

Editorial

ELT in the Time of the Coronavirus 2020/2021 (Part 3) The Show Must Go On!

Jock Wong

National University of Singapore, Singapore

It has been roughly a year since the world first heard of a deadly coronavirus, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which causes Covid19 and reached pandemic proportions, decimating many families and communities. To slow down the spread of the coronavirus and protect people from its life-threatening effects, governments everywhere implemented safety measures, one of which was physical distancing. As a result, many universities moved their classes online with a very short lead time. This was a challenge, particularly for ELT practitioners, because ELT is very much an interactive activity and lessons are, in many instances, seminar-style.

In response to the pandemic, the International Journal of TESOL Studies (IJTS) published a special issue for ELT practitioners to share their experiences on teaching online with others and thus support each other. A number of ELT professionals submitted papers to tell others about what they did, what worked, what did not, and offered practical suggestions. The journal received papers from a host of countries from various parts of the world: Australia, Cameroon, China, Germany, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey, USA, and UK. The papers present various online approaches and methodologies targeted at different kinds of students: ESL/EFL students, undergraduates, post-graduates and pre-service teachers.

When we started working on the special issue, we had little inkling that the pandemic would last beyond a semester. Because it later became obvious that Covid-19 was here to stay for a little longer, and we continued to receive manuscripts, we decided to extend the special issue. Thus, the special issue has now part [one](#) and [two](#), both published in 2020.

Now that we have entered 2021, while it has improved in some countries, the Covid-19 situation has not sufficiently abated in some other places. Singapore, for example, has entered what is called “[Phase 3 re-opening](#)” (Ministry of Health, Singapore, 2020) – following ‘Circuit Break’ (called ‘lockdown’ elsewhere), phase 1 of safe reopening and phase 2. This means that safety rules are easing. For example, 8 people can gather in a public area now instead of 5 in phase 2. However, in some other parts of the world, such as [Malaysia](#) and [UK](#), lockdown rules have been implemented again (BBC News, 2021; Reuters Staff, 2021). There is obviously no room for complacency and perhaps that is why some universities, including the National University of Singapore where I am based, continue to run some of their ELT classes online.

The Covid-19 situation is surely evolving - e.g., the recent availability of a vaccine and new virus strains in UK, South Africa and Japan (Nikkei staff writers, 2021) - but a lot remains unknown - e.g., the duration of the vaccine’s protection and its effectiveness against new strains of the virus. Thus,

our online teaching approaches and methodologies must also evolve to deal with whatever new challenges the situation presents. As long as there are ELT classes being run online, the IJTS would like to extend the special issue, now part 3, to allow ELT practitioners to share their online experiences and recommendations with others, and to continue the discussion on best ELT practices under dire circumstances. Together, we can find the best ways forward.

Because, come what may, the show must go on!

References

- BBC News. (2021, January 13). Covid: What are the lockdown rules across the UK? The United Kingdom. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-52530518>
- Ministry of Health, Singapore. (2020, December 14). Moving into phase three of re-opening. Singapore. Retrieved from <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/moving-into-phase-three-of-re-opening>
- Nikkei staff writers. (2021, January 11). Japan finds new COVID virus strain, distinct from UK and Africa types. Tokyo, Japan. Retrieved from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/Japan-finds-new-COVID-virus-strain-distinct-from-UK-and-Africa-types>
- Reuters Staff. (2021, January 11). Malaysia imposes 2-week lockdown as virus spread strains hospitals. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-malaysia/malaysia-imposes-2-week-lockdown-as-virus-spread-strains-hospitals-idUSKBN29G10T>

Jock Wong is a senior lecturer at the Centre for English Language Communication, National University of Singapore. His teaching and research interests include semantics, pragmatics, intercultural communication, Anglo English, Singapore English and academic English. He is an Associate Editor of the International Journal of TESOL Studies and a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Intercultural Communication Research.