

National Aviation University

NATALIIA PAZIURA

ORCID: 0000-0003-1234-7610

npazyura@ukr.net

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*Foreign Language Teachers' Training in East Asia  
under the COVID-19 Pandemic*

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Szkolenie nauczycieli języków obcych w Azji Wschodniej w związku z pandemią COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an experience of East Asia countries in the training of foreign language teachers with three objectives. The first is to incorporate the principles and values of multicultural world in the university curriculum. The second objective addresses the question of how to train an adequate number of highly qualified foreign language teachers with necessary knowledge and skills to prepare their students to live in the globalized world and contribute to the development of global and national economies. The third one tries to explore how to apply active methodologies in the teaching of foreign languages and to provide students with active distance learning tools to improve and guarantee the quality of the teaching–learning process. The results of the experience of East Asian countries demonstrate the potential of distance learning for the development of transversal competencies and the capacity of students to design and solve complex problems with creativity and knowledge of social and labour realities. The article presents the advantages of distance learning methods and techniques, which assume the combined responsibility of students and teachers in generating knowledge conducive to their professional development as foreign language teachers, corresponding to the needs resulting from the changes taking place in the globalized world.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; online language teaching; virtual community; feedback; pandemic; teaching innovation; East Asia

In times of globalization and the spread of foreign languages as a means of international communication, there appears a social order concerning the training of

sufficient number of foreign language teachers on the one hand, but on the other, their training requirements are increasing as, in addition to the necessary foreign language proficiency, they are expected to master other competences.

Traditionally, teachers in Asian countries are highly respected in society, and considered to be experts in a particular field of knowledge (Nguyen, 2009). However, teachers are expected to constantly participate in the development of their students, grant sincere devotion to their work and even some self-sacrifice for the sake of the students. While these traditional social expectations of teachers are still relevant, in many Asian countries, the educational and socio-political realities of the modern world have introduced new demands on teachers, and especially on foreign language teachers. If previously the main goal of education was to prepare students for exams, now it is expected that teachers should provide students with communication resources necessary for life in a globalized world. At the national level of the East Asian countries, it was decided that teachers should make efforts to educate active agents of society who could effectively integrate into the world economy and contribute to the development of the national economy.

In addition, at the end of 2019, the global COVID-19 pandemic radically changed people's normal life, significantly affected the medical, social, economic and educational sectors. The introduction of educational innovations adapted to the conditions of the pandemic was the key to continuing the activities of education institutions, the use of new technologies was aimed at adapting the tasks and types of full-time work for distance learning. This has been a challenge for the training of foreign language teachers, as the vast majority of effective methods involve a communicative approach, direct contact with the teacher, group work, role-playing games, problem-solving, and so on.

The issue of training foreign language teachers has always been in the focus of scholars around the world. Cem Alptekin (2002) emphasized the need to introduce new pedagogical models for the training of English teachers as a means of international and intercultural communication. Asian scholars (Mirici, İlter, Er, Saka, Aksu, 2004) have highlighted the importance of covering peacekeeping issues in English textbooks. Judith Shrum and Eileen Glisan (2005) emphasized that language enables real-world communication. Douglas Brown (2000) believed that language is the main mechanism for maintaining social ties in society. In addition, the analyzed literature indicates the recognition in Asian countries of the responsibility of teachers for the quality of training of their students. David Nunan (2003) highlighted the problem of providing pedagogical staff with education systems in East Asia and the insufficient level of training of English teachers.

Thus, theoretical and practical research provided the basis for conclusions about the urgent need for foreign language teachers not only in pedagogical knowledge, communicative teaching methods, modern educational technologies, but also in skills to work with digital technologies, especially in pandemics and

distance learning. At the state level, it was recognized that the ability of teachers to perform these functions requires the modernization of training and the introduction of state mechanisms for monitoring and media observation in the education system (Cohen, 2010).

It was decided that the effectiveness of foreign language teachers will be monitored by testing the performance of their students through tests developed according to national and international standards, as well as by comparing performance at national and international levels (e.g. the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA). Students' performance has begun to affect teachers' rewards. For example, in Bangladesh, the government decided to link non-government school teachers' monthly payments to quality of education and pass rates of institutions in national final exams (Obaidul Hamid, 2016, p. 27).

We should emphasize that English language teachers have a special role to play in East Asian countries, as their training makes a significant contribution to the peaceful existence of the world. Although the content of foreign language teacher training does not mention such issues as human rights, responsibility for peace, the main goal in learning a foreign language is to teach understanding of other cultures, lay the foundation for peaceful intercultural communication, prepare for life in a globalized world. Adding a humanistic dimension to the foreign language teacher training process provides future teachers with an understanding of their social responsibility.

Plurilingualism and multiculturalism have become the main aspects in the activities of many organizations, so cross-cultural and international approaches are important in the curriculum of future English teachers given the speed of globalization and the goal of fostering tolerance regardless of the country or region. The process of training future English teachers should integrate the process of acquiring the skills of teaching a particular subject together with the skills of educating the citizens of the world (Hakki Mirici, 2008, p. 346). Thus, teachers in Asian countries educate citizens to live in a multicultural, globalized and multilingual region. They educate students in a spirit of respect for both common and distinctive features of Asian culture. The training program for future English teachers covers humanistic aspects, which allows them to lay the foundation for the education of tolerant and respectful citizens of other cultures.

English in the modern world is the dominant language of communication, technology, science, business and entertainment (Crystal, 1997). The question of whether English is a driver of globalization or not remains unclear, but it is obvious that the relationship between them is symbolic and mutually beneficial. English provides the linguistic and communicative infrastructure for globalization, while globalization contributes to the development of English as a language of communication in a globalized world, which is certainly reflected in the educational policy of Asia.

In Malaysia, for example, the development of the English language was guaranteed at the national level in the “Vision 2020” document aimed at educating the industrialized nation by 2020. As in Singapore, the internationalization of higher education in Malaysia is seen as a determinant of global success. It is expected that internationalization will enable Malaysia to become an international educational hub, and on the other hand, provide employment opportunities for Malaysians in the globalized labor market. That is why in Malaysia, English has become the medium of instruction in higher education. The policy of introducing English in primary and secondary schools for teaching natural sciences and mathematics has been adopted. In Japan, the population is encouraged to learn English as a global language. Recent laws have recognized the TOEFL International English Language Proficiency Test as “raising English language standards”. Therefore, Japanese students are required to take this exam to enter higher education institutions and obtain a diploma (Obaidul Hamid, 2016, p. 28).

Thus, in the countries of the East Asian region, English is considered an important condition for successful human development and activity, with an emphasis on the earliest possible start of its study (Obaidul Hamid, 2016, p. 29). In Indonesia, in order to educate new citizens who would be able to adapt to the world economy, the government has opened International Standard Schools, where English as the language of instruction is gradually replacing Indonesian. Teachers of various disciplines teach them in English, using innovative methods to ensure the learning process. At the same time, the research shows that there are a number of problems associated with ensuring a sufficient level of English language proficiency. A study in Malaysia found that in 2012, two-thirds of the 70,000 school English teachers are not proficient in this language (Straits Times, 2012). In addition, in the context of the pandemic, modernization required the evaluation of academic performance, the development of curricula and effective teaching methods, teaching materials, providing teaching staff with the necessary competencies and ICT.

It can be stated that English has become the *lingua franca* for Asian countries and the official language of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), as well as the language of communication for representatives of different nations in Asia (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In response to globalization trends and society’s demands in East Asia, two educational reforms have been implemented: 1) the introduction of English into the primary school curriculum; 2) use of English as a means of communication in higher education. Due to this approach, English teachers have appeared in the focus of public attention, especially public sector teachers.

At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Chinese is the second most popular language in the world after English, with a growing interest in its study, due to cultural factors and economic processes in China. This makes

Chinese an extremely valuable professional skill in any field. In 2021, 100 million foreigners studied Chinese at various educational institutions around the world and 500,000 foreign students studied it at Chinese universities in 2020 (Free Chinese Lessons, 2021).

The global spread of the COVID-19 epidemic has forced many countries to close their borders, with massive and negative impacts on international student exchange. The consequences of this are especially noticeable in foreign language teaching. In China, most international students studying or intending to enroll in bachelor's or master's programs or short-term programs were no longer able to return to China after the winter holidays in 2020, and all classes were conducted online. Such changes have become a major challenge for Master of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTCSOL) programs designed for international students. Most programs provide theoretical knowledge, along with the development of skills to solve practical problems in the classroom by providing students with appropriate pedagogical technologies. In addition, modern training programs are aimed at educating intercultural competence in future teachers, which is reflected in the curriculum.

For international students who want to learn Chinese, immersion in the language environment is an effective practice as immersion teaching methods have proven effective in improving language skills. In addition, immersion programs are popular in Chinese pedagogical universities, which involve students in the practical use of acquired knowledge and skills in the classroom under the guidance of experienced teachers.

It should be noted that the pandemic has caused significant difficulties in organizing studies at Chinese universities and the change in the form of distance learning has presented certain problems for international students. It took time to transfer programs into distance form, both in technological and pedagogical aspects. Special attention should be paid to the issue of conducting pedagogical practicum in an online format. In addition, the isolated learning environment significantly affects the use of the language of instruction by students. Unfortunately, foreign students in the pandemic had limited communication with native speakers, which usually has a positive effect on the development of pedagogical skills and improving language proficiency.

In Chinese pedagogical institutions, pedagogical practicum is a mandatory component of curricula for future teachers that allows them to practice classroom skills through the discussion of modern theories, interaction with experienced teachers, involving other students in group work. The main goal of pedagogical practicum is to gain practical experience by future teachers and develop informed decision-making skills when providing instructions (Zheng, Zhang, 2021, p. 201). We should note that for Chinese students face-to-face classes resumed in the fall of 2020. But for foreign students, they still remain online. Table 1 compares

classroom organization before and after lockdown for Chinese and international students.

Table 1. Organization of education for Chinese and foreign students in Chinese pedagogical institutions before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

	Chinese students	International students
Before	Classroom classes – lectures and seminars – watching videos from teachers' experience – conducting classes by trainees	Classroom classes – lectures and seminars – watching videos from teachers' experience – conducting classes by trainees
	Practicum (in the classroom) – observation and conducting classes	Practicum (in the classroom) – observation and conducting classes
After	Classroom classes – lectures and seminars – watching videos from teachers' experience – conducting classes by trainees	Individual classes (online) – asynchronous lectures – asynchronous video demonstration from experienced teachers – asynchronous consultations
	Tasks in small groups (online) – discussion between students – preparation for classes in their groups	Tasks in small groups (online) – discussion between native speaker students – preparation for classes with 2 native students – preparation of a video with a lesson with 2 native students
	Students' feedback – anonymous feedback from students about the class conducted by the trainee	Students' feedback – anonymous feedback from students about the class conducted by the trainee

Source: Author's own study.

For both Chinese and international students, the study materials are available on the website of the special online learning platform Chaoxing (similar to Moodle), specially designed and used by higher education institutions in China. Students receive a corporate account and use video conferencing platforms such as Tencent, Voov, or Zoom (Zheng, Zhang, 2021, p. 202).

Consider in more detail the types of educational activities introduced for future teachers in the pandemic.

*Asynchronous lectures.* Students view asynchronous lectures and participate in asynchronous discussions. The main function of asynchronous tasks is that the teacher can stay present and help students when needed, which gives them a sense of belonging to the learning community. For future foreign language teachers, asynchronous lectures are downloaded by the teacher, they are short and focused on specific material, presented in the form of presentations. Students watch lectures on the platform, so the teacher monitors their learning process, as the system

records the amount of time the student spends studying the material. After watching the lecture, students write their questions in a specially created discussion forum.

*Group work.* Usually most tasks are performed in groups. Interaction in small groups helps students focus on grammatical errors of their peers, encourages them to use grammatical forms in a meaningful context, to develop autonomous learning (Gass, 1997). Interaction between native and non-native students can encourage non-native students to assess their own level of proficiency in the language they are learning (Swain, 2000).

The recording of the lesson with native speakers is carried out with the help of video conference. Students are encouraged to hold video conference meetings to discuss topics related to lectures and preparation for classes. Video conferencing creates situations for the synchronous exchange of verbal and non-verbal information. Non-verbal information is perceived by the interlocutors in the same way as in usual communication. All video conferences are recorded by the group leader and the videos are given to the teacher (Sekar Diasti, Kuswando, 2020, p. 204).

The main purpose of conducting the class by a student is to demonstrate the methods and technologies that students have mastered during their studies. In the video, a non-native speaker conducts classes for native students. The video is uploaded to the course website for viewing by all students (Zheng, Zhang, 2021, p. 204). Chinese educators consider feedback from students to be extremely important. Thus, after watching the demonstration classes conducted by students, native speakers and foreign students must provide their assessments, express opinions and wishes. This is used to improve understanding of one's own performance of the task, others than the teacher's thoughts and reflections on possible ways to improve professional skills (Rollinson, 2005).

This process of "consideration–reflection–correction" contributes to the development of autonomy of the educational process. Students are asked to answer the following questions: What do you think was the best thing about the demonstration?; Do you have a quality proposal to improve the lesson?; What did you learn from the lesson? Students' responses are analyzed using content analysis (Zheng, Zhang, 2021, p. 206).

Online interaction allows international students to practice Chinese and study Chinese culture, and Chinese students have the opportunity to develop intercultural communication competence. Providing feedback on the student's lesson allows students to think about their own performance of this task. The student who receives feedback from classmates also analyzes the performance. Among the most serious difficulties for students studying Chinese is the lack of proficiency, and, therefore, they appreciate the opportunity to communicate with their Chinese classmates. It should be noted that international students are satisfied with such an

organization of study. Chinese students express a desire to attend larger meetings or have additional meetings.

Online learning forces students to be more autonomous in this process. However, this highlights the role of the teacher in developing and monitoring the autonomy of this process. In the usual mode of learning, students' autonomy meant his involvement in the learning process, self-reflection, use of the language he is learning and his interaction (Little, Brammerts, 1996). But these aspects can be present in a virtual environment created by the teacher. Study groups including Chinese and foreign students ensure the interaction and use of the language being studied. Feedback encourages students to reflect on their own teaching behavior. Each task is monitored by the teacher through an online platform, which also encourages learning (Zheng, Zhang, 2021, p. 209). We should stress that the organization of training is aimed at the development of pedagogical style. Such integrated and reflective practices are retained for all professional lifetime and allow future teachers to "critically evaluate their own ideas and teaching style for laying the foundation for further professional development" (Lord, Lomicka, 2007, p. 514).

Among other things, the goal of stimulating cultural exchange is achieved. Modern teaching of foreign languages aims to encourage various forms of communication between people of different cultures. In such an unprecedented period of the COVID-19 pandemic, when countries are closed to each other, the successful implementation of global understanding and cultural tolerance totally depend on teachers. Therefore, it is important to educate future teachers a global understanding and intercultural communication competence. Thus, such communication between Chinese and foreign students not only improves pedagogical skills, but also provides intercultural understanding, which should mobilize cultural resources and foster respect for the values of other cultures, adherence to the principle of equality in their future classrooms (Zheng, Zhang, 2021, p. 210).

Thus, educational policy in response to globalization, internationalization of higher education, participation in the globalized economy and the development of the national economy puts great pressure on English language teachers who are expected to meet social demand but do not have language and pedagogical training and support. Besides, the issue of fostering tolerance for people of different cultures, at which foreign language teachers' training is aimed, comes to the fore. The use of innovative methods and technologies in Chinese pedagogical institutions has allowed saving the effectiveness of training. Creating virtual communities of Chinese and international students helps develop learning autonomy, shape future teachers' perceptions of their future activities in a multinational environment, and, as a result, train foreign language teachers with a global worldview. The use of ICT allows tracking and analyzing students' progress, identify difficulties in the learning process and respond to them quickly.



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## ABSTRAKT

W artykule opisano doświadczenia krajów Azji Wschodniej w kształceniu nauczycieli języków obcych w trzech celach. Pierwszym z nich jest włączenie zasad i wartości wielokulturowego świata do programu nauczania na uniwersytetach. Drugi cel odnosi się do pytania, w jaki sposób wyszkolić odpowiednią liczbę wysoko wykwalifikowanych nauczycieli języków obcych, posiadających niezbędną wiedzę i umiejętności, aby przygotować studentów do życia w globalnym świecie oraz przyczynić się do rozwoju gospodarki światowej i krajowej. Trzeci cel obejmuje badanie, którego celem jest określenie tego, jak stosować aktywne metodologie w nauczaniu języków obcych i zapewnić studentom aktywne narzędzia nauczania na odległość, aby poprawić i zagwarantować jakość procesu nauczania–uczenia się. Doświadczenia krajów Azji Wschodniej pokazują potencjał kształcenia na odległość dla rozwoju kompetencji przekrojowych oraz zdolności studentów do projektowania i rozwiązywania złożonych problemów z kreatywnością i znajomością realiów społecznych i zawodowych. W artykule ukazano zalety metod i technik kształcenia na odległość, które zakładają połączoną odpowiedzialność studentów i nauczycieli w generowaniu wiedzy sprzyjającej ich rozwojowi zawodowemu jako nauczycieli języków obcych, odpowiadających potrzebom wynikającym ze zmian zachodzących w zglobalizowanym świecie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** COVID-19; nauczanie języków obcych online; społeczność wirtualna; informacja zwrotna; pandemia; innowacje w nauczaniu; Azja Wschodnia