, not only to re-establish different kinds of roles and relationships within the group, but also to experiment with new formats for presentations and interactions.

Some of the major changes we introduced involved:

- contacting the new participants individually online to welcome them and discuss how they would begin their research
- making online contact with each of the continuing teachers about their individual projects, to discuss if and how they believed they could proceed and to help develop their revised ideas
- then holding a short initial online meeting of an hour with all the teachers to introduce the new participants and to briefly introduce the changes in the way the Program would proceed
- holding the second and third workshop over two mornings instead of a whole day and providing several breaks during each session, so that participants could recharge physically and mentally
- continuing to provide one-on-one sessions for individual projects if the teachers indicated they needed them.

One other significant change related to the third workshop, which in the past had been held the day before the English Australia conference, so that the teachers could share their findings as they moved towards concluding their research, and rehearse and get feedback on the presentations they would do the next day. The third workshop continued to cover these areas, but in 2020, these presentations were not held as part of the (online) conference. Instead they were held a few weeks later as separate sessions offered for 90 minutes each over two days. During this time three teachers each presented their research. This new format worked in our favour as there turned out to be a larger national, and even international, audience and the teachers could take more time describing their research and answering questions.

It was gratifying to find that these changes seemed to have worked well for the teachers in this online format. One commented: 'I'm glad I didn't drop out of the Program as it has provided a sense of continuity and I can feel like I am still accomplishing something during this time', while another stated: 'It has been a very intense period for me over the last five weeks, but I have always looked forward to the sessions and workshops'.

1 I would like to acknowledge both English Australia and Cambridge Assessment English for their willingness and enthusiasm to keep this Program going in 2020 and beyond.

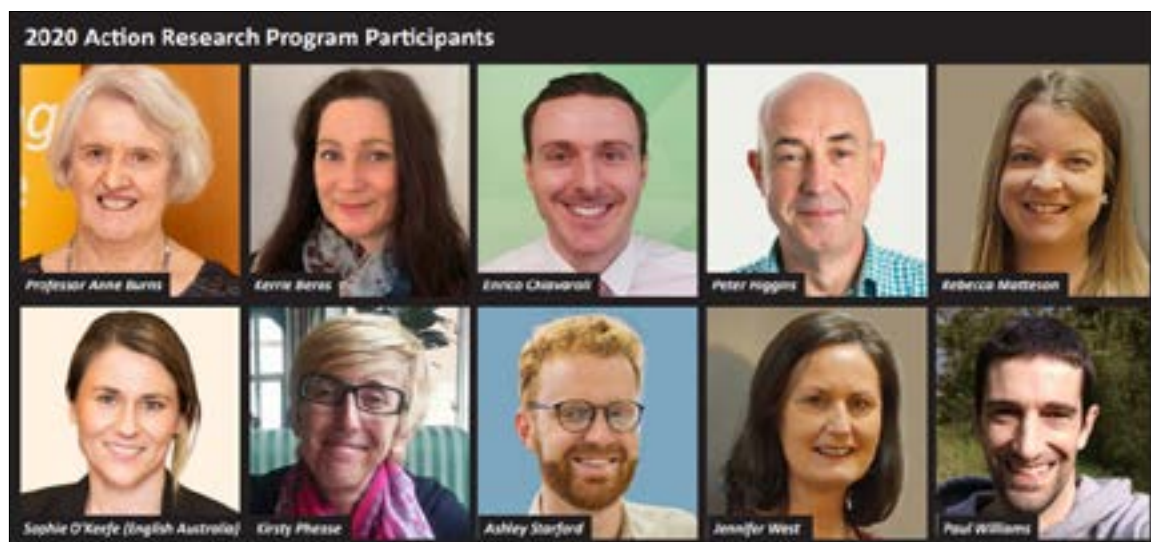
Conclusion

Educational learning that is truly transformative involves a loss of what has been, a letting go, a sense of 'no turning back' in a crisis. It involves creating a new world view, and constructing a form of creativity that can be for many participants a sequence of 'death and rebirth' of their beliefs and values. Transformation is not a linear but a complex, chaotic and unpredictable process with an uncertain and volatile beginning, middle, and end. Like AR itself, it requires 'ambiguity tolerance' from those involved as new insights emerge, become reshaped, and deepen.

The teachers involved in the 2020 Program demonstrated considerable tolerance of an ambiguous and unpredictable environment, where their usual modes of interaction with their students were disrupted and their prospects for continued employment were at stake. Throughout it all, as the articles show, they maintained a focus on the needs of their students and the effectiveness of their pedagogical practices, rather than on the technology they were forced to use. They are to be congratulated for continuing to pursue their commitment to researching their teaching situations for the benefit of their students and their own professional development. It is to be hoped that readers of their accounts gain new insights to bring to their own experiences during the first year of this pandemic.

References

- Lewin, K (1947) *Field Theory in Social Science*, New York: Harper & Row.
- Mezirow, J (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J (1994) Understanding transformation theory, *Adult Education Quarterly* 44 (4), 222–232.
- Mezirow, J (2009) Transformative learning theory, in Mezirow, J and Taylor, E W (Eds) *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 18–31.



Professional insights into the journey of changing from a classroom teacher to an online teacher

Kirsty Phease Hawthorn-Melbourne English Language Centre, Melbourne

Context

In March 2020, Covid-19 turned our industry upside down. In the space of two weeks, my workplace, Hawthorn-Melbourne English Language Centre (HELC), went from being a large English language centre that had face-to-face classes with General English, Academic English, school and bridging students to a completely online school. My role as Senior Teacher for Blended Learning changed from in-person support for teachers, many of whom were unsure and uncomfortable with educational technology, to something else entirely.

At the time of this change, the HELC teaching staff were predominantly teachers with decades of classroom teaching experience and a widespread scepticism of educational technology. And while the teaching staff rose to the challenge of learning the skills they would need to become online teachers in this emergency remote teaching environment (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond 2020), it soon became clear they would need a different kind of training and support from the school's senior staff to help them navigate new anxieties and challenges. In this new context my attention rapidly turned to how this information, support and training needed to be reframed and delivered. My action research (AR) project changed quickly from how I could provide teachers with in-class and live support to identifying what our teachers needed, when they needed it and how it should be delivered.

My project

While my main research question was identifying the teachers' training and support needs, it was also important to understand their contexts and perspectives. This improved understanding would then drive the interventions I would pursue.

My research questions

To better understand what our teachers were experiencing in this adaptation to online teaching I embarked upon the first stage of my AR by working with five teachers, individually, as collaborators. I interviewed these five teachers in a series of half-hour semi-structured (Zoom) interviews over a period of approximately three months. I wanted to see what I would learn from the interviews and which direction they would take me, but started out with three general lines of questioning.

To that end, the initial interviews started with the three questions below. The question shown in **bold** was my primary research question, but I planned to remain open to each participant's answers to all three questions when considering the path of the interview process.

- What personal observations are you as a teacher making about this transition to online teaching?
- In your opinion, what is and isn't working?
- **What training and/or support do you need?**

Figure 1 shows that each participant's answers in their initial semi-structured interview formed the basis of the guiding questions in the four following interviews. After completing the five interviews with each participant, the recordings were coded to identify common themes and responses. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, with the first round starting in March 2020. They were conducted remotely using Zoom, with all participants agreeing to be audio recorded.

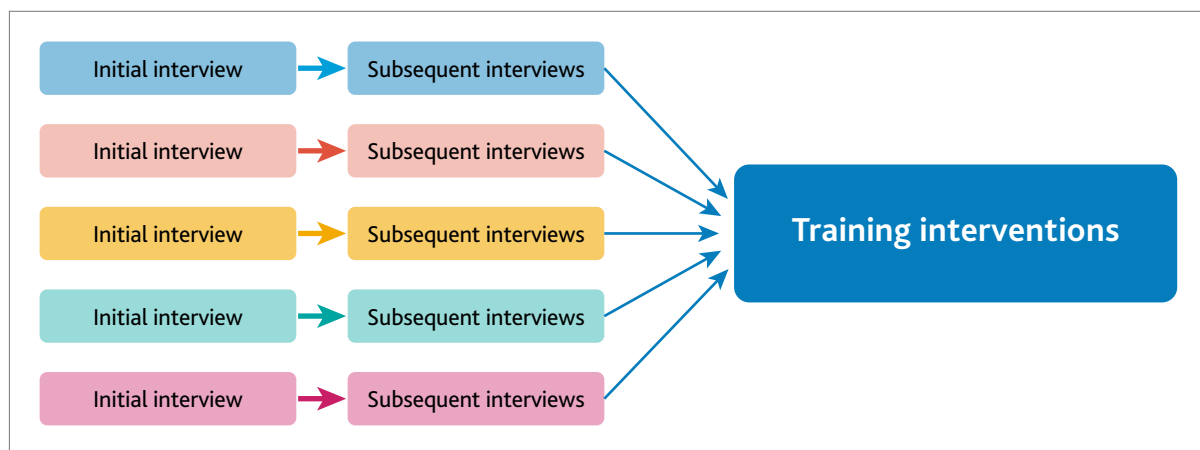


Figure 1: The interview process

The participants

The profiles of the participants were as follows:

1. A female teacher aged 55–65 who had worked as an English Language teacher at HELC for 20+ years. This participant identified herself as someone who had not widely used or pursued educational technology in their teaching up until this point. She identified with the 'emergency' aspect of emergency remote teaching and saw it as an undesirable but necessary change.
2. A female teacher aged 55–65 who had worked as an English Language teacher at HELC for 20+ years. This participant identified herself as having been open to the use of educational technology in the classroom in her previous teaching. She judged herself to be curious about and interested in transitioning to emergency remote teaching, but unsure as to how it would unfold.
3. A female teacher aged 55–65 who had worked as an English Language teacher at HELC for 20+ years. This participant identified herself as having actively avoided efforts to engage her in education technology training up until this point. She viewed herself as someone who could be open and enthusiastic about developing education technology skills now that the need was clear.
4. A female teacher aged 55–65 who had worked as an English Language teacher at HELC for 20+ years. This participant identified herself as someone who had made unsuccessful attempts at using education technology up until this point. She acknowledged a sense of anxiety around the use of educational technology

in the classroom, and after the first two weeks of emergency remote teaching took an unpaid period of leave (five weeks). A final two interviews were conducted when she returned to teaching after this period of leave.

5. A male teacher aged 35–45 who had worked as an English Language teacher at HELC for 5–10 years. The participant identified himself as someone who saw the benefits and potential of educational technology but had rarely found himself in a position where he used them. In the middle of this AR process, this teacher transitioned into a team leader position where he became responsible for assisting in the coordination of a group of teachers in addition to his teaching role.

Processes and findings

Over the course of the five interviews, individual issues arose for each participant. As expected, the context, perspective and response to emergency remote teaching varied for each participant. The individuality of their responses and the semi-structured nature of the interviews led to a variety of topics being pursued and discussed. However, several topics and issues emerged as key areas of concern or discussion across all or most participants.

A sense of surprise that initial lessons went well

'Week one went surprisingly well' [Participant 1].

'I couldn't imagine what it would look like. Then you do it and it makes sense ... it's surprising' [Participant 5].

'I was really surprised. It went really well' [Participant 2].

A sense of surprise and/or relief that the initial online lessons had not encountered more problems was evident among all the participants. Even among those who had experienced some initial technical difficulty or awkwardness there was still a sense of surprise that their classes had proceeded quite well.

A recognition of the additional time needs in online teaching

The issue of time emerged for most participants over the course of the interviews, with several of the participants coming to similar realisations at different points in the interview process. One of the first time-related issues to emerge was the perception that considerably more time was needed on their part to plan and prepare for online teaching than previously in face-to-face teaching.

'I know people who are spending 14 hours a day looking at their screen ... planning, preparing, meetings, marking' [Participant 1].

'I used to be able to get what I needed in 10 minutes ... because I know the course and I've taught it so many times ... It takes so long to find new material and put it on Moodle one at a time' [Participant 3].

'You need to have everything open and ready [on your computer] before you start, just in case. It takes a long time, but you need it' [Participant 2].

A second time-related issue that presented itself to the teachers was how they divided up and used the lesson time. In the first and second round of interviews a few of the teachers observed that lessons could not be delivered in the same blocks of time as they had been in face-to-face teaching.

'I think both teachers and students have this mindset to have a class in the same format timewise as before ... two hours, a break, two hours ... but really it has to change' [Participant 1].

'After the first day I was just exhausted ... they were very passive ... and just wanted to listen to me ... but I can't do that anymore. Day two was better ... I gave them exercises to do by themselves on Moodle' [Participant 4].

'This time I gave them things to go off and do by themselves ... it worked much better' [Participant 3].

Finally, a number of teachers raised the issue of time in relation to the students' differing expectations of how available an online teacher and manager should be.

'I had one [student] who messaged me on Saturday night and asked to do some extra speaking exam practice' [Participant 3].

'I had to make them wait. I didn't want them to think it was OK to message me on weekends like that' [Participant 4].

'I've noticed that they email and ask for help straight away. They don't try by themselves like they normally would ... but email straight away' [Participant 5].

A sense of avoiding being perceived as technologically incompetent in the current climate

There was a sense among some of the participants that their requests for technical assistance were being monitored by senior staff and that these requests could negatively affect their professional reputation.

'I don't like to ask in the meetings [as] I don't want to take up everyone's time ... they'll think I'm old and don't know what I'm doing' [Participant 1].

'Some of us have been here for a long time ... they know who we are ... we're not used to all this technology ... we're expensive for them' [Participant 4].

Seeking one-to-one help with specific technical questions

At the end of each interview I always made time to ask the participants if there were any questions they had about their online teaching that I might be able to assist them with. This access to a private tuition or practice session seemed to be a rewarding aspect of the interviews for most of the participants. They frequently had questions to ask about online teaching and learning that they had written and kept until their next interview with me. On more than one occasion a participant scheduled an earlier interview so as to have an opportunity to ask these questions.

'I need to see it happen in real life as if you are observing a lesson ... I want to see more examples of how to do it ... videos of how teachers do it ... it's reassuring' [Participant 1].

'I'm more than happy to do these [interviews] with you ... it gives me a chance to ask you what I'm missing' [Participant 3].

These group findings led me to a number of general conclusions regarding the nature of the training and support that would be needed to most effectively support the teachers in this emergency remote teaching environment.

Due to the medium of the interviews (video conferencing with Zoom), many of these conclusions revolved around the role of instructional video guides in training and support.

1. Videos and screen-shares in the video-conferencing Zoom meetings were more useful and successful than email or phone calls at modelling the step-by-step necessities of a technical task. Teachers with less online teaching experience or confidence were able to see and duplicate a series of visual instructions more easily and confidently than through written or spoken instructions.
2. Videos needed to be short and model one specific task. Teachers were more willing to invest their time in watching a training video if it demonstrated one type of task and could be viewed and replicated in a very short period of time.
3. Pre-recorded video instructions on how to tackle a technical process could be quickly and easily emailed to teachers to support them in crisis moments when they perceived a need for outside help.
4. Training needed to be delivered at exactly the moment the teacher needed it and not before. Teachers were often unwilling to invest significant time in extra professional development in an environment where skill gaps were not known until the moment a technical problem arose.
5. In the transition to emergency remote teaching, teachers were often overwhelmed and over-worked and were unable to engage with professional development offerings at the times they were offered. These professional development opportunities needed to be readily available and made easily accessible to teachers when the time came that they were ready to extend their skills beyond survival mode.

Intervention

My personal findings, outlined above, led to three interventions to better support teacher's training and support needs in the transition to remote emergency teaching for a medium to large English language teaching centre.

Mini-tech workshops

In an effort to provide support to teachers as they upskilled to online teaching I offered a daily drop-in clinic over Zoom. The drop-in clinics (referred to as 'mini-tech workshops') allowed teachers to sign up to a half-hour session at a time of their choice for a Zoom meeting where they could ask any educational technology question they wished without any pre-determined focus. The workshops offered the opportunity for teachers to ask a question or watch an example of a technical process being performed and then practise it themselves in a controlled and supervised environment. These workshops were advertised as a maximum of 30 minutes to highlight to the teachers that the time needed to engage in the workshop would be minimal. The workshops were available every day from Monday to Friday and offered on alternating morning and afternoon schedules to give every teacher a chance to sign up. The sign-up process was via a Google doc, so that last-minute sign-ups allowed teachers to ask questions about issues that were affecting them on that day. In addition, the workshops were restricted to a maximum of three teachers in one workshop on any one day. The short, flexible and rolling nature of this scheduling allowed teachers to get technical skills training in a responsive and protected environment where questions of concern could be addressed as they emerged in a 'safe' space.

The Appendix highlights that, for the teachers who attended at least one mini-tech workshop between April and June 2020, one of the key drawcards was the relative privacy of these workshops. By limiting the spaces available on any one day it ensured that teachers were never in a position where they had to reveal a skill gap in front of a

large number of colleagues. My personal observation was that the questions teachers brought to the workshop were overwhelmingly of a 'small' nature. By this I mean teachers often signed up to a workshop with the goal of asking quite simple yes/no closed questions. The opportunity to ask these questions in an environment where they 'weren't bothering' people struck me as a common theme.

Inspiration videos

To address the teachers' desire to upskill, I began to produce a series of videos featuring one content creation or content sharing method per video. These videos were emailed to all teaching staff across Navitas English Australia (the parent organisation of HELC) twice a week and marked as 'Inspiration Videos'. Observation and discussion had led me to understand that teachers were initially overwhelmed by the need to acquire the necessary survival skills for emergency remote teaching and that all teachers came to a level of comfort with these survival skills at different times. Therefore, further training needed to be offered in such a way that teachers could access it when they became ready to upskill beyond these basic survival skills. By labelling them 'inspiration videos' it removed the obligation for teachers to watch them every time they were released, but to access them at a later date when they felt ready for further training.

These videos were always less than eight minutes in length, with a deliberate eye to making each skill video a manageable timed task that could be fitted into a busy teaching schedule. The relatively short length of these videos and their centralised storage after release meant they were also an invaluable source of support to teachers who found themselves needing to upskill quickly in one particular area in a short amount of time. Over the period of my research, I personally re-sent 67 short videos after their release dates to individual teachers who emailed me asking for a demonstration of a technical skill that was needed for a lesson that was to be taught that week. The ability to email a video demonstration to those teachers immediately proved a great source of support for the teachers and a time-saving tool for myself.

Assessment webinar as a series of short videos

From almost the beginning of the transition to emergency remote teaching, anxiety surrounding how assessments would be delivered was an obvious area of focus for supporting the teachers and assisting in lesson delivery. After five initial weeks of online teaching I delivered an Assessment Training webinar for teachers which covered all the necessary information regarding assessment. The first five weeks of online teaching had shown the senior staff at HELC that teachers would need guidance in locating assessments, making them accessible, maintaining academic integrity, supporting delivery and marking, and providing appropriate instructions to their students throughout the process. The webinar covered all of these areas and was by necessity a long webinar containing a great deal of information. However, because I designed the PowerPoint used in the webinar into a series of standalone videos, with each video modelling the on-screen instructions for a different stage of the assessment process, these videos could be used for ongoing support.

In the 10 weeks that followed the Assessment Training webinar, I emailed 22 individual videos in response to requests for reminders or support on one or more of the steps in the assessment process. As with other areas of teaching, I observed that teachers were unable or unwilling to invest the time or working memory to technical processes that were not immediately necessary for a lesson that week. Providing email video instructions for the assessment stage that teachers needed at that exact moment assisted them in more confidently and successfully delivering online assessments.

Final summary

Looking back on the interviews and the successes and uptake of the interventions offered, I have several personal conclusions on effective teacher training in an emergency remote teaching environment. First, training opportunities need to be discrete, focused and bite-sized. Training uptake and utilisation are better when teachers know from the outset that time commitments will be limited. Second, video demonstrations of computer processes are more effective and more immediately successful than email or phone explanations. Even for teachers who originally seek out a phone or email explanation, the power of video to be re-watched and shown to students if necessary is soon appreciated. Third, opportunities for teachers to guide the training and steer it towards whatever is immediately necessary for them at that stage of the syllabus is greatly valued. In a transition to emergency remote teaching a recurring theme of not knowing what is needed until the moment it is needed appears again and again. In a more global sense, this research has helped frame a new development and delivery in all our PD resources. Building a bank of bite-size, shareable multimedia training resources has become the standard that we apply to a range of teacher support and development initiatives.

References

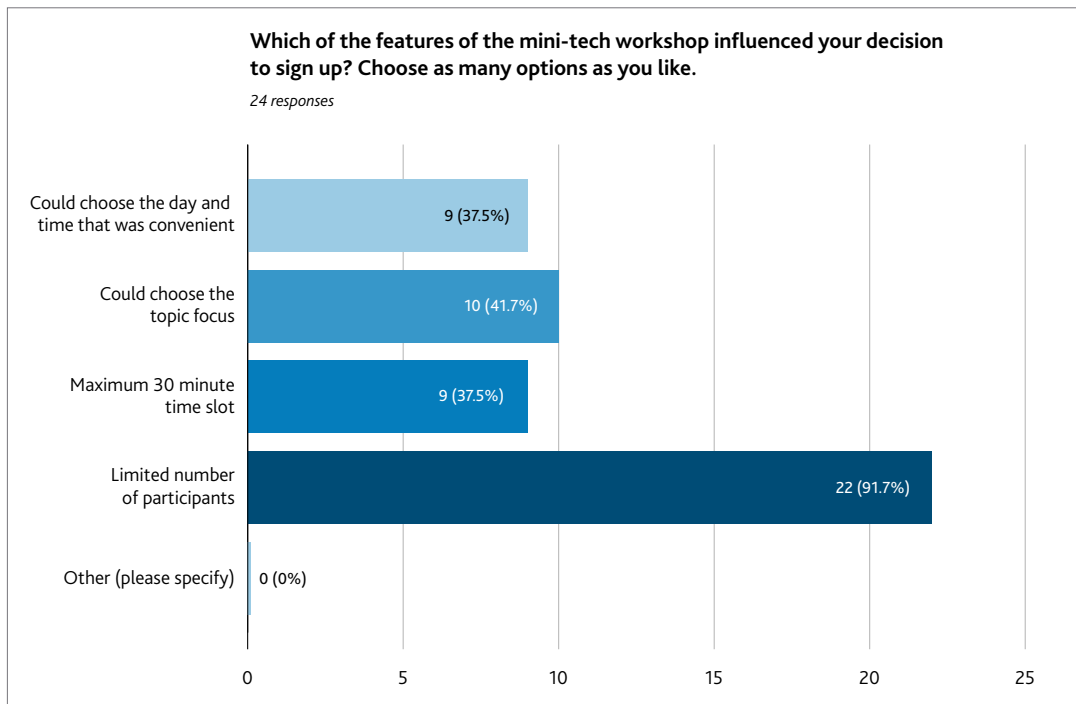
Hodges, C, Moore, S, Lockee, B, Trust, T and Bond, A (2020) The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning, *Educause Review*, available online: er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Link to virtual colloquium presentation

Please click the following link to view the author's presentation at the 2020 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://youtu.be/IC1fevKUQaw>

Appendix: Teacher feedback on reasons for attending a mini-tech workshop

Does this form of professional development opportunity differ from other professional development opportunities you currently have access to (e.g. meetings, webinars)? If so, how?



24 responses (Responses related to limited number of participants are marked with *)

* A more personally tailored meeting to address issues needed.

* Yes. individualised help.

Yes, it's excellent because it has immediate application to my daily work.

Yes it is relevant and beneficial to teaching online as it gives practical help/ideas.

You are an excellent presenter and hit the right optimistic and encouraging note.

* Absolutely: an opportunity to get undivided attention and focused, specific, hands-on help is invaluable.

It has been the most useful professional development for me personally, because it was specifically geared for my needs as a teacher. Moreover, this help came to me when I most needed it. Thanks very much Kirsty!!

It feels more easily accessible, and the time slots are better suited to our workplace

Kirsty caters specifically to what I need in the near future, so its not something that I will be using obscurely some months hence.

* Meetings are personalised and informal.

Yes I can immediate help on very specific questions. Very valuable!

Yes. More targeted.

I never have time to attend the one hour training sessions. Getting what I need for what I have to do right now is all I can manage right now.

* The good thing about Kirsty's drop-ins is that you can ask for the specific information you need and then leave – you don;t have to sit through training that not relevant to you.

I like to be shown exactly what I need to do for my lesson and my class.

* You can usually get a mini tech workshop to yourself so you don't have to worry about taking up other people's time to get what you want.

The meetings are too long. I spend enough time in front of a screen. I want to get in and out.

Kirsty's good at getting to the point and giving you ideas that save you planning time.

In the workshop I attended Kirsty videoed the steps I needed to take to set up the Padlet and then emailed it to me. So I have a video of exactly what I need to do next time I want to do it.

These little workshops are easy to fit into a teaching day. Long meetings are too hard to fit in.

If I can get help with the little things that I need every day like switching screens I feel much more confident.

I can't learn things too far in advance and the webinars are never at the right time for me.

I like having the little videos. I can watch them and then I can show it to the students as well.

I need to practice without anyone watching. I can practice in these mini workshops and it doesn't matter if I make a mistake.

Scaffolding presentation skills for an online EAP program

Paul Williams Central Queensland University, Melbourne

Introduction

This paper begins with an outline of the specific context in which my action research (AR) took place, including student profiles and the rationale for undertaking the investigation into my own teaching practice. Due to the significant changes made between the two iterations of my research, the first section focuses on efforts to increase students' confidence and the importance of reflection and responding to student feedback. The second section shifts to approaches for increasing collaborative activities and integrating task-based learning into online lessons, including insights gained from analysing student interaction and discourse.

My teaching context

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at CQUEnglish has three levels ranging from a B1+ to B2+ on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). This research project focused on the EAP3 program, a Direct Entry course that offers a pathway into the Master of Engineering and Master of Business Administration courses, requiring an IELTS 6.5 or equivalent for entry. Due to disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic, adapting EAP courses to the online medium while teaching was a significant challenge I, like many teachers, faced in 2020.

A common assessment task in Direct Entry and Higher Education courses is the ability to plan and deliver a presentation, which may be more challenging online for some students. While I felt confident in my ability to teach writing and the receptive skills, listening and reading, I was less confident about my approach to teaching speaking online. As a result, I chose to focus on scaffolding activities to prepare students for presenting an oral presentation in an online environment.

By reading articles, reflecting on my teaching practice and considering the students' context, I arrived at two primary research questions:

- a) How can scaffolding activities increase students' confidence in preparing for an online oral presentation?
- b) Which activities do students prefer in preparation for their presentation?

Participants

The 11 students involved in this AR project were from eight different countries including Myanmar, Bangladesh, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Columbia, and were studying both in Australia and overseas. Several students were working part-time while completing the course, but they all maintained a high level of motivation and enthusiasm to learn English throughout. The first class took place between May and July, while the second class ran between August and October 2020. Most of the students were on a pathway to a Master of Engineering, while others were on a pathway to courses in Linguistics, Information Systems, and Artificial Intelligence.

My research focus

My approach was influenced by several principles and beliefs about teaching online, the process of ongoing reflection, and the AR process, including:

1. English language teaching pedagogy applies as much to the online classroom as face-to-face classes.
2. Communicative approaches can be applied to online lessons including task-based lessons.
3. Variety increases engagement.
4. Students should have some control over what, when and how they learn.
5. Improved confidence is a by-product of effective learning.
6. Students are empowered by support from peers and teachers.
7. Learning and teaching objectives should align to assessment indicators.

The term scaffolding was applied in its broadest sense for the purpose of this research project, meaning 'the support provided to learners to enable them to perform tasks which are beyond their capacity' (Richards and Schmidt 2002:466). This would include any actions of either the teacher or students that are intended to build confidence in delivering an online presentation. Unlike rigidly adhering to a prescribed syllabus, this requires a more needs-based approach that involves students in the planning and delivery of lessons, adapts to individual differences, and encourages student autonomy and collaboration.

Research design

My understanding of AR developed as the research was being undertaken, partly because of limited planning time, but also by learning about the importance reflection played in the process. Schön (1983) defines reflection-in-action as an ongoing process of thinking while acting, and throughout the plan, action and observe phases, I felt like I was constantly reflecting. However, at the end of a cycle, my reflection-on-action was more deliberate and focused. The model that arose for me was an adaptation of Kemmis and Taggart's model emphasising the growth that occurs between cycles as new plans were informed by reflection on the previous cycle (1988, as cited in Burns 2010; see Figure 1).

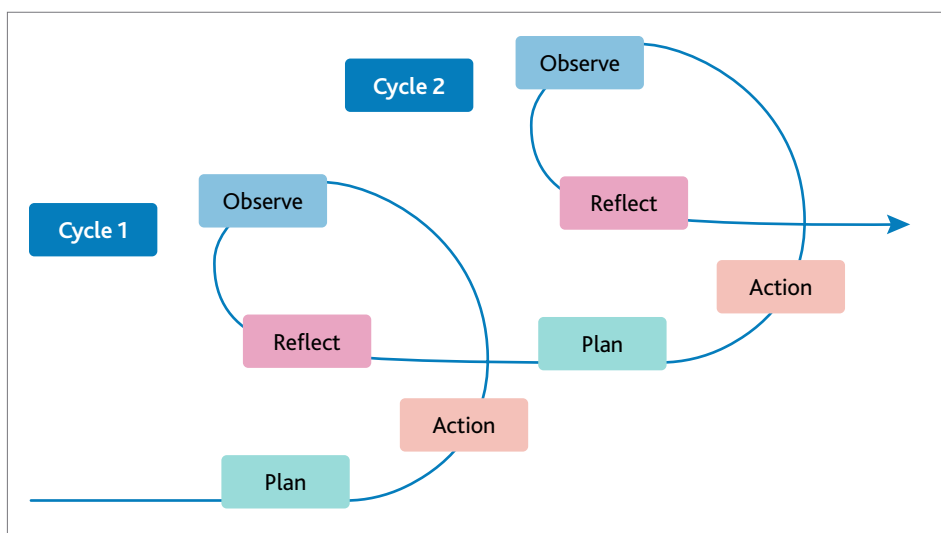


Figure 1: Iterative cycles of the AR process

Data collection

Data was collected through surveys, a teaching journal, student reflections and video recordings. To guide my approach to scaffolding, I developed a survey to assess which of the course assessment indicators the students were most confident with in six key areas: communication, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, pronunciation, and digital literacy skills. For each skill area, there were more specific indicators that aligned with the summative presentation assessment, which were verb phrases similar to the 'can do' statements found in the CEFR (see the Appendix). Students were asked to rank their confidence on a Likert (five-point) scale from 'not confident' to 'very confident'. The original indicators were adapted slightly to ensure students were familiar with the terminology and some indicators were combined or separated for further clarification. The students took an average of just under eight minutes to complete the survey and there was a 100% response rate.

My teaching journal and class notes were used to record my experiences in the classroom, taking note of my feelings, thoughts and observations. Although it was more sporadic than I had planned, they were important for reflecting on the AR process.

I used reflective activities at the start of some lessons to gain more insight into students' preferences and personal goals. For example, students were given prompts in a shared Google document:

- (a) By the end of the week, I want to be able to ...
- (b) I need to improve on my presentation skills by ...
- (c) My teacher can help me by ...
- (d) I would like to work together with other students by ...

However, these prompts changed from week to week in order to ensure some variety and reduce fatigue that could arise from repeating the same task on a weekly basis. Finally, several tasks were recorded for the purpose of providing constructive feedback and analysed to reveal patterns of communicative interaction.

Findings

The first iteration

My findings gave me greater insight into the needs and preferences the students had for online learning. The results of the survey (see Figure 2) highlighted their confidence in digital literacy in comparison to vocabulary, grammar and discourse (i.e. their language skills). When discussing the results with students informally after class, two students stated that academic language presented a significant challenge because their prior learning was limited to General English classes. While most students were confident with their pronunciation, for one student this was an area of concern. One limitation of the survey was that there were differences between their self-reported survey data and my own perception based on observations throughout the course. When interpreting the data of the survey, I realised that their perception of confidence in a skill may not reflect their actual proficiency in that skill.

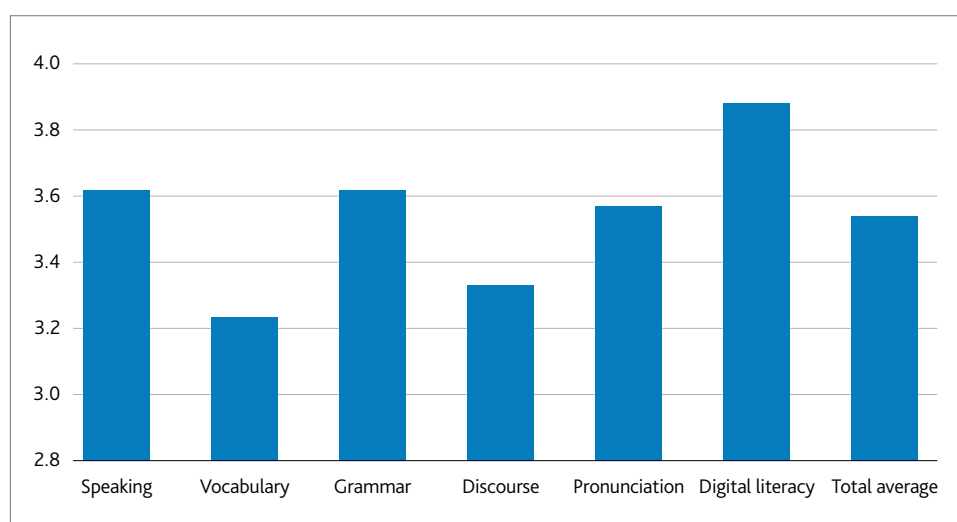


Figure 2: Comparison of perceived confidence by skill category

A common theme in my journaling was that lesson materials did not clearly highlight a process for developing an oral presentation. There were elements of product, process and genre approaches identifiable in the prescribed teaching materials, but organising activities and scaffolding tasks into a coherent approach relevant to student needs was a challenge.

'They need to work on oral citations, make sure their use of signal language and discourse markers creates a flow of information for their cohesion and coherence of the content delivery. They also need to consider the value of their information ... however, all of that depends on their level of motivation, personal goals and priorities.'

The grammar and discourse features presented were useful, but often required careful selection from different sections or chapters of the textbook. The seminar and presentation lessons were interspersed throughout the course rather than scaffolding language skills to progressively build on each genre discretely.

By reorganising, supplementing and adapting materials, I integrated skills such as describing visuals, designing PowerPoint slides, integrating sign language, and emphasising key points with communicative tasks and activities. The process for preparing the final assessed presentation also had to be coordinated with students' progress in conducting research and writing their Research Report. The complex nature of long-term project-based assessments was highlighted in one of my journal entries:

'One student is behind on his ongoing assessments, he promises the world, but doesn't follow through. Another student is well ahead, has a very analytical approach and has excelled in all other aspects of the course.'

Students' responses to the reflection activities contributed to my planning and enabled me to redesign activities to match their learning preferences. The word cloud in Figure 3 illustrates the frequency of each categorised response for preferences and priorities that students identified. Several students requested activities that were language-related, such as using signposting language, academic vocabulary, comparative sentence structures, and cautious/hedging language. Students also used the word 'practice', regularly recognising the need to build automaticity through regular skill development. The other important insight was their desire to collaborate with others in the class through peer feedback and as one student put it 'sharing my own difficulties and asking suggestions on my research'. The same student also requested other students turn on their cameras during lessons, explaining that the isolating experience of life during a pandemic was impacting on her need for social connection.



Figure 3: Word cloud – frequency of issues raised in student reflections

The second iteration

After a break from teaching EAP3 classes, I began preparing for a new class. I wrote a journal entry listing several ideas for potential collaborative online tasks including:

- New idea for a Social Enterprise, start up or invention
- Proposing a change to a city, university campus or public space
- Prepare a video for an advertisement

- Create a poster to explain a project
- Design a community project that could become a charitable event
- Share an important object and create a story that combines them
- Bring a friend or housemate to class and translate a partner's ideas for them
- Bring a book, take a quote out of it and link the ideas together
- Create an online comic or cartoon
- Write a blog as a class

The first task I chose challenged students to utilise resources from around their home to build a bridge that could hold at least 1kg. Initially, I considered pairing students together, but I decided to make it an individual task to reduce complexity. Unfortunately, removing the need for student interaction resulted in poor time efficacy as the language produced in the one-hour lesson was minimal. Nevertheless, the positive aspects of the activity were that it combined creative thinking and realia in an online environment. Below is a transcription of one student presenting his model to the class, exemplifying effective use of collocations, technical and academic vocabulary (underlined in the example).

Student 1 (S1): The structure will distribute the weight through all the columns, and to keep together the structure we use this very organic mass, which is made of corn flour. You can see its yellow corn flour. Ah, what else? Of course, the bolts and all the structure is made of pasta so ... only concern is about the weather. If it rains too much it may fall.

After reflecting on the first task, I reconsidered the potential for collaborative activities to allow for co-construction of discourse and increase students' communicative competence.

For the following task, students were asked to create an advertisement for any product of any company they wished. I allowed students two hours to complete the task, working as a group of four students. The wide scope for possibilities encouraged discussion about the medium for creating the advertisement, their contribution to the task and approach to working as a team. The activity was recorded on Zoom, and notes were recorded for post-task feedback focusing on their interaction, turn-taking and language use. Some of the benefits of this authentic task design was the increased language complexity, natural interaction and descriptive language use. Students self-corrected, clarified information and provided suggestions on both content and language to improve communication. In the samples shown below, Student 3 provides suggestions for the product they wish to advertise while Students 1 and 2 clarify meaning, use a variety of question forms and assist in the brainstorming process.

Task 2

S1: ... I was thinking, maybe, a product that can be massively sell, but um

S3: We can sell drinks (/drɪŋz/)

S1: Rings?

S3: Or maybe a food item, maybe. Which is less oily because it has a strong message

S1: Sorry, I didn't get it. What was that?

- S3: We can sell a new food items
- S1: Oh ok. Right. Good! Something like that
- S3: Like any items which is not cooked in oil. Like some chips. Like, what is it called?
- S2: So you are talking about hygienic right?
- S3: Because you know, it also has a message with it, like if we are selling chips not cooked in oil so maybe it decreases the chance of cholesterol in the body. It has a message also.
- S2: But we should provide a rating
- S3: Multigrain chips maybe.

Later in the task, students chose to advertise a mobile phone and highly technical terms were used drawing on students' existing knowledge. At the same time, language development arose through debate over word order and form.

- S2: Yeah exactly. Certification, not certification ... it's certified IPX10. It's different between certified, yeah.
- S3: Wait wait, you can write IPX10 certified
- S1: Ok, IPX10, certified. I'm just getting rid of this little space here. Ah, IPX10 certified. Perfect!
- S2: Gorilla glass 6 protection
- S1: I'll put this really small here. What did you say? Gorilla glass 6 what?
- S2: 6 protection or you could write protected.
- S2: Gorilla glass 6 protection
- S1: I'll put this really small here. What did you say? Gorilla glass 6 what?
- S2: 6 protection or you could write protected. It will be more good. Protection is common word.
- S3: Protected by gorilla glass
- S2: Yeah, it will sound better, he he.

Students were invited to respond to a post-task survey to gauge their feelings about the task and provide feedback on whether they enjoyed the activity (see Table 1). Although not statistically significant, the feedback was reassuring in that students saw the benefit in the task and were clearly enthusiastic to do similar tasks in the future.

Table 1: Post-task feedback from Task 2

Survey question	Average rating
I enjoyed the advertising task	100%
I felt confident to communicate during the activity	97.5%
The task helped me to improve my English	95%
I would like to do more tasks like this in the future	100%

One limitation of the advertising task was that because students had complete autonomy, this resulted in disproportionate contributions to the task. One student remained silent for long periods of time while the other three students shared ideas more fluidly.

For another task, students collaborated on a poster presentation. This brought together many of the previously cited benefits, but also encouraged more equal contributions by providing clearer directions on the expectations for each student to prepare and present a part of the poster. The students' growing familiarity with task-based learning may have also resulted in the higher levels of negotiation, collaboration, engagement, peer correction and encouragement they provided to each other as they developed their poster on Google Slides. In the sample below, the students clearly understood each other despite the short phrases, incomplete sentences, grammar errors and vague language, because their contextual clues and shared understanding allowed them to focus more on the task and the language they needed to communicate complex ideas efficiently.

S1: Ahh, what can we do with this table? Font, white, yep.

S3: Testing of ... , hey S1, you haven't written in production, or haven't written in shipping?

S1: No we say, expected first production batch for January, so ...

S3: What about production then?

S1: No, that's production, so shipping have to happen after that date.

S3: And, what about prototype?

S1: Ahh, that's the testing is it?

S3: Ok testing, ok ok. Cool!

S1: We can move it a little bit ... ok?

S2: I edited the words in the outline.

S1: Perfect! It looks better, way better now, and we can move it a little bit up, like that. Everything looks way better now.

S3: Oh, that really looks like a poster now man!

S1: Now we have something!

The use of words such as testing, production, prototype, batch and shipping are examples of technical language related to the field of engineering. Aside from the benefit of activating their interlanguage, their motivation to complete the task also improved student satisfaction. One student, referring to the need for collaboration, commented: 'I really like this exercise because it helps us with our general communication skills, and it is important for our work'.

Feedback and conclusion

In terms of my first research question, I found that systematic scaffolding of learning objectives or language skills in emergency remote teaching contexts is problematic. Integrated student reflection activities provided me with valuable feedback on student learning preferences. These activities inspired the inclusion of authentic task-based activities that allowed students to collaborate in online lessons. Their engagement with the tasks encouraged peer support and self-correction, allowed for creative expression of ideas, facilitated academic and technical language to express complex ideas, and increased motivation.

When preparing for a presentation, students clearly preferred activities that were collaborative and focused on fluency and building confidence. Opportunities to socialise in an online class were valued by the students even though the assessment task was an individual task. As a result, I learned that task-based lessons that involve students sharing ideas, offering suggestions, interacting informally and providing feedback are likely to be appreciated by students in online EAP programs. Although I was not able to respond to all the suggestions, preferences and requests provided by students, following this research I believe that reflection-on-action that occurs after a course can allow teachers to bring about iterative changes.

This research project highlights how openness to feedback, change and creative inspiration led to an increased use of collaborative learning tasks and task-based learning methodology to the benefit of the students. Many of the observations made are not generalisable, but the findings highlight why adapting to the needs and preferences of students is likely to be more successful than a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching delivery in ELICOS courses. As an aspiring AR practitioner, I have learned a great deal about myself and the students I was teaching by reflecting on my lesson planning, interactions in the classroom, approaches to engaging students, and strategies for adapting to the online learning environment.

References

- Burns, A (2010) *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A guide for practitioners*, New York: Routledge.
- Council of Europe (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J and Schmidt, R (2002) *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, London: Pearson Education.
- Schön, D A (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Link to virtual colloquium presentation

Please click the following link to view the author's presentation at the 2020 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://youtu.be/i7cFATVqKeo>

Appendix: Self-perception survey of student confidence in speaking skills

1) Speaking

How confident are you in your ability to ...	Not confident			Very confident	
a) deliver a professional presentation with detailed information	1	2	3	4	5
b) present evidence from academic sources	1	2	3	4	5
c) describe visual information such as graphs and diagrams	1	2	3	4	5
d) develop a persuasive argument	1	2	3	4	5
e) support an idea with relevant detail	1	2	3	4	5
f) respond to questions from an audience	1	2	3	4	5

2) Vocabulary

How confident are you in your ability to ...	Not confident			Very confident	
a) use academic vocabulary to communicate about common university topics	1	2	3	4	5
b) describe technical information using vocabulary relevant to previous studies	1	2	3	4	5
c) use vocabulary accurately including word meaning and form	1	2	3	4	5
d) demonstrate a wide range of vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
e) explain ideas using academic and discipline-specific collocations	1	2	3	4	5
f) use words and phrases to avoid repetition	1	2	3	4	5

3) Grammar

How confident are you in your ability to ...	Not confident			Very confident	
a) use a wide range of noun phrases	1	2	3	4	5
b) use relative clauses for definitions or explanations	1	2	3	4	5
c) report information using active and passive forms	1	2	3	4	5
d) hedge opinions using adverbials or cautious language	1	2	3	4	5
e) use conditional structures to explain and speculate	1	2	3	4	5
f) use a range of sentence structures to indicate causes and effects	1	2	3	4	5

4) Discourse

How confident are you in your ability to ...	Not confident			Very confident	
a) develop a clear argument systematically	1	2	3	4	5
b) support an idea with appropriate evidence	1	2	3	4	5
c) use transition, sequence and signposting language effectively	1	2	3	4	5
d) use referents to increase cohesion	1	2	3	4	5
e) simplify complex information from a source text	1	2	3	4	5
f) present technical information in academic style and register	1	2	3	4	5

5) Pronunciation

How confident are you in your ability to ...	Not confident			Very confident	
a) articulate consonant and vowel sounds clearly	1	2	3	4	5
b) pronounce common words accurately	1	2	3	4	5
c) adjust stress and intonation to highlight important information	1	2	3	4	5
d) use connected speech features to increase the rate of speech	1	2	3	4	5
e) communicate fluently for an extended period of time	1	2	3	4	5
f) pause appropriately to increase intelligibility	1	2	3	4	5

6) Digital literacy

How confident are you in your ability to ...	Not confident			Very confident	
a) use computer applications to prepare for a presentation	1	2	3	4	5
b) reference information from online research	1	2	3	4	5
c) contribute and engage in online conversations	1	2	3	4	5
d) utilise digital technology to reflect on learning progress	1	2	3	4	5
e) coordinate multiple applications to deliver a presentation	1	2	3	4	5
f) apply digital technology to create an engaging audio-visual presentation	1	2	3	4	5

Examining learners' roles in blended learning modes: An opportunity for enhanced engagement

Ashley Starford Swinburne Academy, Melbourne

Introduction

Engagement is an ongoing issue in ELICOS classrooms. Unengaged students rely disproportionately on teacher input and struggle to work collaboratively, which is evidenced by attendance, class participation, homework, and independent learning outcomes. This disengagement, as I have observed, is most common in my centre's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes where course content is more 'academic' than in lower-level courses. Before Covid-19 closed the campus, my action research (AR) project sought to identify blended strategies unengaged (henceforth 'at risk') students would find engaging. This would have involved careful monitoring of 'at risk' participants. Covid-19 has since transitioned students and teachers to ongoing online learning, making it difficult to focus purely on the 'at risk' as online learning was a new experience for all students; therefore, the project changed to focus on the engagement of all participants in my classes, though some observations relating to 'at risk' participants are still drawn upon in this report. This AR identified blended learning activities and strategies participants found meaningful and engaging during the emergence of online learning. It also analysed participants' experiences of effective blended learning activities, including independent learning.

Context and participants

Swinburne Academy offers courses in General English (GE), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and other university pathway programs. Participants in this project were EAP students. EAP classes comprise three levels (3, 4, and 5) and are 10 weeks in duration. Each level is split into A and B modules which are five weeks long. Upon completion of EAP 5, students can enter undergraduate and most postgraduate courses that require an IELTS score of 6.5.

One EAP class (comprising three five-week terms) was involved in this project. The first term was in March–April, the second in April–May, and the third in June–July. In addition to researching during these three terms, I also performed five interviews with students after they completed their participation in this research project and their ELICOS studies. These aimed to see what impact my courses had on their current studies and to check in about their experiences with said studies. Participants were recruited from the EAP 4B class which I first taught in March. This formed a key justification for their participation as I was then able to follow students through to their graduation from the entire EAP course, adding value from both a researcher and participant perspective. Besides, students at the 4B level are 15 weeks from entering their post-ELICOS courses where they will be required to work independently and engage in independent learning skills as a key component of blended learning.

Eighteen students took part in the project (see Table 1 for the participants' profile). The participant pool was diverse with most students being in their early to mid-twenties and holding a Bachelor's degree as their highest academic

achievement. Post-ELICOS, most students progress to Bachelor's or Master's degrees, with others going on to diploma level. The participants in this project had studied English for 1.5 to 12 years and 7 of the 18 participants had repeated ELICOS courses at some stage at Swinburne Academy. Lastly, I understood an 'at risk' student to be an individual who has repeated a course, is in danger of not passing their course, has poor attendance, and is notably disengaged in their course and their learning.

Table 1: Participants

Participant information	
Number of students	18
Age range	18–37
Countries of origin	Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, Jordan, Taiwan

Research focus

The following research questions were developed to guide the research:

1. What does a *meaningful* blended learning activity consist of?
2. What blended activities do 'at risk' students find *effective*?

A clear definition of *meaningful* and *effective* was necessary. Shuell (1986:429) contends that while it is a teacher's responsibility to engage students in activities that result in the achievement of desired learning outcomes, the student's role is more important in this process. Shernoff (2014:11) states that *meaningful* activity is a product of accumulated engagement, while Biryukova, Yakovleva, Kolesova, Lezhnina and Kuragina (2015:147) contend that an *effective* experience is based on attending to individual students' needs, meeting learning objectives, cultivating interactivity, and promoting the teacher as a facilitator as well as the instructor. I considered these definitions and presented participants with a holistic definition of *meaningful* that was clear and student-centric: a *meaningful* activity is useful, important, engaging, and is one that students can practise to produce what is required.

Participants were also given a contextual definition for *engaging* and *effective*. Tomlinson (2010:33) asserts that if an activity is *engaging*, students are fully immersed. Hammond (2008:102) also notes *engaging* activities as immersive, whereby students 'participate fully'. Bushman (2001:14) states an *effective* activity is when desired curriculum goals are attained, whereas de Dios Martinez Agudo (2014:60) believes effective experiences require a 'high degree of involvement'. I simplified *engaging* to something pleasant, attractive, and motivating. Similarly, *effective* was presented as something successful in achieving improvement and practice in an English skill. I thought it was necessary to present these definitions to the participants in this project to obtain the most indicative and reflective responses. *Engaging* and *effective* are often subjective terms to native speakers and ELICOS teachers alike, so I felt it was prudent to provide these definitions even though the language level of the participants in this project was between upper-intermediate and advanced.

I created a range of data collection instruments that highlighted student experiences with engagement and meaningful and effective activities (Appendix 1). A background questionnaire (Appendix 2) was the first data collection instrument used in this AR. Next, I asked participants to complete reflections using narrative frames.

This meant participants were asked to complete a story based on their experiences and reflections in class (Appendix 3) with a few prompts (Barkhuizen 2014:13). A semi-structured interview was designed to understand what materials and resources students use when they learn independently, while an open interview was developed to assess how engaging, meaningful, and effective the blended learning activities provided to the students in our centre's curriculum were. To be clear, centre-facilitated independent learning materials are those available on Canvas (Swinburne Academy's learning management system). These materials aim to provide students with extra online learning and practice opportunities with a particular focus on reading, grammar, listening, and writing skills. Students are encouraged to use these resources as optional homework and extra practice is not mandated as such.

Research design and data collection

I had 15 weeks to follow participants, so I planned my research promptly as most of the participants in this AR would be completing their ELICOS studies after this project. The research began in Week 1 and participants were asked to complete a questionnaire detailing their background information, providing quantitative data about their age, nationality, duration of study in Australia and their native country, length of study at Swinburne Academy, and the number of repeats (if any) of ELICOS courses at the academy.

The background questionnaire questions were mostly closed questions obtaining demographic information about nationality, age, participants' first language, length of time studying English in Australia and home, number of repeated classes, and highest educational qualification. These questions were designed to obtain quantitative data about the participants in this research project and to best understand who these participants were in the context of their experiences of studying English. There was one question asking participants about their post-ELICOS study plans, time spent studying English outside of class, and if participants felt well-supported outside of regular class hours. The last question was an open question asking students what they thought a meaningful activity was. I asked this question so I could delve deeper during the reflections and semi-structured and open interviews and provide a lead-in for the project's next phase.

After the first questionnaire, participants were asked to complete a fortnightly reflection throughout the project. These were designed as narrative frames that aimed to help me better understand participants' engagement with meaningful activities. Participants were given the contextual definition mentioned previously for meaningful blended learning activities to elicit the best possible insights into their experiences. Using Barkhuizen's (2014:13) approach, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences by completing a set of prompts. In Term 1, these were collected in Weeks 1, 3 and 5. In Term 2, these reflections were collected in Weeks 2 and 4. In Term 3, participants continued to complete fortnightly reflections in Weeks 1 and 3 before a final, summative version was given in Week 5 (Appendix 4). I tweaked this version of the reflection because I wanted participants to respond more broadly to their overall experience, and I hoped to observe some changes in their reported experiences.

In Term 2 (EAP 5A), I wanted to understand participants' independent learning practices as they form an element of blended learning (Hofmann 2018). This was completed through a semi-structured interview whereby participants were asked about what activities they completed outside of class (Appendix 5). Participants were then asked to reflect on how meaningful, engaging, and effective they felt those tasks were. These interviews were conducted via video call on Microsoft Teams.

In Term 3 (EAP 5B), through an open interview on Microsoft Teams, I sought more evaluative responses from participants about their experiences with centre-facilitated independent learning materials. At Swinburne Academy,

in addition to regular instruction, students across all levels have access to a variety of independent learning materials. These are available through our centre's Learning Management Systems and are labelled under 'Guided Learning', 'Online Resources' and 'Online Programmes'. Guided Learning allows students to practise grammar independently through a variety of interactive platforms. It also offers students the opportunity to practise reading and listening comprehension tasks independently. Online Resources provides students with a series of links to learning services our centre has subscriptions with and covers listening, reading, and grammar. These are generally more interactive services designed to make independent learning engaging and feature familiar resources, such as those from the British Council. Online Programmes generally focus on more academic independent learning resources, covering reading, pronunciation, and grammar. Familiar titles such as Road to IELTS Academic are available to our students. While not mandated by our centre, teachers encourage students to use these independent learning materials in addition to the homework set by their teachers.

The task was scaffolded by asking participants about their overall ambitions around studying English (Appendix 6) in the hope that connections could be drawn between their preferred activities and their aspirations post-ELICOS studies. This interview was developed after I reviewed participants' responses to the semi-structured interview undertaken in Term 2, where it became clear that students preferred their own independent learning materials over the centre's. Thus, I had hoped to use this interview to make our centre-facilitated materials more engaging.

The final phase of this research project was a 'check-in' interview. The interview was designed to check in on participants' post-ELICOS studies. Other than to see how students were progressing in their courses after ELICOS, I wanted to know if any of the participants' experiences or encounters in ELICOS courses were benefitting them in their current studies, and how visible these effects were to them (Appendix 7). I was also interested in their experiences with effective, engaging, and meaningful activity post-ELICOS studies. For this data collection instrument, I interviewed participants who were still living in Melbourne and studying online. After a cursory catch-up, I asked about activities participants were doing well in, what they could be doing better, the extent to which they felt supported, their level of engagement in their course, and the extent to which their ELICOS studies had helped them in their present studies.

Findings

The participants were the first at Swinburne Academy to study English online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Generally, they found online learning to be a positive experience. This was not, however, reflective of their whole online experience, particularly at the beginning. When asked in the first reflection to respond to the statement 'it would have been helpful if ...', one student remarked 'following the current method is a waste of time because no effect is brought.' However, after 15 weeks, when asked to complete the prompt 'studying English online would have been better if ...', the same student said 'I think my online learning is very good and there is no need for improvement. My teachers give their students the best support and I appreciate it.'

I was interested to know how participants viewed meaningful activity. In the background questionnaire, I was surprised by participants' responses to 'what do you think a meaningful activity is?'. At this stage, they had not been given a contextual definition of meaningful, which did not occur until the reflections. My preconception was that students valued speaking above other skills. However, inductive coding of the questionnaire responses showed that only 33% of participants identified speaking-related practice as a meaningful activity, with writing (17%), listening (17%) and games (11%) also recorded. I also learned that students viewed meaningful activities as those which 'enhance an individual's learning'.

In their final reflections, I asked the students about their most engaging online learning experiences. In response, they highlighted their appreciation for relationships with their teacher in a novel learning environment (see Figure 1). One commented: 'what I enjoyed the most is connection and the support I got from teachers', while another said: 'the teacher has a sense of humour to make the classroom more active because online classrooms do not have too much interaction', and 'my engaging experience has been that our teacher is really motivated and my classmates are really friendly and helpful'. These comments surprised me as I had originally predicted that students would mention technology-based activities ahead of somewhat unexpected responses such as 'support' and an appreciation for positive student-teacher relationships. Interacting with other students was also important for the participants in this project: 'the experience of learning English on the Internet is special. In this process, what attracted me most was the teacher's humorous language and interaction with classmates.'

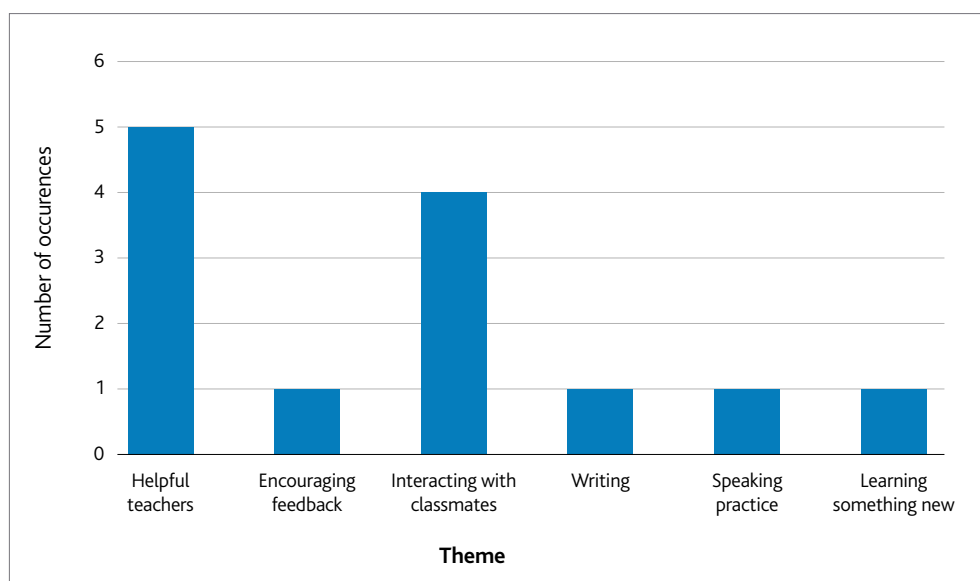


Figure 1: Participants' most engaging online learning experience

This project also focused on student-chosen independent learning activities. Inductive coding of interview responses found 58% of participants thought streaming videos was engaging – especially videos on topics related to learners' hobbies. One student remarked: 'when I watch cooking videos, I feel relaxed because I love cooking at home. I can also revise, and cement vocabulary related to food', while another noted dating applications, with 'we can meet some native speakers on there and can talk with them to improve our English'.

I wanted to understand how participants believed centre-facilitated independent learning activities could become more engaging. Many respondents said that they wanted to complete undergraduate or graduate studies in courses delivered in English as a result of becoming fluent in English. Conversely, one response eloquently mused on a desire for 'self-improvement, the building of knowledge and open my mind to new ideas'. Regarding improving engagement, responses ranged from predictable answers including a need for more interactivity, variety, and volume of activities, to a suggestion for more competitive activities. Inductive coding showed 25% of participants suggested more competitive activities to improve engagement, with one participant noting 'for me, a competitive edge is motivating'.

In the research project's final data collection phase, I checked in with five students after the completion of their ELICOS studies. Four of them had started postgraduate study and while two had decided to return home, all were

still living in Melbourne. Most of them reported that verbal communication and writing skills learned in ELICOS classes had helped them in their current studies: 'Group work, presentation skills, and speaking skills on Teams and in class are important. Reflective writing skills in addition to other writing skills have helped me with writing-related tasks in my master's course'. Somewhat surprisingly, all said they felt engaged. Importantly, three students reflected that more exposure to non-native accents would be beneficial in ELICOS classes to better prepare ELICOS students for the variety of English accents at Australian universities: 'I'm struggling to understand some of the lecturers whose first language is not English'. Perhaps most pleasingly was the appreciation shown by one student for being exposed to different cultures and ideas: 'ELICOS allowed me to understand culture easily (Australian) and exposed me to a variety of new ideas (veganism, the dangers of sharks for example) – ideas that I was not exposed to in Jordan'.

Conclusions and reflections

This AR project suggests online ELICOS courses have great potential to deliver effective, engaging, and meaningful experiences for students. Students were able to actively participate in a variety of in-class and independent learning activities and provide unique insights into a novel learning experience.

Furthermore, there existed a variety of activities students found effective, engaging, and meaningful which differed from those completed under 'normal', in-class instruction. Interestingly, gamification was not recorded by the students as an engaging blended activity. Rather, participants found helpful teachers and interactivity with other students as most engaging during the three terms of online delivery when this research was conducted. This may be because students missed being able to access 'normal' in-class experiences in the new learning landscape, or possibly because their language levels progressed from upper-intermediate to advanced, or from B2 through to C1 (and eventually C2) under the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001).

At the beginning of the research, I had assumed that 'at risk' participants would respond differently to others. However, the final reflection, that asked participants about their most engaging experiences, showed that 'at risk' participants' responses were consistent with their classmates'. A lengthier, more comprehensive study would help to differentiate the experience of 'at risk' students during online learning since this type of teaching and learning is still in its infancy, and assessing the efficacy of activities for 'at risk' students is complex. A key message from the research was that students' appreciation of assistance from teachers inside and outside class hours and classroom interactivity predominated. As a teacher, I learned that teaching, even during a pandemic, is not confined to a desk, laptop, or office. Maintaining strong relationships with students, even when face-to-face interaction is limited, is much more important.

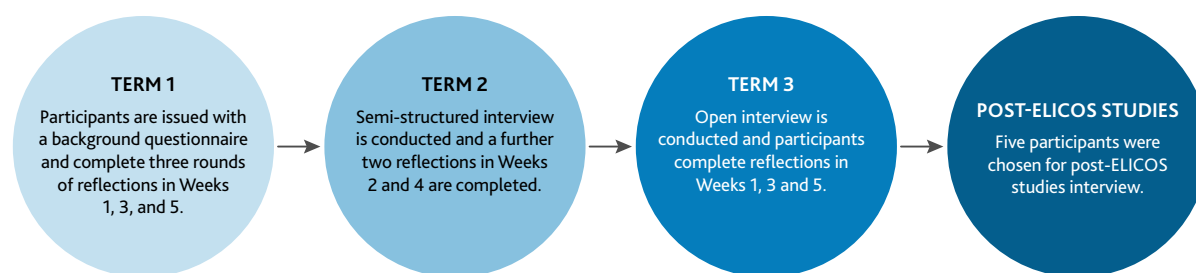
References

- de Dios Martinez Agudo, J (Ed) (2014) *English as a Foreign Language Teacher Education: Current Perspectives and Challenges*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Barkhuizen, G (2014) Revisiting narrative frames: An instrument for investigating language teaching and learning, *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics* 47, 12–27.
- Biryukova, N A, Yakovleva, S L, Kolesova, T V, Lezhnina L V and Kuragina, A A (2015) Understanding adult learners as a core principle of effective ESL-educators, *Review of European Studies* 7 (8), 147–155.
- Bushman, J H (2001) *Teaching English Creatively*, Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.
- Council of Europe (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hammond, J (2008) Challenging pedagogies: Engaging ESL students in intellectual quality, *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 31 (2), 101–105.
- Shernoff, D J (2014) *Optimal Learning Environments to Promote Student Engagement*, New York: Springer.
- Shuell, T J (1986) Cognitive conceptions of learning, *Review of Educational Research* 56 (4), 411–436.
- Tomlinson, B (2010) Engaged to learn – Ways of engaging ESL learners, *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 1 (1), 29–55.

Link to virtual colloquium presentation

Please click the following link to view the author's presentation at the 2020 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://youtu.be/h4hy6dB8rul>

Appendix 1: Research design scaffold



Appendix 2: Participant background questionnaire

1. Where are you from?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your first language (L1)?
4. How long have you studied English at Swinburne Academy?
5. Approximately how long did you study English in your country before coming to Australia?
6. Have you repeated any ELICOS courses (the English classes you attend) at Swinburne Academy?
If yes, how many times and which levels?
7. What is your highest level of qualification? Please circle.
 - a. Completed high school certificate
 - b. Bachelor's degree
 - c. Master's degree
 - d. Other (please specify) _____
8. What will you study after completing ELICOS studies at Swinburne Academy?
9. How much time do you spend studying English outside of regular ELICOS classes?
10. What materials do you use when you study outside of class times? Circle all that apply.
 - a. Materials my teacher distributes
 - b. Online materials on Canvas
 - c. Other online materials (e.g. YouTube videos, watching TED talks, online grammar exercises)
 - d. Other materials (please specify) _____
11. Do you feel well supported outside of classes?
12. Lastly, what do you think a *meaningful* activity is?

Appendix 3: Reflection (narrative frames) prompt

- 1) *What I found engaging was ...*

- 2) *It would have been helpful if ...*

- 3) *What I need is ...*

Appendix 4: Final reflection

- 1) Since I began studying English online, my *most* engaging (pleasant, attractive, motivating) experience has been ...

- 2) While studying English online, my *most* enjoyable experience has been ...

- 3) During my time studying English online, what I *did not* enjoy was ...

- 4) Studying English online *would have been* better if ...

- 5) When I studied English online, *I needed* ...

- 6) When it comes to studying English online, I recommend that ...

Appendix 5: Summary of a participant's responses to semi-structured interview questions

- 1) Outside of class, what activities or resources do you use to practice English?
 - *TED talks (provide a lot of knowledge).*
 - *Read novels in English (easy ones that are not too complex).*
 - *Talks with her Cambodian friend.*
 - *Watches animation / cartoons about English.*

- 2) Which of these do you find engaging (pleasant, attractive, you have fun doing them)? Why are these activities engaging?
 - *Cartoons are the most engaging – because they are interesting and funny, laugh, enjoy the time, it's easy, you can understand, attractive, the stories can be interesting.*
 - *Talking with her Cambodian friend – have their own opinions and discuss about contemporary issues, share positive views with her Cambodia friends happy times together.*
 - *TED talks: if they are interesting (i.e. about language, drawing, things she likes and related to her major)*
 - *Reading: good for quiet time.*
 - *Listens to music in English.*

- 3) Which of these do you find unengaging? Why?
 - *Not especially – these are enjoyable activities that she had deliberately chosen.*

- 4) Which of these do you find effective (successful in achieving the improvement and practice in an English language skill that you want)? Why?
 - *Talking with your Cambodian friend: she can hear her friend using English and therefore can practice listening, can hear another accent, uses dictionary, learns new words. Mutually beneficial, uses chat and makes phone calls and uses speaking and some dictation. Short chats.*
 - *TED talks: can learn a lot of new words, exposed to new accents, including British, Australian and American.*
 - *Reading books: the grammar is useful, helps her become more fluent and advanced.*

- 5) How meaningful (useful, important, you can practice and produce what is required) are these activities? How?
 - *Has had to adapt since the emergence of Covid-19, not as many in-class opportunities.*
 - *Cambodian friend: afford her the opportunity to develop a relationship.*
 - *Develop a positive mood.*
 - *Talks about family, teachers, classes, illness, food: everyday topics and is effective – especially since there are no classes now to talk about these things.*

Appendix 6: Summary of responses given by one participant to open interview questions

- 1) What is your greatest ambition after studying English?
 - *Reach the level of a native speaker across all skills.*

- 2) What do you want to do as a result of becoming fluent in English?
 - *Study or research in English, and in a working environment, especially in his part time job (wants one in customer service in an office, or as a kitchen hand or in a cafe), and also in his future job with a company (with a supervisor and clients).*

- 3) Reflecting on the materials found in Online Programmes and Online Resources, what do you think would make these materials more engaging?
 - *Rarely uses Online Resources, but frequently uses Online Programmes.*
 - *Group participation would make it more engaging and would like more competition with friends with tests. Believes the process of sharing experiences to be valuable, especially with listening. Believes it brings a level of excitement to the learning experience.*

- 4) Reflecting on the materials found in Online Programmes and Online Resources, how could these be improved?
 - *Instructions and tutorials would be useful for students: stated that instructions about Online Resources and Online Programmes would help students.*
 - *Feels that there should be encouragement to use these materials and some guidance on how they are useful and how they can be used with clear objectives and outcomes.*

Appendix 7: Summary of responses to check-in interview

- What are you up to now?
Homework, assessments, presentations, homework.
- What are you studying?
Master of Design.
- Where are you?
Melbourne, but returning to China in November.
- What are you doing well?
Writing – projects and reports (has four courses so lots of different writing tasks).
- What could you be doing better?
Reading (teacher feedback) and listening (to what the teacher says during the classes).
- Do you feel well-supported?
Yes, teachers send good feedback from emails, opportunities of Canvas to develop other skills. Student HQ also, Heidi.
- How are the activities outside of class?
Looking for references, reading opinions, questionnaires, collecting data. Teams and Canvas for talking with group members about assessments and other matters.
- Is your course engaging? Are you engaged?
Yes, she thinks so. Good feedback and good discussions generated in class. Finds PPTs are useful in-class and revision-wise.
- What does independent learning look like for you now?
Difficult for her because she is a new student learning the course content, but she did well in assessments. Homework and assessment preparation are difficult and too much homework!
- What are your teachers like?
Helpful with feedback, they are kind, enthusiastic, helpful, very careful and good listeners.
- How are they different from your former ELICOS teachers?
More professional about her major (about Design!). More specific knowledge, but her relationships with Design teachers were not as close as hers with ELICOS teachers. More details about assignments needed (more briefing), and clearer.
- Are the activities in your course meaningful?
Yes, finds them attractive. She pays more attention during the classes. Her mind has been opened and ideas have come up.
- What have been the most effective experiences for you post-ELICOS?
Writing skills and (they have led to her passing exams) after classes, she has felt more capable of handling the demands of the Master of Design Course.
- How has ELICOS helped you in your studies now? What are the main differences between your course now and when you studied ELICOS?
See above.
- Is there anything else you have not said that you would like to add?
*Difficulties: accents.
Relationships: some students have long-lasting relationships prior to the course.*

Implementing and comparing online delivery methods in reading and writing activities

Kerrie Beros RMIT English Worldwide, Melbourne

Peter Higgins RMIT English Worldwide, Melbourne

Context and research focus

RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) English Worldwide (REW) offers ELICOS programs for students on pathways to foundation, vocational and degree programs at RMIT University. The Advanced Plus program represents the highest-level offering for students who are proceeding to undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs. Successful completion of this course is equivalent to an IELTS band score of 6.5 which is a minimum requirement for RMIT university undergraduate entry.

This action research (AR) focused on the reading and writing macro skill components of the Advanced Plus course. These skills are closely integrated with group discussion activities that are designed to facilitate a deep level of engagement with opinion-style coursebook texts. The process has a strong focus on authentic academic skill development and refinement, preparing students for mainstream tertiary learning.

Our initial research proposal was to offer comparisons between blended learning strategies and traditional classroom approaches to integrated reading and writing skill development. That was subsequently adjusted to reflect the rapid transition by REW to an online delivery model brought about by the Covid-19 crisis. Since April 2020, REW has not delivered any content in a traditional classroom environment and so the research focus shifted to the study of various online delivery strategies.

Participants

We were allocated an Advanced Plus class to share for the duration of one course cycle. There were 15 students enrolled in the class (see Table 1 for a breakdown of the course participants' background information).

Table 1: Information related to course participants

Nationality		Pathway	
Mainland China	12	Engineering/Design	8
Saudi Arabia	2	Business/Commerce	4
Brazil	1	Science/IT	3
Study Location		Previous Weeks Enrolment at REW	
Onshore	6	> 20 weeks	5
Offshore	7	10–20 weeks	9
Transient*	2	Direct Entry	1

* Two students relocated offshore during the course

Research environment

The course was delivered over an accelerated nine-week period (200 hours) to meet strict mid-year university enrolment deadlines. The class commenced in the final week of May 2020 and concluded at the end of July 2020. This course offered students the last opportunity to meet the required level of English to enroll in their tertiary pathway in 2020.

The students worked from an online, digital form of an existing REW-authored and published coursebook (RMIT English Worldwide 2011a, 2011b). All the core course content was accessed through the Canvas learning management system (LMS).

Throughout the course, some students, particularly those located offshore, endured regular and sometimes significant disruptions to their connection to the class. Consequently, we were often compelled to adopt a more asynchronous approach to content delivery.

Research activity cycle

In each of three weeks during the course, students are presented with two opposing opinion-style texts based on the following topics:

- Week 2 – Globish – A new global language
- Week 3 – Conscription – Individual social responsibility
- Week 6 – Pandemic – Global health

Each topic aligned with a broader weekly theme and learning outcomes also utilised additional reading, listening and speaking activities.

During each activity cycle, the students read and annotated both texts and then answered exam-style comprehension questions. In small groups they discussed main ideas from the texts and made further notes related to the strengths and weaknesses of the respective authors' arguments. Finally, as a writing exercise using their text annotations and notes, they responded critically to both texts. This response was a single document, synthesizing the main ideas in a summary and then critiquing one or more of the arguments outlined in each text.

There were six basic stages in the activity sequence described above. A brief outline of these stages and variations we undertook in each of three research cycles are outlined below.

Stage 1: Vocabulary activities throughout the cycle

Four approaches to vocabulary acquisition and revision were included across all cycles:

- Quizlet, which is an online application targeting the collection and review of key vocabulary extracted from the texts during reading.
- Padlet, which is an online collaborative tool used principally for pre-teaching smaller sets of key vocabulary selected from the texts.

- Canvas LMS vocabulary 'meaning in context' activities based on key vocabulary and phrases from the texts.
- Teacher-directed activities requiring students to research meaning, form and function of key words and phrases independently and prior to reading.

Stage 2: Context setting prior to each cycle

Before engagement with all core course reading texts, we delivered several short activities that set the context for the main topic of those texts. These included shorter information-style readings, listening exercises and supplementary videos sourced online. Typically, the class would spend a full day in the early part of the week completing these preparatory activities. This stage was not changed across the three cycles.

Stage 3a: Reading and annotation of texts

We explored two basic approaches to text engagement as part of this research.

In the first cycle students accessed the reading texts in a non-editable PDF format in Canvas LMS. Students could download and print the texts or simply read them online. Written annotation was undertaken on the printed copy of the text or alternatively made in the form of typed notes in a separate document.

In the second and third cycles, students received both reading texts in an editable digital format. They were directed to create annotations within the editable document using colour highlighting and bold or italicised text. They were also encouraged to create comment notes in the document margin or embed text notes within the document.

Stage 3b: Completion of comprehension questions

After reading each text, students completed a set of comprehension questions. Students were provided with these question sets prior to commencing the reading task (Stage 3a), allowing them to further predict text content and inform the focus of their annotations.

While the Canvas LMS platform offers interactive modules for language and discussion activities associated with the course texts, they are limited in providing authentic exam-style comprehension questions and so we provided students with supplementary question sets that had been developed specifically for that purpose.

Stage 4: Discussion and analysis of text content – post reading

A thorough discussion of key ideas outlined in the texts followed the reading and comprehension activities. Students discussed, compared and adjusted their notes and initial responses to both texts. Discussion groups were provided with a set of topic question cards to assist in directing the discussion.

In Cycle 1, students engaged in a large group, teacher-directed discussion of the main and supporting ideas from both texts.

In Cycles 2 and 3, students discussed the texts in smaller breakout groups of three or four before returning to the main classroom for a larger group discussion.

Stage 5: Written critical response to the text

The practice of drafting and submitting writing using online tools had already been adopted in the traditional classroom environment at REW.

In the first cycle, students worked in small groups or pairs to plan, construct and type a summary that synthesized the main ideas of both texts. This was completed in an editable digital document. Students were given our feedback prior to planning and completing two discussion paragraphs based on main ideas extracted from the two texts. In each discussion paragraph the student outlines their position on the author's argument and then offers justification for that position. Our principal goal here was to scaffold the required structure of this writing genre prior to having the students work independently.

In Cycles 2 and 3, we encouraged students to work independently to produce both a summary and discussion of the two texts. The third cycle of writing was designed to mirror end-of-course exam conditions with some time constraints introduced. All writing in these two cycles was completed in a private channel accessible only to the student and to us.

Stage 6: Writing review and feedback

In each research cycle we adjusted the method of feedback and students were encouraged in all instances to review peer and teacher comments and where necessary make amendments to their original texts.

- Cycle 1 involved peer and teacher review using a standard correction code (RMIT English Worldwide 2009)
- Cycle 2 involved only teacher feedback through embedded written comments in the student's digital document
- Cycle 3 offered additional feedback in the form of an audio file, following guidelines presented and demonstrated by Richards (2019).

Data collection

Students were asked to complete two 10-question surveys, one at the conclusion of the second cycle in Week 5 (see Appendix 1) and another at the end of the course in Week 9 (see Appendix 2). In both surveys, we invited students to record their preferences for, and opinions on the value of, activities conducted throughout the course.

Between the two surveys, in Cycle 3, all the student activities and work undertaken in digital documents was captured and preserved. Metadata and editing timelines embedded within this content provided valuable qualitative detail related to the way writing was constructed as well as providing evidence of each student's attempts to re-visit and correct work based on our feedback. It also provided clear evidence of students' text annotation activities and preferences.

Findings

Survey 1 – Completed in Week 5

Students were asked to rate their preferences in relation to the staged activities undertaken in Cycles 1 and 2.

In regard to vocabulary acquisition, students showed a strong preference for the Quizlet application. They also indicated that they found value in activities involving teacher-directed independent research (see Table 2).

Table 2: Vocabulary acquisition – student preference

Activity	Mean score (/5)
Quizlet – collection and revision	4.9
Independent research and compilation in Teams	4.3
Padlet – collaborative collection	4.1
Canvas LMS 'mix and match' style activities	3.7

Students expressed a clear preference for working with editable versions of the course texts. They also embraced the process of annotation using a variety of techniques but with a preference for colour highlighting.

Discussion of the course texts often proved challenging because of online connectivity issues. Feedback in relation to optimal discussion group size was mixed with at least half the class preferring larger, teacher-led discussion forums.

Finally, students indicated a strong preference for working alone on all writing activities. They did, however, demonstrate a willingness throughout all the research cycles to work collaboratively on all of the activities, including writing, when we directed them to do so.

In general students sought teacher feedback in the form of embedded (written) feedback placed in their digital submissions.

Qualitative data derived from Cycle 3

In Cycle 3 students were free to undertake the reading and writing activities based on their individual preferences. Online collection of the students' work in digital document folios allowed us to closely analyse not only the completed output but also the processes that students had undertaken throughout the activity.

During reading activities, the use of colour in annotating the texts was very dominant (see Figure 1). Many students also underlined text and used the comments feature of the document editor to place annotations in the margins. Almost all students actively and thoroughly annotated both texts during the reading phase.

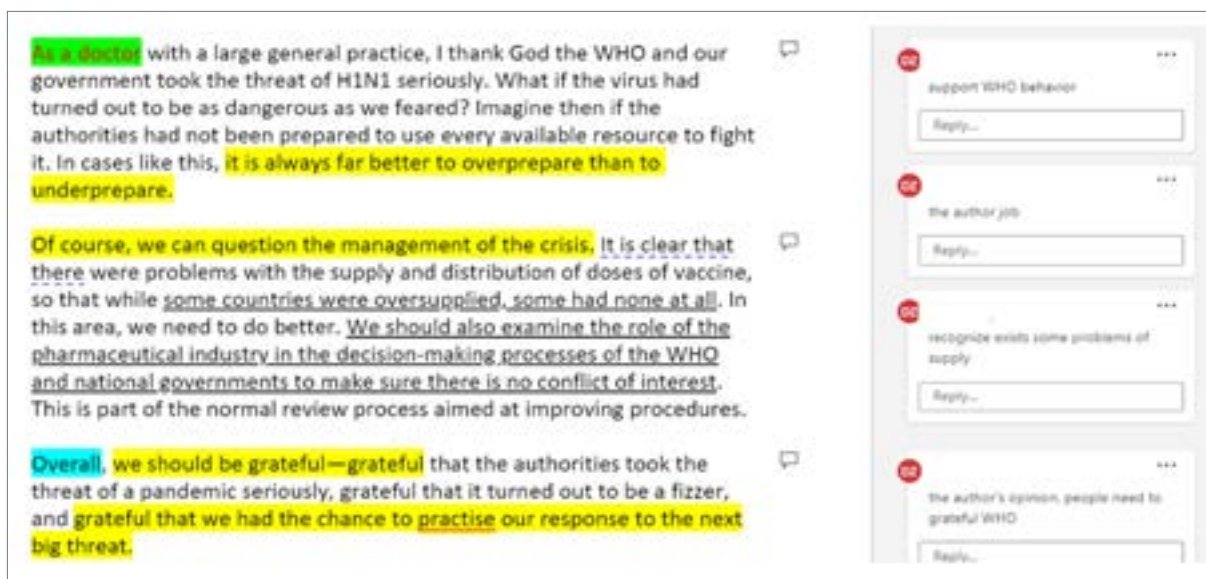


Figure 1: Example of text annotation

Students were compliant in accurately completing reading comprehension question sets as directed by us. While students were encouraged to work in small groups to complete this task, most choose to work individually.

For the writing activity, students were given 120 minutes to complete the task of writing a response of around 450 words. These guidelines closely match the requirements of the end-of-course examination. Upon completion, a review of document version history allowed us to better understand how students went about their writing. Prior to this cycle they had already completed and retained two pieces of writing in their folios and some chose to copy a completed piece of writing into their new document to use as a scaffold for genre structure. Three students chose to type their submissions entirely outside of the collaborative Teams environment and then copy and paste the result into the blank template that we had originally shared with them, indicating a reluctance to share their work during the drafting phase.

We also noticed that students tended to start this timed writing exercise without much planning. The version history showed them all having commenced the process of constructing their responses within a few minutes of having received the task instruction.

Finally, despite receiving feedback on their writing through a variety of forms, only six of those who completed the writing re-visited their document to view and action the typed comments that we had made about the summary section of their response. Of those students, only two returned and edited the document based on the audio feedback which was delivered later, after the entire response had been completed.

Survey 2 – Completed in Week 9

This final survey was designed to re-visit some of the indicated preferences from the first survey and confirm some of the demonstrated practices in Cycle 3.

Students told us that they started the course with a relatively high degree of confidence in their reading skills but significantly less confidence in their writing skills. They observed however, that both reading and writing proved to be significantly less challenging for them in the online environment when compared with listening and speaking.

Preferences for vocabulary acquisition closely mirrored the results from the first survey where students expressed a strong partiality for Quizlet and independent research. The content produced using both methods was preserved and more easily accessible for revision.

Engagement with online editable texts was embraced and clearly preferred. Students appear to have enjoyed the process of annotating texts in this environment and engaged more freely with question sets provided in the Teams environment. Answers to these question sets were not as rigorously collected and retained as they would be in the Canvas LMS.

Students responded favourably to all forms of writing feedback without a clear preference for any of the methods employed across the three cycles. Most acknowledged that while they did re-visit and note the comments made by the teacher, they did not often re-draft or edit their submissions.

Discussion

In the context of reading and writing skill development, this AR focused on four key questions related to an online learning environment.

What skill development methodologies work best in an online classroom environment from the perspective of both learners and educators?

Students expressed a clear preference for working independently on most tasks. This participant group were confident users of digital technology and adapted quickly to the use of software applications and workflows which had been introduced and scaffolded. Students were able to explore and choose different options and adjust their approach to learning to suit their individual preferences. From our standpoint, as the educators assigned to the class, helping the learners to quickly establish a preferred workflow for integrated reading and writing provided greater scope for the deployment of a more asynchronous learning environment. Learners could then mitigate some of the adverse effects of interrupted connections and other technical difficulties that they would not have experienced in a traditional classroom.

How can skill development be measured in a remote online environment?

The clear advantage of an online digital classroom was that all the student submissions and our feedback were captured and retained. For students, all completed class activities were easily re-visited for review purposes and collaborative group activities were quickly and easily configured, executed and assessed. Metadata contained within digital submissions provided clear timelines of learner activity offering insights into reading and writing techniques.

Canvas LMS also retained learner responses to activities but that capture process was more apparent to learners. Despite assurances that the data would not be used for formal assessment purposes, students were often reluctant to engage with these activities given that we clearly had visibility of the results.

What difficulties do learners encounter when confronted with a rapid deployment of an online learning platform?

Our students adjusted to and embraced the online learning environment very quickly. Some of the digital tools which underpin online learning were already familiar to them and this proved to be very helpful. Encouraging active engagement with online activities particularly in Canvas LMS, where input content is retained, remained difficult.

This was likely due to student concern that incorrect answers are captured and may be viewed negatively by the teacher.

There were some significant impacts on the online learning experience arising from connectivity limitations. These will no doubt continue to improve but will require some more permanent adjustments to delivery methods and probably a shift toward more asynchronous learning strategies.

What is best teaching practice when providing feedback to students in an online environment?

Students continued to indicate a strong desire to receive prompt feedback from their teachers. However, during this research they did not express a clear preference as to whether that feedback should be written or verbal. This research did confirm to us that the greatest challenge that remains is to encourage learners to engage with and review the feedback provided.

Conclusions and reflections

The rapid transition to an exclusively online teaching platform for EAP presented many challenges in 2020. The focus of our AR shifted from consideration of blended options complementing a traditional teaching model, to the investigation of a significantly changed set of online delivery methods. Our research was able to utilise some existing online practices and tools that we had previously deployed, such as online vocabulary applications and the use of an online collaborative writing platform. Most of the student participants had also had some exposure to the online learning environment having completed a previous level course at REW.

The most significant change to the traditional reading activity was that students no longer had access to a coursebook where they could record and preserve their annotations. It was very clear, however, that they accepted the engagement of course texts through editable digital versions of the documents in the Teams environment where their annotations were still recorded and preserved. They had greater freedom with the rich suite of annotation tools at their disposal and continued to undertake this important text task without much prompting. In the traditional classroom, we have previously found it much more difficult to persuade students to undertake this activity conscientiously and effectively.

Discussing the texts in detail proved more difficult in an online environment during this research. This was largely due to shortcomings in connectivity that impacted the ability of students to communicate in small groups with their video enabled. Small group discussions, preferred in the classroom environment, were significantly impacted when conducted online if one or more of the participants had a connection issue. It is notable however, that throughout the year, the stability of technology deployed to facilitate online learning improved significantly and so this is unlikely to be a long-term problem.

Collaborative platforms designed for content creation and assessment have been evolving for some time and are particularly well suited to the delivery of EAP writing tasks. During this research students worked in a single class team, collaborating with others and also working alone in private channels assigned within that team. In this environment, where content is organised and preserved, we were able to continually monitor student progress and provide feedback during and after the writing process. This research has highlighted the ability for teachers to not only review the completed student output, but to also observe the processes students have used to complete the work.

Finally, it was disappointing that only a few of the student participants chose to actively engage with the writing feedback we gave them. However, all of these students were on a very tight pathway timeline on an accelerated course. It is likely that having established that their writing was of a sufficient standard to pass the level, few of them sought the opportunity to further refine the skill.

References

Richards, N (2019) *How technology can increase student agency in the feedback process*, paper presented at English Australia Conference, Melbourne, 20 September 2019.

RMIT English Worldwide (2009) *Grammar Guide 2*, Melbourne: RMIT Training.

RMIT English Worldwide (2011a) *English Academic Passport Advanced Plus Units 1–3*, Melbourne: RMIT Training.

RMIT English Worldwide (2011b) *English Academic Passport Advanced Plus Units 4–6*, Melbourne: RMIT Training.

Link to virtual colloquium presentation

Please click the following link to view the authors' presentation at the 2020 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://youtu.be/smm-76h9EnI>

Appendix 1: Survey 1

Rate the first 4 questions on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 represents a strong preference for the activity)

1. Thinking about vocabulary activities you have done in class, how useful is Quizlet?
2. Thinking about vocabulary activities you have done in class, how useful is Padlet?
3. Thinking about vocabulary activities you have done in class, how useful are the mix and match activities in Canvas?
4. Thinking about vocabulary activities you have done in class, how effective are activities where you do independent research for definitions and share this in Teams?
5. Thinking about reading activities you have done in class, choose the method you find most effective?
 - (i) PDF Texts and activities in Canvas
 - (ii) Word document texts and questions in Teams
6. When you are asked to annotate a text, which method do you find most effective? You may choose more than one response.
 - (i) Colour highlighting and text typed directly into the document
 - (ii) Using the comments box that appears beside the text
 - (iii) Using colour, text and comments
 - (iv) Using a diagram or other graphical element
7. When you are discussing a text, which method do you prefer? Choose one.
 - (i) As a whole class led by the teacher
 - (ii) In small breakout groups with focus questions
8. When you are asked to do a writing task, which approach do you prefer? Choose one.
 - (i) Working in a small group or in pairs in a breakout group
 - (ii) Working alone in a quiet space
9. When you were asked to check someone else's work, how useful was the correction code that the teacher provided?
 - (i) Very useful
 - (ii) Moderately useful
 - (iii) Not useful
10. How do you prefer to receive feedback from your teacher?
 - (i) Colour coded with text typed into the document
 - (ii) Only using the comment box which appears beside your document
 - (iii) An interview with your teacher in a breakout room
 - (iv) Any other method (typed response)

Appendix 2: Survey 2

1. When studying English how easy or difficult are these skills for you?
Likert scale: Very difficult / A little difficult / Not too difficult nor too easy / A little easy / Very Easy
 - (i) Listening
 - (ii) Reading
 - (iii) Writing
 - (iv) Speaking

2. Which skill or skills have been most challenging for you in the online learning environment? (You may select more than one option)
 - (i) Reading
 - (ii) Listening
 - (iii) Writing
 - (iv) Speaking

3. Vocabulary
Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree
 - (i) Quizlet is an effective way to learn vocabulary
 - (ii) Writing vocabulary in my study notes is most effective
 - (iii) I prefer to collect vocabulary on my own
 - (iv) I prefer to collect vocabulary in a group
 - (v) Vocabulary exercises in Canvas are useful

4. Reading and annotating
Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree
 - (i) I like to print out a hardcopy of the text for handwritten annotation
 - (ii) I like to use the text on my screen in Canvas but make hand-written notes
 - (iii) I like to use an editable text in Teams with typed notes

5. Annotating a text
Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree
 - (i) I like to use colour to highlight important information
 - (ii) I like to type my comments directly into the document
 - (iii) I like to type notes into comments in the margin of the text so that they are hidden until I need them

6. Discussing a text in class
Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree
 - (i) Discussing a text in class is very important to help me understand the ideas
 - (ii) I like to work in a small group of 2 or 3 people
 - (iii) I like to work in a larger group of 6 or 7 people
 - (iv) I prefer teacher-led discussion with the whole class

7. Writing a critical response

Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree

- (i) Writing with a partner helps me to develop my writing skills
- (ii) I prefer to work alone when I am writing
- (iii) The annotations I have made when reading the texts help me when I am writing

8. Receiving writing feedback

Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree

- (i) Getting feedback from my classmates is helpful
- (ii) Giving feedback to my classmates is something I find easy to do
- (iii) I prefer to only receive feedback from my teacher

9. The type of writing feedback you receive from your teacher

Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree

- (i) I like written comments in my typed document
- (ii) I like comments made in the margin of my document
- (iii) I like audio (recorded message) feedback

10. After receiving writing feedback from your teacher

Likert scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither disagree nor agree / Agree / Strongly Agree

- (i) I always go back and check the comments
- (ii) I always edit my typed document to reflect the teacher comments
- (iii) I re-write the whole document a second time

Video vs written feedback on writing

Enrico Chiavaroli University of Newcastle, Sydney Campus

Context and participants

I work as an English teacher with the Pathways and Academic Learning Support Centre at the Sydney-based campus of the University of Newcastle (UON). I had usually taught an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course (exit point B2+/C1) prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. UON's ELICOS program is a direct entry pathway (i.e. a course that leads to a student's entry to a university program/course) and is divided into English for General Purposes (EGP) courses and EAP courses. EGP is divided into three levels (Elementary, Intermediate and Upper Intermediate), whereas EAP consists of one level: Advanced (EAP). Each level is 200 hours over 10 weeks unless the student has been permitted to only do five weeks. Alternatively, they may be repeating five weeks at a level due to the student scoring below a pass in a previous attempt but above the threshold for a 10-week repeat.

UON Sydney campus ELICOS students are mostly on a pathway into postgraduate qualifications from the Newcastle Business School (NBS), particularly the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Professional Accounting (MPAC) because these can be completed at the Sydney campus. However, some students first attend the campus in Sydney for their ELICOS courses and then transfer back to the main campus in Newcastle for their degree, so they are not all prospective NBS students. The principle countries of origin at the Sydney campus are China, Nepal, and some from Pakistan, though the face-to-face class involved in this research was exclusively Chinese. However, because of the pandemic the Australian government introduced a travel ban for travellers from mainland China at the start of February. As a result, in mid-February, I started teaching two courses online for offshore Chinese students: an Upper Intermediate course and an EAP course. The Upper Intermediate class was the subject of Cycle 2 of this research as the EAP class was too small in number.

Research focus

My research focused on the students' writing, and more specifically giving feedback. In the past, I have used Panopto (an E-learning software with a screencasting function) when giving screencasting feedback on student writing, specifically essays. Prior to the shift online due to the pandemic, these essays were handwritten. Prior to the study and in Cycle 1 of the study, I scanned essays as PDFs and then used Panopto to screencast. I used the highlighting tool of a PDF reader to point out what in the essay I was referring to at any given point, while offering direct and indirect oral feedback. I then emailed the link for the video to the respective student. Prior to this study, I had used screencasting feedback for the full duration of our 10-week EAP course once at the end of 2019.

The research proposes to investigate the following questions:

- Do students prefer screencasting feedback to written feedback on their writing? If so, what are their reasons?
- Are students more able to incorporate screencasting feedback than written feedback to improve their future writing?

Other formal academic research has been done addressing these questions (for example, Ali 2016), but I would like to investigate these questions in a way that is specific to my context, that is small class sizes, largely monocultural student groups, future postgraduate business faculty students, and a satellite university campus location.

Research background

Feedback on writing has a number of purported benefits such as assisting students' learning about the process and styles of writing, encouraging students to revise their own writing, and helping them to improve the quality of their writing, while also meeting student and teacher expectations that an English course will include corrective written feedback (Hyland and Hyland 2006). However, there is a view that written feedback is of dubious benefit in terms of students improving their writing (Lee 2009:1), and that direct written corrective feedback may actually distract from other important aspects of writing such as content (Stevenson 2019:slide 10). There is a perception that students may tend to focus on grades instead of using the feedback to improve (Henderson and Phillips 2015:52). There is evidence that error correction leads to small improvements in the quality of the content of student writing (Biber, Nekrasova and Horn 2014:50). Why might this be?

From the students' point of view, they can find it difficult to interpret written feedback (Bitchener 2018). Students may not be ready to notice or focus on eliminating particular errors, may not understand why something is wrong, and may not have been taught how to revise their writing using error correction (Stevenson 2019:slide 10). Students may feel confronted by or disappointed with feedback (Ryan and Henderson 2017). This may lead to rejection of feedback or loss of motivation. There is also evidence of high levels of student dissatisfaction with assessment feedback to the effect that they do not find feedback comments helpful, frequent, timely or consistent enough (Hounsell 2007, Nicol 2010:501–502).

As a result, some teachers, including myself, have adopted video/audio feedback. Perceived positive benefits of this method include allowing for more detail and elaboration than written corrective feedback, more personalised feedback, and less social distance between marker and student. In addition, tone of voice makes feedback easier to accept, and the teacher is more likely to highlight positives. While there is reduced time spent on feedback by teachers, paradoxically students feel their teacher has spent more time (Mann 2015, Richards 2019:slide 20). Markers have also reported that they have found satisfaction with the format's reduced marking times and renewed enthusiasm for providing feedback as opposed to experiencing sufferance or dread (Henderson and Phillips 2015:63).

Research design

Under face-to-face conditions, there are three writing assessments (essays) in a 10-week course at the EAP and Upper Intermediate levels. Before each assessment, students completed practice essays and feedback on these essays alternated between written and screencasting feedback (for example, written feedback for the first essay, screencasting feedback for the second essay, and written feedback for the third essay). In the next 10-week course block, which essays received which type of feedback was intended to be inverted (for example, screencasting feedback for the first essay, written feedback for the second essay, screencasting feedback for the third essay). (See Appendix 3 for a visual representation.) The intention was to ensure an equal number of essays was used

with both types of feedback. Due to the class I was teaching being online in the second cycle, written feedback was provided through Word document comments rather than the handwritten feedback that was used in the first cycle. Screencasting feedback captured the student's essay in a Word document rather than a PDF scan of an essay they had written in class.

In Cycle 1 (the EAP class), there were three in-class, hand-written writing assessments. Each assessment is a different type of essay: a cause and effect essay, a problem solution essay, and an argument essay. There were also two in-class, hand-written practice essays under assessment conditions before each assessment for a total of nine essays with teacher feedback. In Cycle 2 (the Upper Intermediate class), the typical assessment schedule of Upper Intermediate was altered to accommodate the sudden shift to online study. Essays were now word-processed and not invigilated, nor were they assessed but rather served as practice for online exams that consisted of a timed essay writing task that was submitted via the university's learning management system. These practice essays consisted of two cause and effect essays and three advantages and disadvantages essays. The first essays of each type received video feedback and the remaining essays received written feedback.

Data collection

After receiving feedback on the final writing assessment, students were asked to complete a Likert scale questionnaire which was designed to measure their relative satisfaction with written and screencasting feedback and their comparisons of the two forms in terms of perceived benefits and drawbacks. There were also open-ended questions after the Likert scale questions. Questionnaires were conducted anonymously and without my presence in the class in the first cycle. Questionnaires in the second cycle were sent to me via email.

The second part of the methodology involved recording how many and what type of errors from the practice essays were repeated in the corresponding assessment. The types of errors were grouped into the following categories:

1. Grammatical accuracy
2. Text organisation
3. Academic writing
4. Syntax
5. Vocabulary & unnatural language
6. Logic & quality of argument

The aim of this second part of the research was to measure whether written feedback or screencasting feedback was more effective in reducing repetition of the same errors (i.e. getting students to incorporate feedback into their writing).

While the data collection for the first 10-week EAP class, which was face-to-face, was completed as planned, the transition to online classes due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a number of changes and challenges. Due to the absence of in-class assessments, there were no longer three writing assessments in the form of essays, only a writing exam in Week 10 consisting of an essay. Even so, only the Upper Intermediate class I taught actually submitted three practice essays. The EAP class for offshore students ultimately consisted of two students,

neither of whom submitted practice essays when asked. As such, the offshore Upper Intermediate class was asked to fill out the questionnaire but not the offshore EAP class.

Findings

Student questionnaire results (see Appendix 1) indicated that 100% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that: receiving feedback through videos was personal, it was helpful because it allowed them to go back and forth in the video, the videos were long enough to understand what to revise, the language used was easy to understand, positive aspects of their writing were praised, they had a positive attitude to video feedback, and they would like to continue receiving video feedback. 83.3% agreed that they preferred video feedback to written feedback while the remainder were neutral. The least positive result was that 25% found watching video feedback time-consuming.

In terms of error tally results (see Appendix 2), when essay error tallies were compared with those of the immediately preceding essay by the same student, written corrective feedback resulted in 48% of essays having fewer errors and 52% having more errors. Video feedback resulted in 57% of essays having fewer errors and 43% having more errors. However, the difference became more marked when comparing the face-to-face class with the online class. Written corrective feedback for the face-to-face class resulted in 53% of essays having fewer errors whereas for the online class it was 33%. Video feedback for the face-to-face class resulted in 44% of essays having fewer errors whereas for the online class it was 66%.

Another point of note was that the online class' punctuation error average was more than double the face-to-face class' average, but its spelling error average was less than a fifth of the face-to-face average.

Conclusions and reflections

Questionnaire results indicate that screencasting feedback was popular among both the face-to-face class and offshore class. Part of this appeal may have been due to novelty. A longitudinal study would help establish whether this appeal persists over time. It should be noted that while the feedback for the first cycle was recorded in a small room with favourable acoustics and without background noise, the second cycle feedback was recorded in a large space with background noise. The neutral reply in Figure 1.3 was from the second cycle class, which may indicate the importance of carefully selecting the recording space.

The results in Figure 1.9 and 1.10 (25% of student agreeing that video feedback was time-consuming in the former and 16.7% agreeing that they had difficulty loading the videos in the latter) may not be a true reflection of student attitudes due to questionnaire design. While the rest of the questionnaire consisted of statements favourable to screencasting, which students generally said they agreed or strongly agreed with, Questions 9 and 10 were statements unfavourable to screencasting. However, this explanation for these results only seems to be true in the case of two students who responded agree or strongly agree to all the other statements. Another student agreed with Question 9 while disagreeing with Question 10. Moreover, for students who responded neutral, it would not matter if the statement were assumed to be favourable or unfavourable towards screencasting.

This result in Figure 1.9 indicating that some students found reviewing video feedback time-consuming is interesting to me because it relates partly to my impetus for choosing this topic. At the end of my 2019 class,

while student responses on screencasting feedback was almost entirely positive, one student preferred written feedback because they preferred the portability of a physical piece of paper. Moreover, I suspected that 'scrubbing' a video file to find a specific comment was less convenient than scanning an entire page. In the open-ended questionnaire question 'Describe what you dislike about video feedback on your writing? Why?', one student who answered neutral on whether they found video feedback time-consuming wrote 'too many long time' (sic), which would seem to support this.

One of the agree statements in Figure 1.10 was from the second cycle online class, where multiple students noted difficulty accessing the videos. In the first weeks of the offshore classes, students noted recurrent problems with accessing materials online (not just screencasting feedback) such as the amount of time it was taking or connections timing out. Discussions with UON's IT support usually led to the conclusion that these issues were due to firewall restrictions in China. Tools like Zoom also experienced slow speeds during peak periods when the lockdown initially began in Australia. In other words, difficulty loading videos may have been due to the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Analysis of the error tally results would indicate that in my teaching context and with my current teaching practices, video feedback produced better results than written corrective feedback when teaching online. However, a longitudinal study would indicate whether there are longer-term effects beyond a single 10-week cycle. One variable that was not examined in the tally component of the study was the teacher. Comparing whether teachers are more likely to provide feedback on quality of argument compared to grammatical accuracy when giving screencasting feedback could provide further justification for the use of screencasting feedback, as would a comparison of positive feedback compared to negative feedback.

Finally, there is the issue of the punctuation error average being much higher and the spelling error average being much lower for the online class compared to the face-to-face class. This probably reflects the fact that in most word processing programs and even in the university's learning management system, incorrect spelling is flagged and often suggested spelling corrections are given. Conversely, a reason for the increase in punctuation errors may be due to the fact that some Latin alphabet fonts available in Chinese word processing programs have spaces included as part of the glyph for full stops and commas, so Chinese students may be more likely to forget to include a space after a full stop or comma when required to use Microsoft Word (the online version of which is included with their student email account at UON) or the university's learning management system. Another possible reason may be less linked to nationality and more to the settings of some phone apps where they automatically include spaces after full stops. These changes in the types of errors being made in online classes indicate future avenues for research into how word processing may influence student writing and how teaching methods can adjust to better suit students' current needs.

Acknowledgements

Professor Anne Burns, Sophie O'Keefe, Keely McCauley, Sara Houshi Deghati Fouman, Owen Wilson and Ruben Mazzei.

References

- Ali, A (2016) Effectiveness of using screencast feedback on EFL students' writing and perception, *English Language Teaching* 9 (8), 106–121.
- Biber, D, Nekrasova, T and Horn, B (2014) *The Effectiveness of Feedback for L1-English and L2-Writing Development: A Meta-Analysis*, TOEFL iBT Research Report TOEFL iBT-14, available online: www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-11-05.pdf
- Bitchenor, J (2018) Teacher written feedback, in Liantas, J I (Ed) *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Henderson, M, and Phillips, M (2015) Video-based feedback on student assessment: scarily personal, *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 31 (1), 51–66.
- Hounsell, D (2007) Towards more sustainable feedback to students, in Falchikov, N and Boud, D (Eds) *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education*, London: Routledge, 101–113.
- Hyland, K and Hyland, F (2006) Feedback on second language students' writing, *Language Teaching* 39, 83–101.
- Lee, I (2009) Feedback revolution: What gets in the way, *ELT Journal* 65 (1), 1–12.
- Mann, S (2015) Using screen capture software to improve the value of feedback on academic assignments in teacher education, in Farrell, T S C (Ed) *International Perspectives on English Language Teaching*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 160–180.
- Nicol, D (2010) From monologue to dialogue: Improving written feedback processes in mass higher education, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 35 (5), 501–517.
- Richards, N (2019) *How technology can increase student agency in the feedback process*, paper presented at English Australia Conference, Melbourne, 20 September 2019.
- Ryan, T and Henderson, M (2017) Feeling feedback: students' emotional responses to educator feedback, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 1–13.
- Stevenson, M (2019) *Writing feedback: How do we value students' writing?*, Course presentation, EDPJ5020: Literacy and Language Teaching, week 5.

Link to virtual colloquium presentation

Please click the following link to view the author's presentation at the 2020 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: <https://youtu.be/-A4cDfRLNjU>

Appendix 1: Cycle 1 and 2 questionnaire results

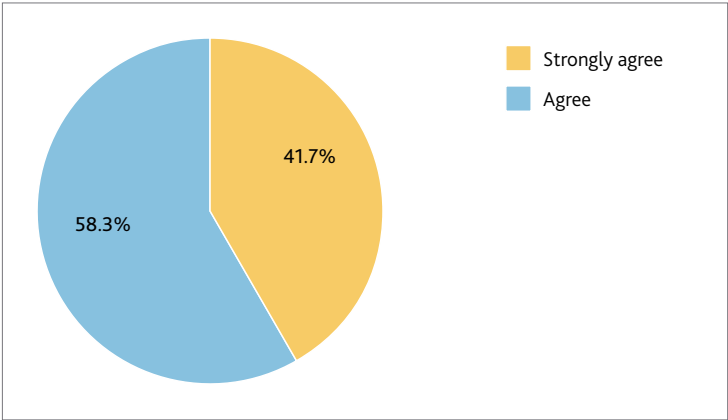


Figure 1.1: Receiving feedback on my writing through videos is personal

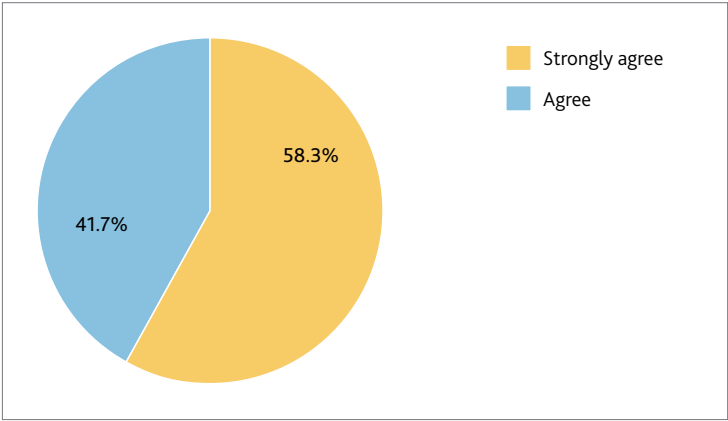


Figure 1.2: I found video feedback on my writing helpful because I can go back and forth

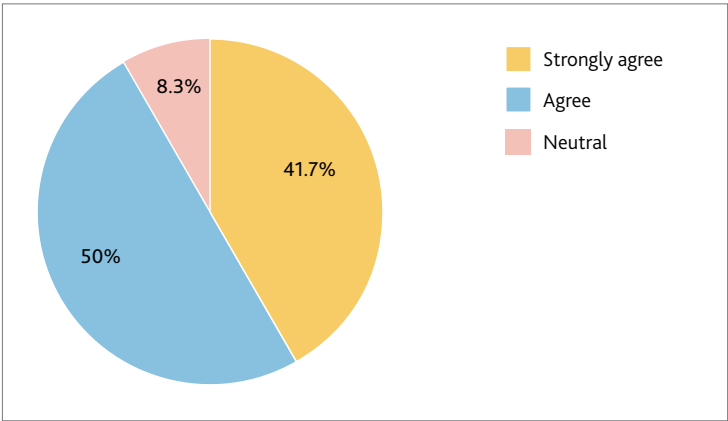


Figure 1.3: The sound of the instructor in the videos was clear

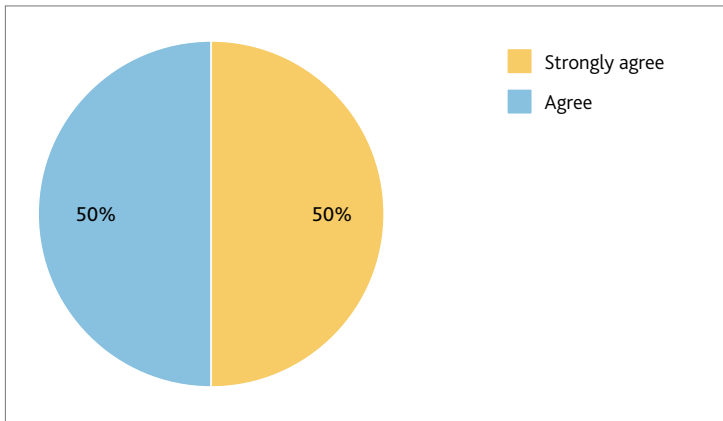


Figure 1.4: The length of time in the videos was enough to understand what to revise in my writing

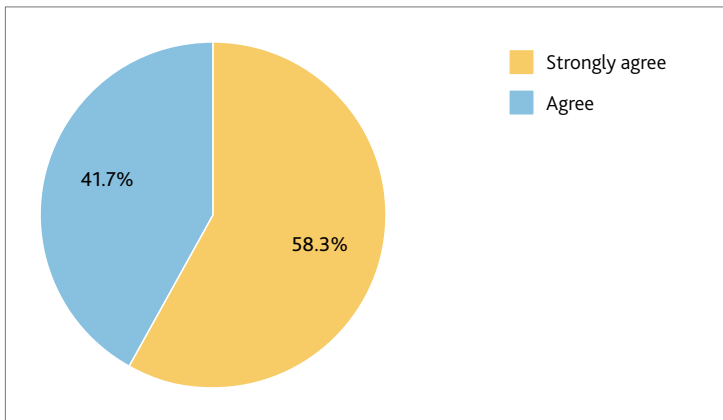


Figure 1.5: The language used in giving the video feedback was easy to understand

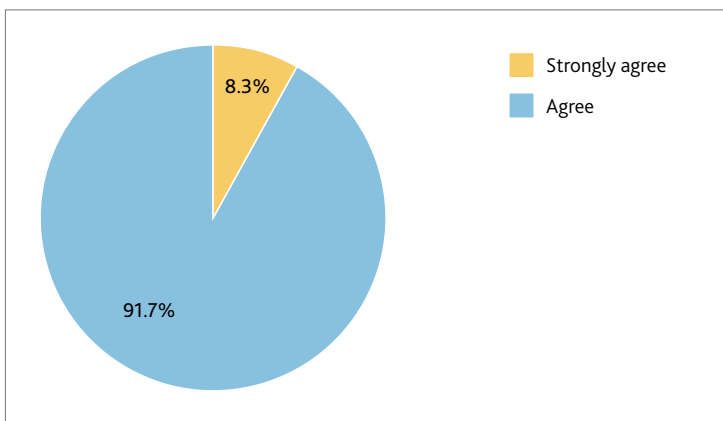


Figure 1.6: The instructor praised the positive aspects of my writing in the video feedback

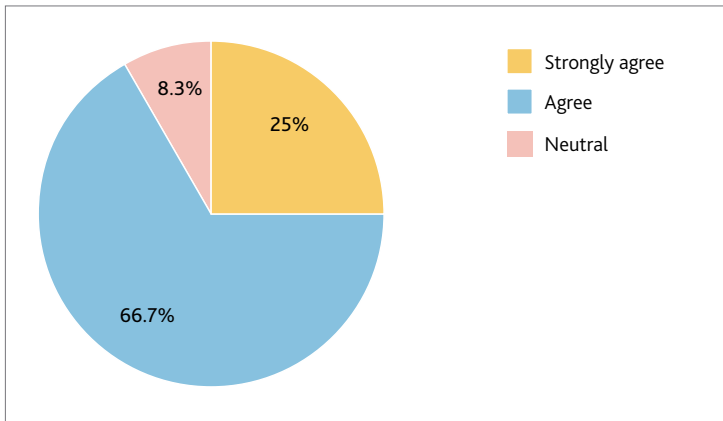


Figure 1.7: The video feedback was supported by examples/suggestions for improvement

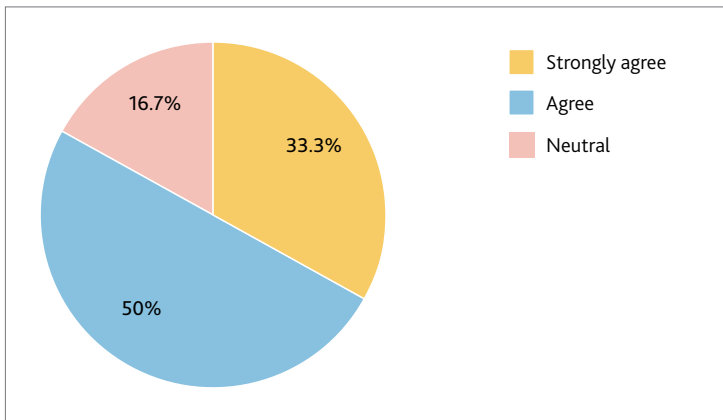


Figure 1.8: The video feedback was specific and clear enough that I understood what exactly to revise

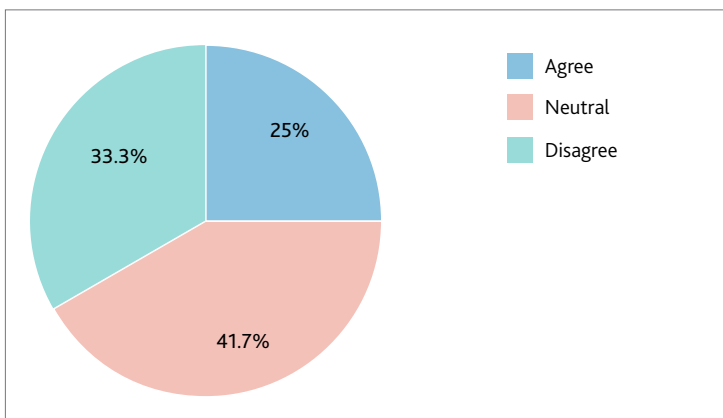


Figure 1.9: Watching video feedback is time-consuming

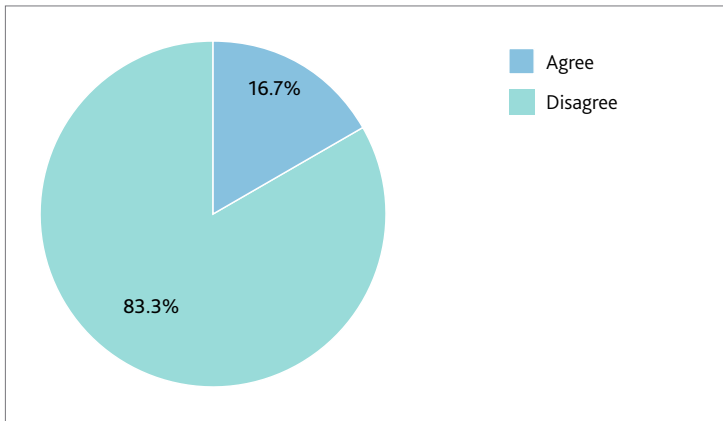


Figure 1.10: I had difficulty loading the videos

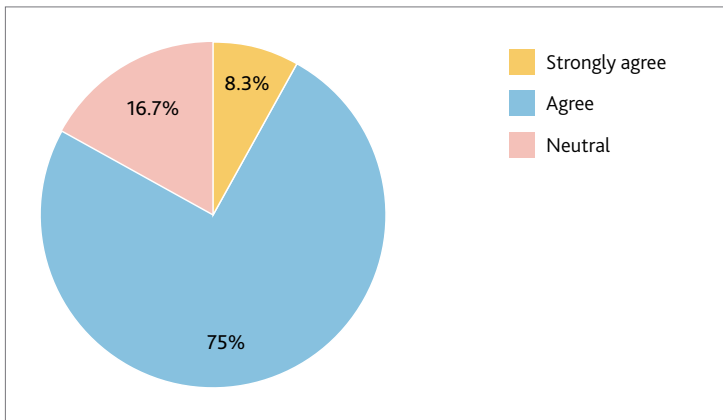


Figure 1.11: I felt that receiving the feedback through videos engaged me actively in the revision process

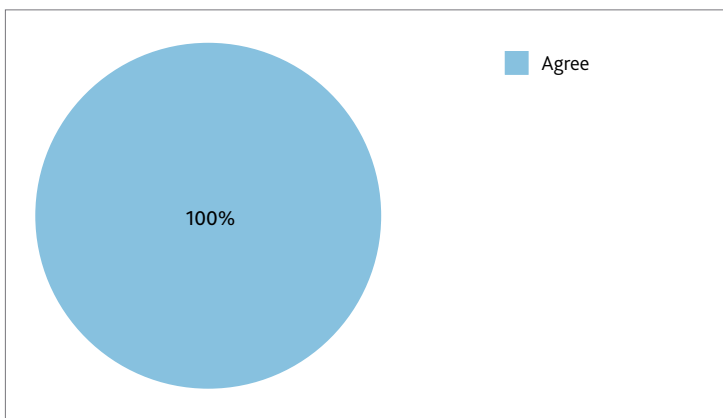


Figure 1.12: I have a positive attitude toward receiving feedback through videos

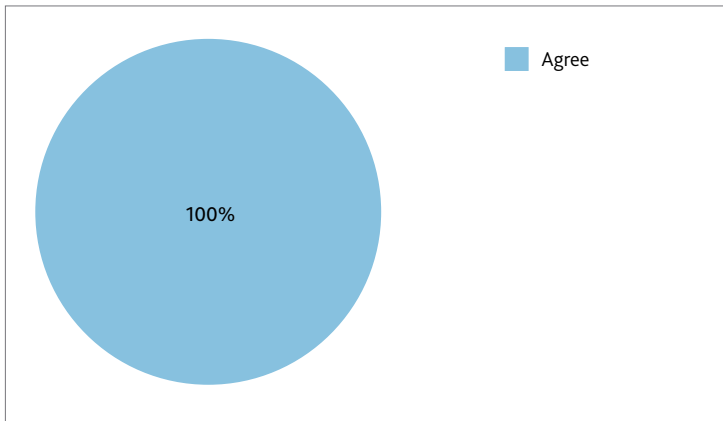


Figure 1.13: I would like to continue receiving video feedback on my writing

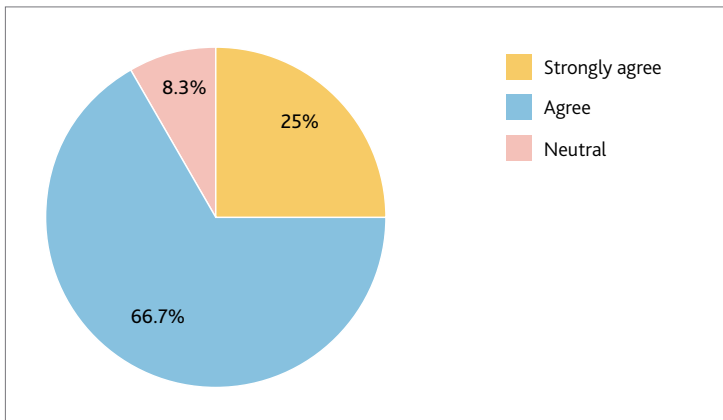


Figure 1.14: I prefer hearing the voice of my instructor to reading their words when receiving feedback

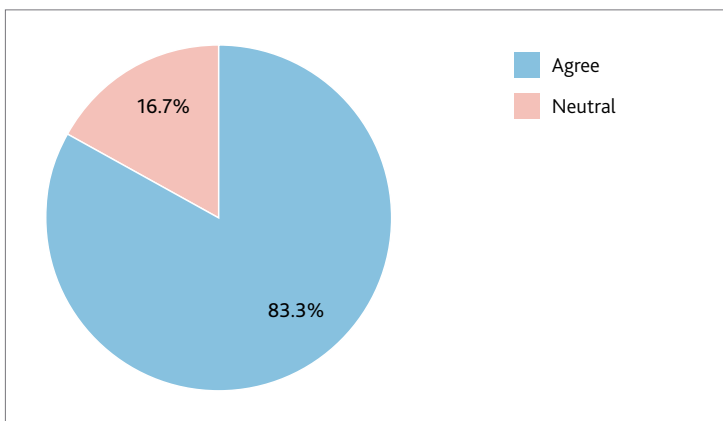


Figure 1.15: I prefer video feedback to written feedback on my writing

Appendix 2: Cycle 1 error tally results

	Grammatical accuracy subtotal:	Text organisation subtotal:	Academic writing subtotal:	Syntax subtotal:	Vocabulary & unnatural language subtotal:	Logic & quality of argument subtotal:	Total:
Student 1 – 1st prac.essay	39	7	2	5	29	0	82
Student 1 – 2nd prac.essay	42	5	3	4	21	0	75
Student 1 – Assessment	36	4	3	9	12	1	65
Student 2 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 2 – 2nd prac.essay	64	13	6	6	22	4	115
Student 2 – Assessment	70	8	3	8	21	5	110
Student 3 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 3 – 2nd prac.essay	54	3	2	N/A	21	5	85
Student 3 – Assessment	35	11	3	4	7	6	66
Student 4 – 1st prac.essay	26	2	4	1	24	2	59
Student 4 – 2nd prac.essay	47	6	0	5	16	6	80
Student 4 – Assessment	77	2	0	9	16	1	105
Student 5 – 1st prac.essay	11	0	2	1	9	1	24
Student 5 – 2nd prac.essay	26	4	2	4	15	1	52
Student 5 – Assessment	30	7	2	2	6	2	49
Student 6 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 6 – 2nd prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 6 – Assessment	89	6	8	5	15	3	126
Student 7 – 1st prac.essay	18	1	2	1	10	1	33
Student 7 – 2nd prac.essay	44	2	5	1	7	1	60
Student 7 – Assessment	44	2	3	2	5	0	56

Figure 2.1: Cycle 1/EAP cause and effect essay error tally results

	Grammatical accuracy subtotal:	Text organisation subtotal:	Academic writing subtotal:	Syntax subtotal:	Vocabulary & unnatural language subtotal:	Logic & quality of argument subtotal:	Total:
Student 1 – 1st prac.essay	32	9	0	11	15	1	68
Student 1 – 2nd prac.essay	36	11	2	8	10	2	69
Student 1 – Assessment	42	3	0	6	16	3	70
Student 2 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 2 – 2nd prac.essay	59	5	1	3	12	6	86
Student 2 – Assessment	47	4	1	4	12	9	77
Student 3 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 3 – 2nd prac.essay	51	9	0	10	19	5	94
Student 3 – Assessment	52	12	0	5	5	10	84
Student 4 – 1st prac.essay	25	8	4	7	7	7	58
Student 4 – 2nd prac.essay	20	7	2	12	13	1	55
Student 4 – Assessment	35	4	0	8	9	12	68
Student 5 – 1st prac.essay	36	3	7	8	8	0	62
Student 5 – 2nd prac.essay	25	11	1	4	5	2	48
Student 5 – Assessment	61	7	1	4	15	3	91
Student 6 – 1st prac.essay	39	4	1	8	10	4	66
Student 6 – 2nd prac.essay	41	3	8	11	12	1	76
Student 6 – Assessment	77	15	4	5	13	11	125
Student 7 – 1st prac.essay	22	4	2	4	4	3	39
Student 7 – 2nd prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 7 – Assessment	51	3	1	4	5	3	67

Figure 2.2: Cycle 1/EAP problem solution essay error tally results

	Grammatical accuracy subtotal:	Text organisation subtotal:	Academic writing subtotal:	Syntax subtotal:	Vocabulary & unnatural language subtotal:	Logic & quality of argument subtotal:	Total:
Student 1 – 1st prac.essay	41	8	8	6	13	1	77
Student 1 – 2nd prac.essay	34	15	1	12	6	1	69
Student 1 – Assessment	21	4	3	13	3	3	47
Student 2 – 1st prac.essay	39	12	0	8	13	9	81
Student 2 – 2nd prac.essay	37	9	1	6	5	7	65
Student 2 – Assessment	77	14	0	8	13	4	116
Student 3 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 3 – 2nd prac.essay	63	15	2	7	18	3	108
Student 3 – Assessment	48	3	0	10	7	4	72
Student 4 – 1st prac.essay	17	7	2	8	8	1	48
Student 4 – 2nd prac.essay	11	3	1	2	5	4	26
Student 4 – Assessment	46	6	1	11	7	1	72
Student 5 – 1st prac.essay	23	5	7	4	4	1	44
Student 5 – 2nd prac.essay	20	7	2	4	3	2	38
Student 5 – Assessment	47	7	1	9	9	4	77
Student 6 – 1st prac.essay	41	10	5	9	11	3	79
Student 6 – 2nd prac.essay	56	6	0	9	7	5	83
Student 6 – Assessment	70	7	1	9	12	2	101
Student 7 – 1st prac.essay	15	6	8	2	16	3	50
Student 7 – 2nd prac.essay	24	9	5	4	9	5	56
Student 7 – Assessment	42	7	2	3	4	1	59

Figure 2.3: Cycle 1/EAP argument essay error tally results

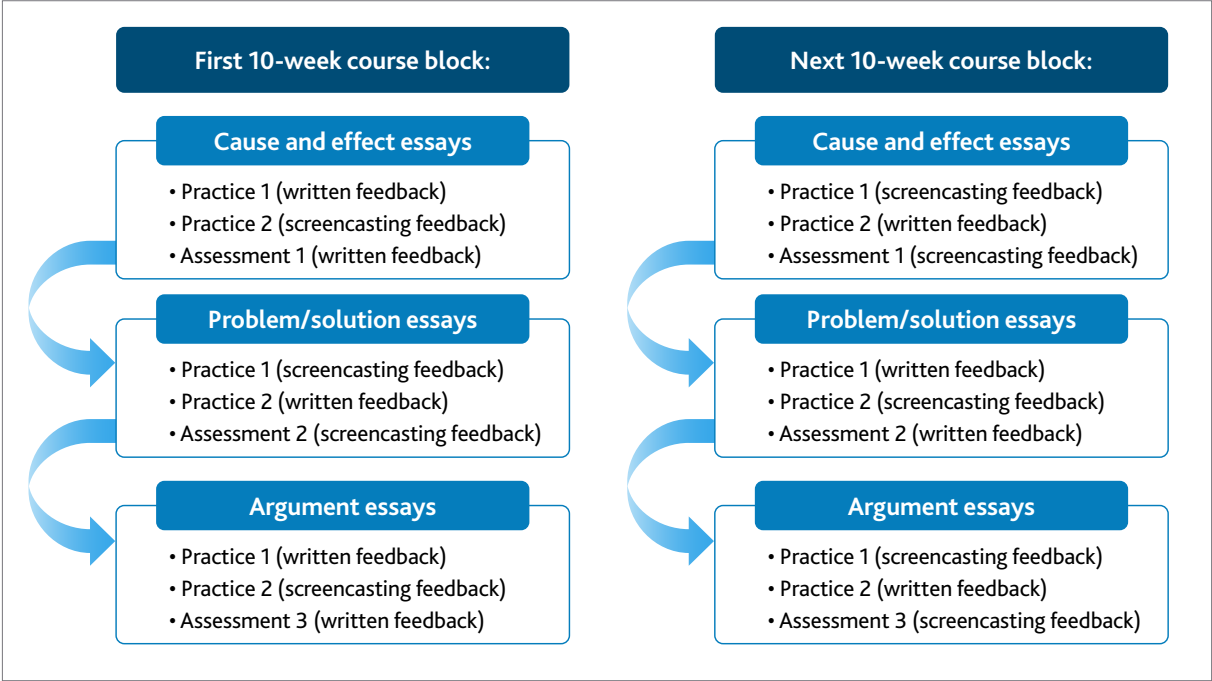
	Grammatical accuracy subtotal:	Text organisation subtotal:	Academic writing subtotal:	Syntax subtotal:	Vocabulary & unnatural language subtotal:	Logic & quality of argument subtotal:	Total:
Student 1 – 1st prac.essay	39	4	3	5	4	2	57
Student 1 – 2nd prac.essay	39	5	4	2	4	0	54
Student 2 – 1st prac.essay	13	3	0	2	7	1	26
Student 2 – 2nd prac.essay	19	4	0	5	7	1	36
Student 3 – 1st prac.essay	26	3	3	11	5	1	49
Student 3 – 2nd prac.essay	34	2	3	10	10	1	60
Student 4 – 1st prac.essay	44	11	2	7	29	4	97
Student 4 – 2nd prac.essay	26	12	5	10	14	1	68
Student 5 – 1st prac.essay	14	1	7	2	8	0	32
Student 5 – 2nd prac.essay	18	3	8	1	7	1	38
Student 6 – 1st prac.essay	15	5	2	3	5	1	31
Student 6 – 2nd prac.essay	9	5	5	0	7	0	26
Student 7 – 1st prac.essay	79	21	6	10	8	3	127
Student 7 – 2nd prac.essay	45	8	4	7	4	3	71
Student 8 – 1st prac.essay	17	7	1	5	5	7	42
Student 8 – 2nd prac.essay	17	3	7	1	6	2	36
Student 9 – 1st prac.essay	7	4	0	3	5	5	24
Student 9 – 2nd prac.essay	14	2	4	4	7	5	36
Student 10 – 1st prac.essay	9	3	6	1	5	2	26
Student 10 – 2nd prac.essay	6	2	6	0	4	0	18
Student 11 – 1st prac.essay	23	5	1	3	5	0	37
Student 11 – 2nd prac.essay	40	1	4	5	2	0	52
Student 12 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 12 – 2nd prac.essay	13	7	8	7	6	4	45

Figure 2.4: Cycle 2/UI cause and effect essay error tally results

	Grammatical accuracy subtotal:	Text organisation subtotal:	Academic writing subtotal:	Syntax subtotal:	Vocabulary & unnatural language subtotal:	Logic & quality of argument subtotal:	Total:
Student 1 – 1st prac.essay	28	4	5	10	12	0	59
Student 1 – 2nd prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 1 – 3rd prac.essay	11	6	1	2	4	0	24
Student 2 – 1st prac.essay	13	0	3	1	5	1	23
Student 2 – 2nd prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 2 – 3rd prac.essay	18	2	2	3	6	1	32
Student 3 – 1st prac.essay	32	5	6	8	13	2	66
Student 3 – 2nd prac.essay	28	4	9	6	5	2	54
Student 3 – 3rd prac.essay	24	3	3	4	6	4	44
Student 4 – 1st prac.essay	37	4	10	17	12	3	83
Student 4 – 2nd prac.essay	36	9	13	11	14	1	84
Student 4 – 3rd prac.essay	19	6	3	7	8	4	42
Student 5 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 5 – 2nd prac.essay	37	7	13	4	7	2	70
Student 5 – 3rd prac.essay	11	1	10	3	5	2	32
Student 6 – 1st prac.essay	29	3	5	5	8	1	51
Student 6 – 2nd prac.essay	26	6	15	2	7	3	59
Student 6 – 3rd prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 7 – 1st prac.essay	61	14	17	11	18	3	124
Student 7 – 2nd prac.essay	55	14	11	16	17	3	116
Student 7 – 3rd prac.essay	54	9	5	14	10	4	96
Student 8 – 1st prac.essay	14	2	0	3	2	2	23
Student 8 – 2nd prac.essay	53	4	20	11	9	0	97
Student 8 – 3rd prac.essay	29	4	2	6	8	0	49
Student 9 – 1st prac.essay	7	3	4	2	4	0	20
Student 9 – 2nd prac.essay	6	4	3	3	3	3	22
Student 9 – 3rd prac.essay	7	3	3	2	2	1	18
Student 10 – 1st prac.essay	16	3	8	1	7	0	85
Student 10 – 2nd prac.essay	5	6	10	5	9	1	36
Student 10 – 3rd prac.essay	4	1	8	5	7	0	25
Student 11 – 1st prac.essay	31	5	10	7	8	2	63
Student 11 – 2nd prac.essay	24	4	10	5	6	3	52
Student 11 – 3rd prac.essay	10	0	7	1	2	1	21
Student 12 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 12 – 2nd prac.essay	14	6	6	1	7	2	36
Student 12 – 3rd prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 13 – 1st prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Student 13 – 2nd prac.essay	29	2	3	1	13	4	52
Student 13 – 3rd prac.essay	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Figure 2.5: Cycle 2/UI advantages and disadvantages essay error tally results

Appendix 3: Essay writing feedback at EAP under face-to-face conditions



Teachers' attitudes to moving online quickly

Jennifer West UTS College, Sydney

Rebecca Matteson UTS College, Sydney

Context and participants

We are teachers who work at UTS College (formerly UTS Insearch) in Sydney, which is a pathway provider to the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). Students can progress from UTS College to UTS in three ways: through the Academic English (AE) direct entry program, through the Foundation program (FDN), or by completing a diploma allowing entry to second year undergraduate courses. At the beginning of our project, Rebecca was Program Coordinator of an AE program. AE has five programs, each with 200 hours of intensive English tuition. Jennifer was Subject Coordinator for FDN English, within the FDN program. The FDN program is a 12-month bridging course for students who either have not completed the Higher School Certificate (HSC), which is the examination taken by students in New South Wales in their final year of high school, or whose qualifications have not been recognised by UTS. The program aims to increase academic study skills, and students take a range of subjects including Mathematics, Science, and Digital Literacy.

At UTS College, 2020 was going to be a year of transition. Our school was planning to implement a new curriculum and a new learning management system (LMS) which would create a more blended teaching and learning environment than we had previously. As coordinators, we were tasked with adequately preparing teachers for these changes. To do so, we first needed to examine teachers' attitudes to blended learning techniques. Therefore, we decided to focus our action research (AR) project on the teachers who would be navigating these substantial changes.

Our research participants were ELICOS teachers who taught in either the AE or FDN English programs. At the start of 2020, there were over 100 teachers working at UTS College and our interventions and data collection were open to any of these teachers who wished to participate.

Research focus

Initially, our AR project was focused on UTS College's move to blended learning using a new LMS, Canvas, as a result of UTS College's new curriculum. The impact of this move was that teachers would simultaneously need to learn the features of the new curriculum and the subsequent changes to teaching and learning it entailed, as well as how to navigate the new LMS. During previous technological and curriculum transitions, we had observed a range of attitudes towards the adoption of a blended learning approach, including 'resistant' teachers (Reinders 2018). We had hoped to examine teachers' attitudes to blended learning techniques and ensure teachers were adequately prepared for the transition to the new LMS and curriculum.

However, in March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our research focus shifted from blended to exclusively online learning. UTS College moved to deliver all courses online, via Zoom and Blackboard for AE, and via

RingCentral and Canvas for FDN. Teachers learned of the decision to move online on a Wednesday afternoon and classes began online the following Monday. This created many challenges for teachers, including managing the emotional response to the change, adapting lessons for remote learning, and adjusting to the new experience of teaching remotely.

Research questions

Our AR project aimed to capture teachers' attitudes towards the initial emergency online teaching experience and the subsequent online delivery of our courses. We also aimed to explore the emotional, pedagogical and technical challenges brought about by teaching in this new environment. We explored effective training for teachers and ways to bridge the gaps between current skills and future needs. We developed the following questions to guide our research:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards online teaching and learning?
2. How can we adequately prepare teachers for the changes they are experiencing, both with the initial emergency online teaching and the subsequent online delivery of our courses?

Data collection

Data was collected in two cycles. First, after six weeks of remote teaching, we constructed a questionnaire using ideas from Burns (2010) and Dörnyei (2003) on behavioural and attitudinal questionnaires. Question types included closed-ended items (yes/no, rating scales, numerical scales and multiple choice) and open-ended items which either guided the participant or allowed them to comment. We used Google Forms to create the questionnaire and emailed all UTS College English teachers a link to our form, inviting them to participate. We received 22 responses. The questionnaire was anonymous, and the questions focused on emotional, technical and pedagogical experiences (see the Appendix).

Then, after a 10-week remote teaching period, we held two focus group sessions where teachers reflected on their experiences. Eight teachers attended, with four teachers in each group. We asked just one question: After nine weeks of teaching online now, what suggestions or revelations about adjusting your teaching from face-to-face to online delivery do you have? For example, which skills are transferable?

We recorded and transcribed the sessions, analysing the discussion into thematic categories using keywords.

Qualitative data analysis

We used thematic analysis (Smith and Rebolledo 2018) on our open-ended questionnaire responses and our focus group transcripts. We categorised the responses into five themes: pedagogy, emotion, technology, physical, and development. The theme that appears most often is pedagogy, with 156 total mentions (see Table 1). This demonstrates that the teachers maintained a focus on pedagogy even when their technical demands had significantly increased. Table 1 shows the frequency of each theme from our qualitative data, along with some examples of keywords within each theme.

Table 1: Frequency of themes in our qualitative data

Theme	Examples of key words	Total	Initial questionnaire	Focus groups
<i>pedagogy</i>	attendance, classroom management, comparison online vs classroom, feedback, monitoring, student attention/engagement, etc	156	59	97
<i>emotion</i>	anxious, challenge, comparison online vs classroom, confidence, easy, excited, exhausting, isolating, job security, positive, possible, stress, tolerate, etc	118	78	40
<i>technology</i>	breakout rooms, camera, comparison online vs classroom, internet, mistakes, new skills, support, etc	82	32	50
<i>physical</i>	eye contact, comparison online vs classroom, monitoring, physical distance, physical location, time, etc	44	27	17
<i>development</i>	comparison online vs classroom, new skills, learning	25	25	0

Another interesting thing to note was that the most frequent theme was not the same in the initial questionnaire as it was in the focus groups three weeks later. Emotional themes (78) appeared most often in the initial questionnaire, while pedagogy (97) appeared most often during the focus groups. This may have had to do with the questions that we asked during each. In the initial questionnaire, the open-ended questions (see the Appendix, questions 1, 3, 14–17) may have led people to focus on their emotions, while the focus group questions may have drawn attention to pedagogy.

Further investigation into the theme of pedagogy revealed frustrations many teachers raised. Concerns included student engagement, student attention, and feedback. Teachers' focus on pedagogical concerns may largely have been due to the fact that the materials the teachers were using for online teaching were developed for face-to-face delivery.

Findings and discussion

Question 1: What are teachers' attitudes towards online teaching and learning?

In our initial questionnaire, to understand how teachers felt about online teaching and learning during our emergency remote teaching phase, we asked them to compare it to face-to-face teaching. As shown in Figure 1, around 63% of respondents indicated that their opinion was that online teaching was not as effective as face-to-face teaching.

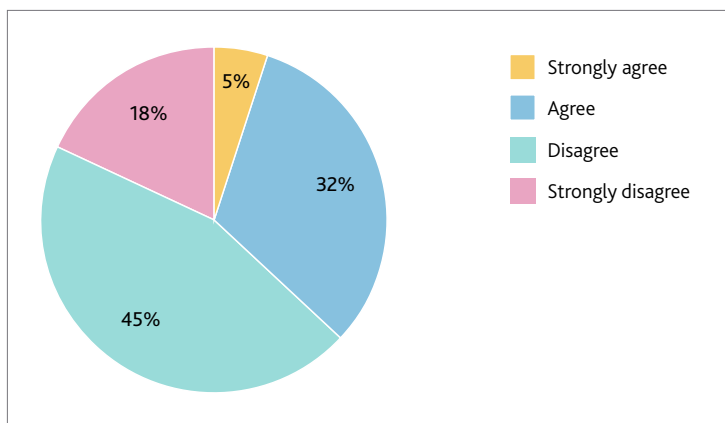


Figure 1: Responses to the statement 'Teaching with online delivery can be just as effective as teaching face-to-face in a classroom.'

This response implied that many of our teachers disliked online teaching and thought it was inferior to face-to-face teaching. It should be noted that the type of online teaching that they were practising was emergency remote teaching, rather than truly online teaching (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond 2020). This response was not surprising, given that our questionnaire also revealed that only one out of the 22 respondents had ever used the video technology they were being asked to teach with, and only five respondents had ever used any video technology for teaching online.

While some teachers expressed initial positivity to online teaching, using adjectives such as *pleased*, *reassured*, *excited*, and *relieved*, many expressed initial negativity with adjectives like *nervous*, *intimidated*, *overwhelmed*, and *stressed*. However, after six weeks of online teaching, 18 out of 22 teachers responded that their attitudes had changed. When asked to elaborate on this attitudinal change, many of the responses showed a positive change with an emphasis on the development of new skills and job security due to our school being able to remain open. For example, one teacher commented that, 'teaching online has opened up a whole new way of teaching plus I have learned so much', while another teacher said, 'I've realised that remote teaching creates many opportunities to leverage new skills and refocus the way we teach to a more blended learning format. It means we've been able to continue with our teaching despite many other organisations closing down.'

Although we did not explicitly ask the focus group to compare online teaching to face-to-face teaching, many of the participants did just that. One teacher expressed the difficulty of monitoring students online like this:

'I always have viewed teaching in the classroom as kind of like you know, those plate spinners. Those guys that put a plate on a stick and you have to run around and keep this plate spinning and if you see one wobbling you have to go over. In the classroom, if you see you're losing someone, it's kind of easy to just go, "hey, what are you doing?" and get them back or "what's wrong?" It's so hard online to get someone and because they have other things in their own room, they tend to stop spinning quicker. So it's harder to get them and it's easier to lose them.'

This quote demonstrates that monitoring students' attention, engagement and understanding was often much more challenging online than it would have been in person. An example from another teacher illustrated this difficulty when she said that two of her students handed in assignments that were completely off topic:

'One or two students, when they handed in their drafts, had completely missed the point and in a classroom I would have caught that early. I would have seen. I would have walked around the room and seen what people are writing and the students would have looked at the person next to them and seen.'

In the physical classroom, not only would she have been able to walk around the room and see if students were understanding the assignment, but these students would have also had the benefit of seeing what those sitting next to them were doing.

Similar responses emerged in our initial questionnaire with teachers expressing the difficulties in creating rapport with students online compared to the physical classroom. One teacher summed up the challenges this way:

'I miss the personal contact I manage to establish with my students in a face-to-face classroom. I still try to establish rapport, but it is much harder. I feel I don't understand them as well as I usually do and am therefore less effective in motivating them and adapting my teaching to their interests/learning style.'

Although other teachers expressed similar difficulties, many teachers developed strategies to create rapport and community in their classrooms. Those strategies included building personal relationships from the first day of class and continuing those relationships with warmers, activities, and personal interactions throughout the course. One teacher suggested placing students into a group that they worked with throughout the course so that they built a sense of community within that group. Another teacher expressed that once she and her students had established these personal relationships, the students became excited about attending class because they looked forward to seeing their friends:

'I was surprised ... that once we had those relationships, they were excited about coming to class. I maybe thought that some students would drop off more, but I think they're feeling a bit isolated as well and they are looking forward to seeing their friends at 9 o'clock.'

One teacher went so far as to say that they often preferred the rapport they had with students online because they had many more opportunities for one-on-one interactions than in the face-to-face classroom:

'And strangely enough, I know I'm probably mad, but I actually really love the environment. I felt that it allowed me to have a lot more one-on-one time with people too ... I thrived in it and I loved it, and I felt I felt the connection with my students was much better than maybe sometimes face to face.'

In summary, our teachers demonstrated a willingness to act quickly. They exhibited more positive attitudes after just six weeks of online teaching due to the excitement of developing new skills and the fact that UTS College remained open and teachers were able to continue working. However, they also responded that the biggest challenge was classroom dynamics: monitoring students in order to meet their needs, engaging students in lessons, and creating rapport with students online.

Question 2: How can we adequately prepare teachers for the changes they are experiencing, both with the initial emergency online teaching and the subsequent online delivery of our courses?

In attempting to answer our second research question about preparing teachers, we probed whether teachers were receiving the support they needed. Figure 2 shows responses about support from the initial questionnaire.

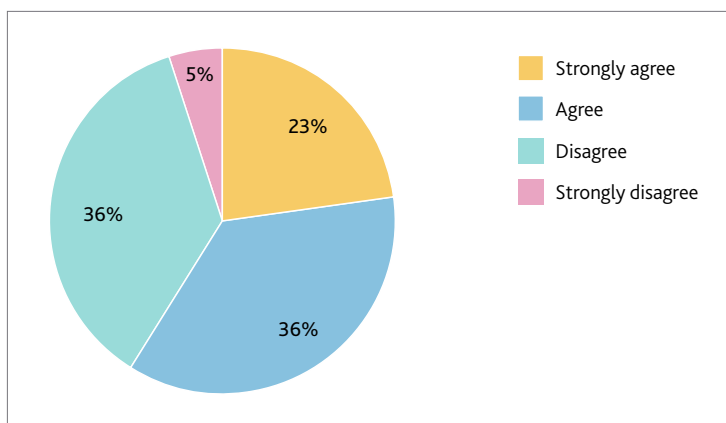


Figure 2: Responses to the statement 'I feel that I am receiving the support I need to effectively teach online.'

Approximately 60% of respondents indicated that they were receiving the support they needed. However, 40% felt they were not. For these teachers, we wondered what kind of support they required, so we asked a follow-up question in the questionnaire (Figure 3) and again in our focus groups (Figure 4). The majority of responses in each of these follow-up questions were related to pedagogy. Figure 3 shows the themes that came out of teachers' responses when we asked what else they would like to learn about.

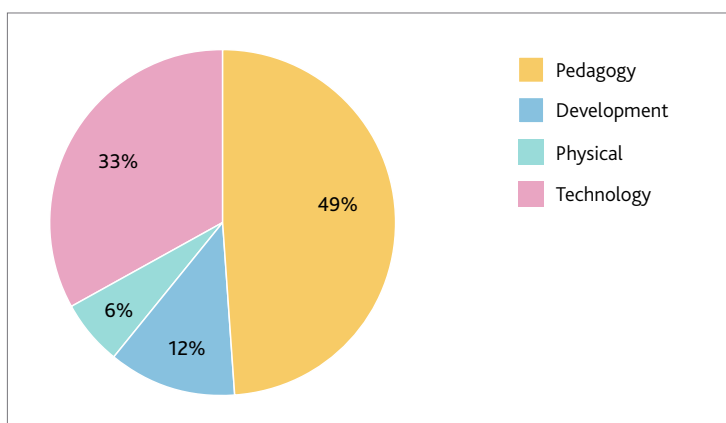


Figure 3: Thematic analysis of responses to the statement 'I would like to learn more about _____', from the initial questionnaire

During our focus groups, we asked teachers to choose between three options for further support: emotional, technological, or pedagogical. As in the initial questionnaire, Figure 4 shows that the majority asked for more support in the area of pedagogy.

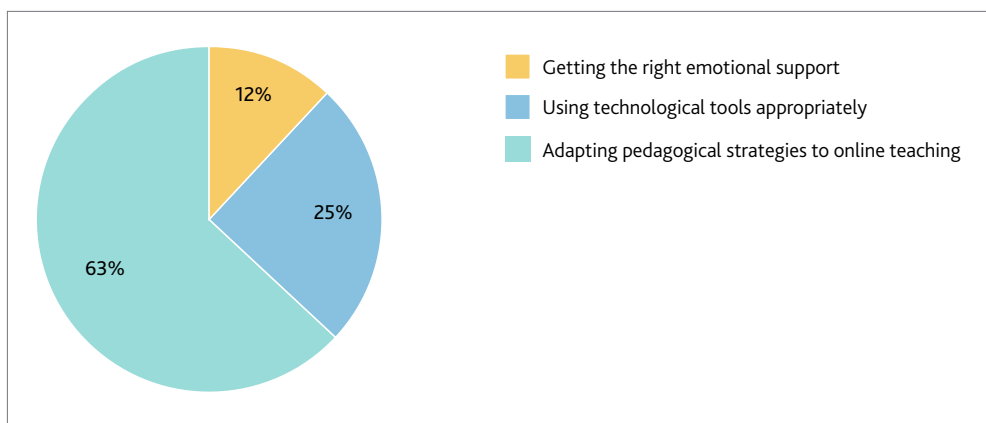


Figure 4: Responses to the question 'Which area of support do you need most going forward?', from the focus groups

Despite many teachers requesting further support in the area of pedagogy, the majority of the training provided during the period of our research project centred around the new technologies the school required that teachers use. One teacher in a focus group discussed how this training had affected them:

'I think for me, the biggest challenge has been things like, so I don't normally use a lot of PowerPoints, and now we're trying to use all of this other sort of technology which, given enough time I can sit down and work it out. You know, I'm relatively tech savvy. However, I have lost so much time in my day while my kids are at home when I'm trying to work and in my week that I'm just so stretched in that regard, and I'll end up doing things, trying to work things out at 9:00 o'clock at night. So although we've had all these trainings available to us, it's like I don't actually necessarily have the time to then do them.'

This response exemplifies that for this teacher, the technological training received may have been adequate, but the teacher was more time poor due to increased responsibilities at home and increased lesson preparation time. At UTS College, our teaching materials were initially developed for face-to-face teaching, but now this teacher required time to adapt them for online delivery. Several other teachers in both the initial questionnaire and the focus groups expressed similar frustrations about lack of time due to adapting lessons.

Three phases of training were implemented while conducting our AR project and at times the phases were run concurrently. First, within the first week of emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al 2020) training was delivered in person, and teachers each received a laptop from our IT department. During this time, Rebecca delivered training on Zoom basics, and Jennifer, along with another UTS College program coordinator, delivered training on using OneDrive.

Then, as classes continued online (April to July) ongoing remote teaching training was delivered wholly online. During this phase, we harnessed UTS College's robust professional development (PD) culture in which teachers train each other in informal and formal settings. For example, one teacher gave a lunchtime session about tips for communicating effectively with students online. Other teachers presented sessions on advanced use of technologies such as Zoom, Office 365, and Padlet. Many teachers participated in 'show-and-tell' sessions during meetings. Knowing that teachers were sharing strategies with each other like this, it was at this point that we devised our initial questionnaire to understand what teachers had learned from their experiences teaching online and from sharing strategies with each other. After collating our research data, we found that teachers were more

interested in online teaching and learning training than in technology-focused training. We fed this back to the PD planning committee which had an impact on the type of training delivered at subsequent PD days.

In the third phase, during the transition to the new LMS, training was delivered primarily on Canvas using a self-access model integrated into UTS College's professional development course. Throughout this year, we supported teachers informally in our capacity as program coordinators, we were members of a team of LMS experts who advised teachers with questions about Canvas, and we also contributed to setting up a shared online folder where teachers could access training materials, how-to videos, and support documents at any time.

To answer our second research question about teacher preparedness, a reassuring finding was that, although the majority of our training for remote teaching had been focused on learning new technologies, teachers maintained a commitment to and a concern for pedagogy. We were able to feed this finding back to our school's PD committee. As a consequence, the final PD day of the year focused on teacher development and its impact on teaching and learning, rather than training in new technologies.

Conclusions and reflections

In answering our first research question, we found that teachers' attitudes towards online teaching and learning varied. We were pleasantly surprised to see that many teachers expressed positive attitudes in the initial questionnaire, turning a challenge into an opportunity. Though some were apprehensive, they were willing to adapt quickly, and many teachers were excited to adopt a new way of teaching and to learn new skills. This response was promising for the future of our teachers' professional development at UTS College. Teachers were also relieved that our school was able to continue operating during a time when many other English language centres were forced to close due to the Covid-19 restrictions on international travel, reducing the ability of international students to study in Australia, resulting in a lack of onshore students.

As for the second question about adequately preparing teachers for remote teaching, the answer is complex and requires an ongoing dynamic process of development. During the transition to remote learning, teachers indeed needed technical training. However, providing technology does not mean that it will automatically enhance teaching and learning if the materials, course content, and curriculum are not adapted to suit the remote learning environment. As we develop and curate new online materials, teacher needs will evolve, and to be successful our school should invest in further development.

In addition, teachers' focus on pedagogy indicates a strong need to adapt lesson materials to effectively teach online, which cannot be done on an individual basis. The organisation must plan, create and develop courses and materials for the online platform, and the associated roles related to managing it. Mavridi (2020) states that this change requires leadership and investment. Ultimately, teachers' resilience and competency with technical upskilling does not override the institutional need for online curriculum planning and training considerations if we are to successfully transition from an emergency remote teaching environment to ongoing online delivery.

References

- Burns, A (2010) *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: a guide for practitioners*, New York: Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z (2003) *Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration and Processing*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hodges, C, Moore, S, Lockee, B, Trust, T and Bond, A (2020) The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning, *Educause Review*, available online: er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning
- Mavridi, S (2020) *From emergency remote teaching to sustainable online education*, available online: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivPrLEzk98Y
- Reinders, H (2018) Teacher resistance and resilience, in Liontas, J I (Ed) *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Smith, R and Rebolledo, P (2018) *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research*, London: The British Council.

Link to virtual colloquium presentation

Please click the following link to view the authors' presentation at the 2020 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium: https://youtu.be/yq3toRI_uEw

Appendix: Questionnaire on teacher attitudes to online teaching

1. When I learnt that Insearch was moving to online teaching, I felt _____ because _____ .
2. My attitudes toward online teaching have changed in the past few weeks.
Yes / No
3. If you answered yes, how?
4. I am confident in my ability to teach online.
Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree
5. I feel that I am receiving the support I need to effectively teach online.
Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree
6. I had used Zoom or Ring Central before the beginning of Term 3/Semester 1.
Yes / No
7. Before the beginning of Term 3/Semester 1, I knew how to use a video app (such as Zoom, Ring Central, Skype, etc) to teach online.
Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree
8. In the past few weeks, I have attended training about using technology for online teaching.
Yes / No
9. Other than Zoom or Ring Central, what technologies are you currently using to deliver online classes? (choose all that apply)
OneDrive, Teams, Padlet, Flipgrid, Discussion boards, Google Classroom, Google Drive, Other
10. I knew how to adjust my teaching from face-to-face to online delivery.
Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree
11. I knew where to go to find ideas about online teaching.
Yes / No
12. Teaching with online delivery can be just as effective as teaching face-to-face in a classroom.
Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree
13. In the past few weeks, I have attended training about online teaching.
Yes / No
14. The thing I like best about online teaching is _____ .
15. What I dislike most about online teaching is _____ .
16. I would like to learn more about _____ .
17. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

We help people learn English and prove their skills to the world

Discover more:
cambridgeenglish.org/researchnotes

We are Cambridge Assessment English. Part of the University of Cambridge, we help millions of people learn English and prove their skills to the world.

For us, learning English is more than just exams and grades. It's about having the confidence to communicate and access a lifetime of enriching experiences and opportunities.

With the right support, learning a language is an exhilarating journey. We're with you every step of the way.

Cambridge Assessment English
The Triangle Building
Shaftesbury Road
Cambridge
CB2 8EA
United Kingdom

 cambridgeenglish.org

 [/cambridgeenglish](https://www.facebook.com/cambridgeenglish)

 [/cambridgeenglishtv](https://www.youtube.com/cambridgeenglishtv)

 [/cambridgeeng](https://twitter.com/cambridgeeng)

 [/cambridgeenglish](https://www.instagram.com/cambridgeenglish)

 [/cambridge-assessment-english](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cambridge-assessment-english)