The Emerging Post Pandemic New Species of ELT Online Teachers

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Abstract

This paper will pinpoint pivotal practices fostered and delivered by the aforementioned practitioners, in English language teaching contexts, as they emerged during this whole new teaching process. It will explore the effectiveness of these practices with testimonies, examples and scientific references. These practices refer to: online presence, content preparation and delivery of successful ELT lessons, effective online tasks which promote communicative language objectives, ways of assessing language learning objectives and online engagement techniques for social connection in teacher- parent relationships. Having been forged under such difficult circumstances, during COVID-19, it might be the time for it to be massively fortified, widely spread and skillfully practiced by the vast majority of ELT teachers.

Keywords*: online teaching, remote teaching, online*

In March 2020 the global teaching community went online, literally, overnight! The impact of the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic was profound. [1](Barron, Romani, Munoz-Najar, Sanchez, 2021).The idea of "the expert ELT online teacher" was also powerfully transformed by this. The frontline of ELT online teaching became a long frontier across the world with many "untrained soldiers" who had to struggle for their "online classroom survival". As a result of this disruptive event, the DNA of traditional teaching (and ELT) professions was altered. Many of these "inexperienced online teachers" not only managed to survive but also returned from the aforementioned frontline as winners. They learned the hard way by having to adapt face-to-face language learning curricula into online versions, and learn how to use technological tools that they had not known existed, to fight new diseases like "zoom fatigue" or "online burnout". Finally, they faced significant psychological pressure, put on them by themselves, their students and, in many cases families. Teaching online appeared to be a dirty job that someone had to do.[3](De Cotto, I., & Estaiteyeh, M., 2022).

For the teachers to come through these daily adaptability requirements for effective online sessions, they had no other way but to strengthen their resilience levels. There wasn't any other option anyway. Lessons needed to continue and teachers had to deliver online. That was the exact reason why many scholars referred to this situation as "emergency remote learning" [4](Mavridi, 2022) and not as a standard "online remote learning".

As a result of this emergency, we saw a new hybrid type of teacher rising, who would match more the profile of the ELT online teacher practitioner rather than the one of a simple "online teacher". Someone not labelled as an "expert" but someone who has become a fully prepared skillful professional, ready to deliver online ELT classes at any time, for any level, to any age group.

Of course, in this process, there were problems, disruptions, lack of resources and motivation [4](Mavridi, 2022) but the "show was going on". It was because of these problems that the "exclusive offline teachers" managed to become "mandatory online practitioners" by finding solutions to problems they have never thought of before.

This paper will pinpoint pivotal practices fostered and delivered by the aforementioned practitioners, in English language teaching contexts, as they emerged during this whole new teaching process. The paper will also try to serve as a point of reference or as a comprehensive, fundamental outline for ELT teachers who would like to enrich their existing online classes or start teaching online. The paper consists of four different sections. A brief SWOT analysis from the perspective of the teacher as a professional and three consecutive sections as to what is recommended to do as a

teacher before, during and after the lesson. All the ideas and suggestions presented in this paper have been practiced by the author of the paper in various online teaching contexts and they are cross-referenced and justified by data drawn from the literature.

A Brief SWOT Analysis of Online Teaching as a Business Opportunity for ELT Teachers Today

The prevalence of online learning may have forced teachers to go online and teach but it may also open new ideas on how to expand their business as teachers in a continuously demanding market for online learning. It might be the case that even before the forced shift to online teaching, the teacher had an introverted attitude and could never think of themself as someone who could offer their services to the world or even increase the marketing value of their lessons. Proof of this is that many online private marketing companies have increased their clientele by setting up online teaching businesses for teachers from all over the world like the Balkan countries, Ukraine, Spain and even North Africa.[7](Paul Sallaway, 2021).
Some points that could be considered as strengths for expanding business with online teaching could be the following:

- **Flexibility in schedules and number of students -** Restrictions that may refer to limited spaces or matching schedules to accommodate people in the same classroom may not exist. Teachers may spend more time teaching online but this automatically increases their flexibility regarding the number of slots they have available and the number of students they can teach.

- **Cheaper than running a physical school -** Even by having your school or working at a physical school, the cost of running classes online is cheaper. This allows teachers with a smaller budget to still be able to create a viable online teaching business and with the right promotion to increase their profit.

- **Presents different opportunities for collaboration and creativity for "digital natives". -** Following Mark Prensky's definition of the "digital natives", we should not be excluding the possibility that the majority of the students, during COVID, did enjoy the experience of having a lesson with the assistance of technology. Whether this "learning opportunity" was sufficiently supported by teachers worldwide is another story. But the teachers who did perceive technology as a "vehicle for knowledge" and not as an enforced means did experience moments of collaboration and creativity at a large scale and literally from distance. [4](Mavridi, 2022)

- **The teaching community has discovered the benefits of asynchronous learning.** It looks as though we completely neglected the power of asynchronous learning but COVID-19 could have been a wonderful opportunity to revive it. It was the combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning that may have given a different dimension and splendor to our online classes. It seemed like teachers re-discovered how they could expand their learning time outside the classroom with techniques like project-based learning, flipped classroom, online presentations etc. On the other hand, students rediscovered the comfort of studying at their own time and pace, outside of the strict timeline of a classroom session.

- **Precious feedback from recorded lessons**. Findings from recent research point out that "...recording sessions is much easier online than face to face and this can provide useful opportunities for assessment and reflection on the teaching experience". [4](Mavridi, 2022)

Suggestions for Teachers' Preparation Before the Lesson

- **Choose the right tools and keep looking for better ones.** The market has a very wide range of hardware tools that can suit any taste, any subjective convenience or even financial status. Teachers can make their research and discover the hardware that suits them. It does not matter if it will be cheap or expensive. What matters is if it will work for them and if it can ensure a technical flow for their lessons. This can only be established by a non-stop trial and error period and the openness to testing new devices. It is recommended that teachers do not change a particular tool if it suits them and before they find a new, better one.

- **Prepare and Practice in Advance.** In the same way that a teacher needs to have very thoroughly prepared before entering a physical class, the same stands for the teacher delivering an online class. This goes both ways regarding lesson planning and testing of hardware/software programs. Compatibility between different software/hardware programs may be an issue that can only be cured with procurement and testing. Every single new device or software needs to be tested again and again before everyday usage.

- **Prepare to Troubleshoot.** There is no guarantee that things will run smoothly during an online lesson. No matter how many rehearsals or tests one might do, the possibility of a technical glitch, while greatly diminished, will never be fully eliminated. That is why it is always recommended that teachers have different troubleshooting scenarios for various problems that may arise. Usual problems that may occur are internet connectivity problems, connectivity with a low Wi-Fi signal, incompatibility of software or simply a computer crash. Have your troubleshooting manual ready for any of these scenarios. All of these problems can be equally particular and general at the same time; hence, those aforementioned manuals will be useful even in the case of troubleshooting from the students' perspective.

- **Reset your Students' Timeline.** Even though now students might be quite accustomed to the practice of online learning, one of the main complaints from teachers during the pandemic, was that the whole lesson flow was slowed down, which sounds like a very reasonable cause to consider. By default, during the pandemic everyone was unprepared and by nature, it takes more time to finish certain tasks online compared to a face-to-face setting. A well-prepared teacher can deliver a lesson with great flow online but resetting the timeline of the lesson might be something that will be needed, to avoid frustration, and anxiety to meet curriculum deadlines and above all, kill students' motivation. It is highly recommended that all parties are on the same page regarding the timeline of the class/course.

Suggestions for Teachers' Preparation During the Lesson

- **Break materials into chunks -** Students may be less receptive to sessions with many learning objectives. Try to teach materials in small chunks.

- **Generate frequent interactivity -** Integrate many interactive tasks to generate attention and participation.

- **Offer frequent feedback -** According to Prensky "digital natives" love frequent, on-the-spot feedback. Thus, their learning process becomes more meaningful.

- **Assessment should be digitalized as much as possible.** Maybe remote learning environments can stand as an opportunity to check alternatives to testing assessment techniques like for example, project-based learning, flipped classrooms, and video presentations. The use of gamified assessment has proved to be very successful in online learning environments.

Teachers should have a more than decent screen presence - It is highly recommended that teachers make a lot of eye contact during the delivery of the lesson, use a lot of body language, maintain an upright posture , use their voice differently, be off screen during intervals and have a rather professional outfit or look (something that won't provoke students' negative comments and distract them from their lesson).

Suggestions for Teachers' Preparation After the Lesson

- **Try to give students an off-camera hook connecting the online lesson to activities outside the online classroom.** "Flipchallenges" refer to flipped classrooms, project-based learning or even connecting certain online activities to physical books.

- **Involve the Parents by keeping them fully up to date with the activities and the work you deliver online.** Have regular updates regarding the performance of their children. Invite them to attend, in the background, any online class of yours to see how the whole online learning environment works and make them part of this process.

- **Do individual check-ins with the students either for encouraging them on this whole process or to discuss particularities that may refer to any difficulties they face.**

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