

Adapting EAP pedagogy for online learning: Lessons from emergency remote teaching

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How to cite: De Lima Guedes, K. K. (2025). Adapting EAP pedagogy for online learning: Lessons from emergency remote teaching. In Y. Choubsaz, P. Díez-Arcón, A. Gimeno-Sanz, V. Morgana, A. C. Murphy & F. L. Seracini (Eds.), *Advancing CALL: New research agendas - EUROCALL 2025 Short Papers*. <https://doi.org/10.4995/EuroCALL2025.2025.21290>

Abstract

This study examines how English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners adapted their teaching during Emergency Remote Teaching in a UK university's online pre-sessional programme. Using qualitative methods, including discussion forum reflections and interviews with 25 practitioners, this research explores how these practitioners restructured their online practices and integrated digital tools to improve learning outcomes. Findings reveal that most initially tried to replicate in-person instruction but soon recognised the unique affordances and constraints of online teaching. Adjustments included more structured lesson plans, integration of asynchronous learning to complement synchronous sessions, and adoption of flipped-learning methodologies. Practitioners also developed multimodal engagement strategies, using collaborative tools to boost student participation, and adapted concept-checking methods by using chat-based responses, emoji reactions, and structured questioning techniques to foster interaction. The study offers insights into how teaching methodologies were continually evaluated and re-evaluated in digital EAP contexts and highlights the role of digital tools in supporting both second language and academic skills development, as well as enhancing engagement in synchronous and asynchronous settings. It concludes by underscoring the importance of CALL-informed professional development to advance digital EAP pedagogies.

Keywords: digital pedagogy; EAP; online teaching; continuous professional development.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an abrupt shift from in-person teaching to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) across educational sectors worldwide (Hodges et al., 2020). This unprecedented transition presented significant challenges for educators, particularly those in specialised fields such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Most second language (L2) teachers lacked tailored training or prior experience in online delivery (Mavridi, 2022), and EAP practitioners were no exception to this widespread unpreparedness. Among those most significantly affected were practitioners teaching in pre-sessional programmes (PSPs), who are responsible for supporting students' academic language development and study skills. EAP teaching in PSPs has traditionally relied on campus-based instruction, characterised by intensive and interactive in-person sessions and immersive cultural and disciplinary engagement. However, the sudden shift to ERT fundamentally disrupted practitioners' established pedagogical approaches, forcing them to reassess their teaching methods.

Despite this significant disruption, research examining how EAP practitioners adapted their pedagogy during this period remains limited. This literature gap highlights the need to explore not only what changes practitioners made during ERT, but also their underlying pedagogical rationales. Understanding how practitioners navigated this transition is essential for advancing knowledge of digital pedagogy in EAP and informing future emergency teaching preparedness. Situated within an online pre-session programme at a Higher Education (HE) institution in the UK, this study addresses this gap by investigating the following research question (RQ): Did practitioners feel compelled to adjust their teaching practices during ERT? If so, what adjustments were made and why?

2. Teaching during emergency remote teaching

ERT studies reveal that most educators initially adopted a transfer approach, primarily moving existing materials and teaching practices to digital formats with minimal pedagogical adaptation, thus retaining similar resources, classroom structures, activities, and teaching methods (Bertoletti et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Tafazoli, 2021). However, despite their initial unfamiliarity with online methodologies, some began to experiment with different strategies that acknowledged the distinct demands of remote teaching environments. Farrell (2021) observed that some English teachers gradually refined their materials and approaches over time, systematically considering factors such as online activity design, platform selection, interaction modes, engagement techniques, and task duration. Nevertheless, many teachers encountered significant challenges when attempting to adapt communicative tasks to online formats, particularly when students disabled their cameras and microphones, thereby severely limiting engagement and interaction in the target language. This finding is documented by Tafazoli (2021), who reported that while some L2 teachers merely replicated in-person practices in online environments, others successfully adopted more diverse digital strategies.

In terms of delivery modes, most L2 educators employed a combination of asynchronous and synchronous methods during ERT, though this was followed by a trend toward primarily synchronous teaching (Chen et al., 2022). A particularly notable pedagogical shift involved the widespread adoption of the flipped learning method (FLM) (Ibid.), which prioritises active learning during class time, with students assigned self-directed preparatory learning materials to review independently before attending synchronous sessions (Adams & Gingras, 2017; Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Sams & Bergmann, 2013). However, the implementation of FLM during ERT proved problematic in practice with many instructors struggling to ensure student engagement with preparatory materials prior to synchronous sessions teaching (Chen et al., 2022).

When examining ERT practices, it is also important to understand how educators integrated technology into their instruction. Two influential frameworks are frequently applied to analyse this integration: TPACK and SAMR. Mishra & Koehler's (2006) TPACK framework recognises teaching as a complex process that integrates multiple knowledge domains, including technology, making it essential to understand the key aspects of teacher expertise required for effective technology integration when teaching online. TPACK intersects three fundamental domains: Technological Knowledge (TK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Content Knowledge (CK). Effective technology integration in teaching occurs at the nexus where all three domains overlap (see Figure 1¹). This framework is significant for understanding teaching changes during ERT because it illuminates how educators must simultaneously navigate technological challenges while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness and content integrity. During the rapid transition to remote learning, teachers were forced to develop new competencies at the intersection of these three knowledge domains, often under considerable time pressure and with limited preparation. In EAP specifically, effective digital language instruction requires a careful balance between academic and linguistic CK and the development of PK and TK. This balance supports the thoughtful integration of digital tools with academic language content and appropriate teaching methodologies.

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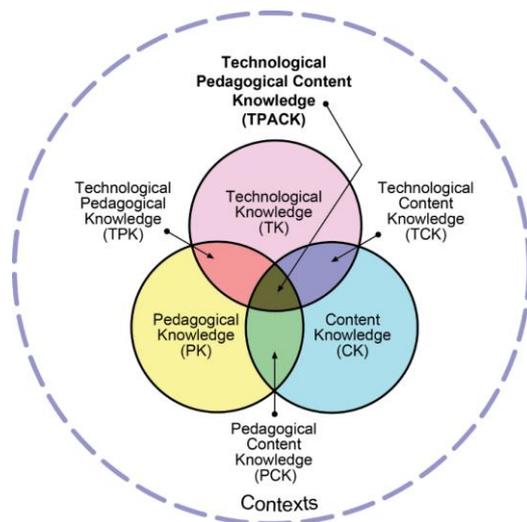


Figure 1: TPACK model

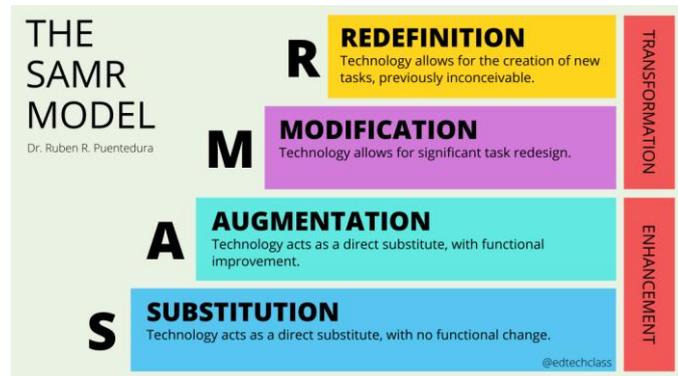


Figure 2: The SAMR model

While the TPACK framework explores the interplay between CK, PK, and TK, the SAMR model focuses on evaluating the hierarchical levels of technology integration in educational contexts (see Figure 2²). Developed by Puentedura (2006, 2013, 2014), the model categorises technology integration into four progressive stages: Substitution (direct replacement of tools and practices), Augmentation (functional improvement of existing practices), Modification (significant task redesign), and Redefinition (creation of new, previously inconceivable tasks). The SAMR model proves particularly valuable for analysing teaching changes during ERT because it provides a systematic framework for measuring the depth and sophistication of technology integration as educators adapted to remote instruction. In EAP contexts, Substitution might involve simply sharing PDF readings online, while Augmentation could include the addition of interactive Q&A functions or multimedia annotations. More advanced stages, such as Modification and Redefinition, may involve collaborative annotation of academic texts, real-time peer editing of research papers, or the creation of peer-reviewed multimedia presentations, activities that reimagine traditional EAP tasks for digitally enhanced learning environments and potentially create new forms of academic literacy. Both models were frequently employed during this emergency period to assess teachers' levels of technology integration (Bicalho et al., 2023a; Lee & Jung, 2021; Su, 2023). Together, these models illuminate both the technical and pedagogical challenges teachers faced throughout ERT and the potential pathways for sustained innovation in post-pandemic EAP educational practices.

3. Method

This study employed a case study design (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) to examine the teaching experiences and perspectives of EAP practitioners in a PSP during the ERT transition. A multi-method approach (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2017) using diverse qualitative data sources enhanced rigour through cross-validation. Following Wiewiorka's (1992) framework, the study treated the programme and its practitioners as the case study subject, with their online teaching experiences and perspectives as the object of investigation. This design enabled in-depth exploration of practitioners' lived experiences within the research context, while the multi-methods approach captured both spontaneous reflections and structured responses regarding pedagogical adaptations.

3.1. Participants and data collection

All individuals teaching in this online pre-sessional programme were invited to participate, with 25 EAP practitioners in total agreeing to take part in the study. Data were collected using non-probability sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) between 2021 and 2022 through two primary qualitative methods:

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- **Discussion forums (DFs):** Facilitated asynchronously via Microsoft Teams (June–September 2021), these grouped participants by role (i.e. tutors, coordinators) to elicit ongoing reflections under structured topics. The asynchronous format allowed participants to reflect deeply on their teaching over time, capturing evolving perspectives on necessary adjustments and their implementation. DFs engaged 17 individuals and provided an environment for practitioners to share spontaneous pedagogical insights.
- **Semi-structured interviews (SSIs):** Conducted via Microsoft Teams or Skype (November 2021–January 2022), each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. Interviews followed a guide of open-ended questions with flexibility to probe emerging insights from participants' responses. This enabled targeted exploration and allowed for detailed examination of their pedagogical decision-making processes and rationales. Interviews were conducted with 16 practitioners.

The majority of participants were women aged between 36 and 65 years who spoke English as their first language (L1). More than half possessed CELTA certification, and half had earned either a master's degree or PhD as their highest educational qualification. The group included nineteen instructors, five coordinators, and one academic leader, all of whom had experience delivering EAP courses during ERT. With the exception of one practitioner, all participants brought more than a decade of ESL or EAP teaching experience to their roles, though none had previously conducted online group instruction prior to the pandemic.

3.2. Data analysis and ethical considerations

Participants received comprehensive study information and assurances of data confidentiality, had opportunities to ask questions, were notified of their right to withdraw at any time, and provided written consent. Ethical approval was secured from the University's ERGO committee (ref. 56658). To preserve anonymity, responses were de-identified using labels (e.g. T001 for tutors, L001 for leaders), which are used to attribute quotations in this paper. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2006, 2013) framework to inductively derive and report themes pertinent to the RQ. This analytical approach enabled the systematic identification of adjustment strategies whilst preserving the contextual richness of practitioners' rationales for their pedagogical decisions during the emergency transition to online teaching.

4. Results and discussion

Most practitioners initially attempted to replicate familiar in-person pedagogical practices during ERT; however, they encountered considerable difficulties: "It is not easy to reproduce the classroom experience [online]" (L016). As practitioners attempted to reproduce on-campus practices, they recognised that reproducing traditional teaching methods was suboptimal for fostering EAP learning success in the virtual environment. They acknowledged the need to adopt alternative methods, activities, and techniques tailored specifically for teaching EAP (TEAP) online, as exemplified by L016:

EAP teaching online requires a certain type of methodology, which I'm trying to adapt to. (L016)

This aligns with the Substitution stage of Puentedura's SAMR model, where in-person tasks are transferred online without redesign, as a direct replacement without functional change. Such attempts often led to frustration and reinforced perceptions of online learning as inferior. Traditional replication is often ineffective due to differences in delivery, platforms, tools, interaction, engagement, and assessment (Farrell, 2021).

By the second year of ERT, practitioners recognised that traditional in-person EAP pedagogy cannot translate directly to online teaching, requiring distinct approaches tailored to digital contexts. Their methods evolved incrementally as they reflected on and experimented with various strategies throughout the pandemic. This gradual adaptation reflects the kind of iterative development TPACK describes, where technological knowledge had to be rapidly integrated with established PK and CK. These findings align with previous ERT research (Bertoletti et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Farrell, 2021; Tafazoli, 2021). Practitioners' reflections resulted in adaptations across several domains, such as lesson planning, synchronous-asynchronous session balance, classroom management, interaction techniques, instructional delivery, and resource selection.

4.1. Detailed lesson planning requirements

The transition to online teaching fundamentally altered practitioners' approach to lesson planning, with over half of participants (N=14) reporting the need for significantly more detailed preparation. This shift stemmed from three primary factors: reduced capacity for spontaneous adaptation, increased complexity of collaborative activities, and altered timing considerations in the virtual environment. The reduced ability to improvise and adapt in real-time emerged as a critical challenge. Practitioner L014 articulated this constraint: "I've found it harder to 'wing it' in online lessons as you don't have quite the same space as a physical classroom [...] you need to think through your lesson a lot more and plan effectively." This limitation was particularly pronounced among tutors who did not typically identify as meticulous lesson planners, such as T011 and L010.

I was never the most pre-planned teacher. I tended to go into class with a general idea of the kinds of things we were going to do. [...] I've been teaching long enough that I could ad-lib. I find online, it's almost impossible to do that. Somehow, I expect myself to have PowerPoints, all sorts of things ready, so I've got to be much more prepared. (T011)

I had this [attitude of], I know what I'm doing. I'll just go in with some bits, we'll just talk, and it'll be fine. And it always was [...]. Online, [however], I have to plan. So, that's not really an option anymore. I used to be able to pivot, suddenly change what I was doing in a classroom situation if it's not working, whereas on an online situation, I've tried that a few times and it's always gone wrong because I haven't thought through the consequences of changing an activity halfway through. (L010)

Both L010 and T011, experienced EAP practitioners who had previously relied on minimal planning, preferred dynamic adjustment, and valued their ability to “ad-lib”, acknowledged that this approach proved unfeasible in online contexts. L010 explained that online delivery necessitated lesson planning adjustments:

You've got to think much harder about what you're doing and using. Even simple things like sharing your screen and finding all your bits if you've got two screens going. If you're trying to do it on one screen, it's even harder. We're trying to find everything to present to the students and the pauses between what you're doing. So, I will give an instruction, for example, before I've set up the breakout rooms. Then, I've got set up the breakout rooms. Now they're going to sit there not doing anything while I do all that, you know? So, it's the order of information. And that makes you stop and think. (L010)

This quote highlights key considerations for online lesson planning: activity sequencing, task feasibility, and multitasking with technology. L010 emphasises the need for greater reflection on lesson planning and delivery, particularly the importance of information order and instructional design. It also exemplifies the heightened cognitive load teachers face when managing multiple tasks and technological tools simultaneously online, and illustrates the TPACK challenge of balancing pedagogical sequencing with the demands of technological tools.

Secondly, the complexity of organising collaborative activities online introduced additional procedural demands requiring careful advance planning. This included selecting appropriate groupings, managing transitions to breakout rooms, monitoring discussions across multiple virtual spaces, and coordinating return to the main classroom. T033 emphasised the heightened preparation required for synchronous pair and group work.

Preparation for group activities needs to be made in more detail to achieve as good a feel of togetherness as possible. Relying on the technology to create groups isn't good enough and monitoring and encouraging groups or individuals has to be done more directly. (T033)

Organising collaborative tasks online requires more time compared to in-person settings, demanding careful lesson planning to determine optimal timing for such activities and effective use of classroom time, as T061 explained: "the logistics might be slightly different, [for example] leaving the discussion until the end [of the lesson]." The data also suggest this logistical complexity may have resulted in tutors using less pair and group work online due to additional temporal and organisational considerations.

Furthermore, practitioners discovered that online teaching demanded a reassessment of task timing and pacing. L014 observed that students required more processing time online, leading her to adjust her approach.

Teaching online has given me a much more accurate picture of how long students need to think before they answer a question and made me realise that I probably haven't always allowed them enough time before I assume they don't know the answer, so I tell them and then move on. [...] I have learnt to pace the lessons differently, allow more time for responses and activities, and not cram too much into one lesson. (L014)

This recognition prompted systematic adjustments to lesson pacing and activity allocation, suggesting a shift in the tutor's perception of student engagement, recognising that silence may indicate cognitive processing rather than misunderstanding or disinterest. L014 also recognised that students work at different paces and may prefer varying response methods, incorporating these considerations into her planning.

Synchronous online teaching was also perceived as slower than in-person sessions, requiring different pacing and additional learning and preparation outside class time. Lessons required comprehensive planning to maximise asynchronous learning and synchronous interaction, as noted by L007 and T050.

You're a bit more mindful of how you use your time online. You don't want to waste [it]. (L007)

I had to be more careful about planning [...] and how I delivered the activities. [...] it's made me realise more how much more efficient I could be in terms of the activities that I was doing. (T050)

While the next adjustments in practice can also impact lesson planning, the aforementioned factors were the ones most closely associated with the need for detailed planning in an online context.

4.2. Reconceptualisation of synchronous and asynchronous learning

As highlighted in the literature, the FLM was widely adopted during ERT as a way to maximise synchronous time for active learning, with preparatory work completed asynchronously. While synchronous contact hours decreased compared to pre-ERT levels in the PSP, supplementary engagement methods, such as asynchronous discussions and tasks, were introduced. Practitioners increasingly recognised synchronous sessions as precious time requiring strategic utilisation rather than serving as primary content delivery vehicles, emphasising the need to carefully plan and integrate pre-lesson activities to enhance synchronous interaction.

L004, for instance, previously viewed synchronous sessions as opportunities for direct instruction and task engagement confined to particular classes. However, the shift to online teaching prompted re-evaluation of this approach. He recognised that learning extended beyond the temporal limits of synchronous sessions, with these classes taking on a new role focusing primarily on reinforcing and consolidating learning rather than serving as the primary source of input.

The idea that synchronous time is precious [is] something I appreciate more now than I did before. [Before] I entered the room more as synchronous time as the me show, you know? Not in terms of I'm telling them everything, I set tasks and got them doing things, but the lesson often started with this is what we're going to learn. And now, the week starts with this is what we're going to learn, [...] the synchronous class is [where] the dialogue happens. That's where the consolidation happens. (L004)

He further emphasised that his synchronous sessions now focus on students producing something based on what they learnt that week or the previous week, not just based on one lesson. For him, ERT led to adjustment of perceived learning boundaries previously established in on-campus teaching time.

One thing I do in my own practice now is, at the end of the synchronous session, there's a tangible output. [Students] engage in the discussion board, [...] and then they enter the synchronous session. [...] They're engaging in something, they're deconstructing something, they're applying something to their lives or their development, and then they're going to produce something out of that, whether individually or in groups, so that there's a record, an output, something that's been created. (L004)

This indicates a shift towards active, productive engagement. By ensuring students produce something concrete, L004 fostered an environment where students could apply what they had learnt asynchronously. There was therefore a change in where teaching and learning started and ended, with boundaries becoming more flexible. Similar adaptations occurred in other online educational settings, with tutors increasingly incorporating

asynchronous activities to offer students greater flexibility, while synchronous classes shifted from content delivery to interactive activities designed to reinforce and consolidate learning (Bozkurt et al., 2020). These findings indicate that the pre-sessional programme evolved into a more flexible and student-centred model, with tutors incorporating both synchronous and asynchronous components.

Approximately one-third of participants (N=7) embraced flipped learning, reversing traditional content delivery patterns and enabling a more seamless learning continuum with synchronous sessions forming a component of a broader learning process. L014 observed exemplary implementation where "students watched [a lecture] before the lesson, they looked up the vocab. Then in the lesson, the tutor focused on critical thinking and synthesising students' ideas. [...] by the end of the lesson, they produced, [and] they continued their discussion on Teams."

The FLM yielded several pedagogical benefits. Participants noted enhanced student preparation, focus on student engagement with content over delivery, increased confidence in synchronous participation, and improved accommodation of diverse learning styles. T055 reported a shift towards more interactive teaching due to using a flipped learning approach, with students completing pre-class tasks that formed the basis for collaborative work during synchronous sessions. In these sessions, she assumed a facilitator role, encouraging knowledge co-creation, marking a departure from her previous on-campus pre-sessional teaching approach.

I'll get them to do something beforehand. And I'll bring that into the class. I'm talking less and they're co-creating with me much more. (T055)

L016 fully integrated this approach into online teaching, using asynchronous sessions for initial content acquisition, followed by interactive application and discussion in synchronous classes. Similarly, T025 reported improved interactivity and output focus in her synchronous classes and expressed intention to maintain this approach upon potential return to in-person teaching. Participants noted that the approach facilitated deeper learning, as "it is quicker and easier for students to further explore something they didn't quite understand" (T043), while "the flexibility of the online environment allows students to give more considered responses" (L016) as they "have more time to think before responding" (L010). Moreover, the FLM provided particular benefits for diverse learner needs, as L014 explained:

Using flipped learning means weaker students can spend more time on the input and activities to prepare for the lesson. It also seems to encourage more reticent learners to participate as they can use different means of communication (e.g. chat, discussion boards, etc). (L014)

This suggests extended engagement with content allowed students to work at their own pace, potentially improving understanding, participation, and performance. These observations are particularly relevant for PSPs as they require high levels of interaction to develop academic language skills effectively and quickly. The FLM enabled students to approach synchronous sessions better prepared, more focused and with increased confidence.

The FOCUS is better. I like the idea of students receiving material in advance and discussing it in class, a technique I employ in my regular all-year classes. (T028)

Students concentrated more as they [got] less [synchronous] class hours. (L002).

Asynchronous elements [allowed] for teacher and students to be more prepared. (T002).

The adoption of FLM enhanced student readiness, confidence, and engagement in synchronous sessions, which support Chen et al.'s (2022) observation that this approach can better accommodate diverse learning needs in online environments, though it still relies heavily on student self-direction. This approach also introduced dependency risks, as T061 cautioned: "You have to rely on the students preparing for the class in advance more than you would normally." However, this challenge could be attributed to the rapid nature of the transition to remote learning, which did not allow sufficient time for students to develop the self-directed learning skills and greater learner responsibility that the FLM requires.

4.3. Modified interaction and engagement strategies

The virtual environment fundamentally altered interaction dynamics, with one-third of participants (N=8) reporting reduced student engagement and necessitating alternative management approaches. Online interactions,

including synchronous and asynchronous formats with text, emoticons, audio, and video, offer greater variety than in-person interactions. However, students can more easily disengage behind profile pictures, hindering tutors' ability to assess feelings, reactions, motivation, and engagement. The absence of visual cues and physical presence online created communication barriers that required compensatory strategies to foster student engagement, build rapport, and enhance participation confidence. These strategies included double-checking understanding through oral and written formats, using repetition, pair work, direct questioning, and closed questions suited to chat or emoticon responses. For example, L010 shared systematic checking procedures to ensure engagement and comprehension in the online environment:

I do much more double checking. I repeat. If I ask a question orally, I'll also put it in the chat... I do a lot more checking perhaps than I would in-person. I won't just assume that everyone's understood what I'm saying. I'll ask them to put their thumbs up. Does everyone understand what they've been asked to do? [...] I do a lot more checking perhaps than I would in-person. Because when I'm in a room, I can see everyone, I can see their faces. I know if they look confused. I know if they haven't started working because I can see that. I guess it slows me down a bit. (L010)

Such thorough verification reflects a shift toward redundancy for clarity in online pedagogy, demonstrating awareness of potential for miscommunication where visual cues and immediate feedback are diminished. By encouraging physical responses (e.g. thumbs up), L010 actively gauged student comprehension, compensating for inability to monitor all students visually. Her reflections demonstrate critical awareness of contrasts between in-person and online environments and a proactive approach to sustaining student engagement remotely. Drawing on a similar insight, T071 and T025 described structured use of paired activities and direct questioning:

I use paired tasks and targeted responses, so they all know to expect a direct question from me. I scaffold according to need and prompts. Everyone now expects this, and they have an allocated pair for every paired activity which helps with building rapport and confidence (T071).

I did not ask students, who would like to participate? [...] I would say X, what do you think? Do you agree? Do you disagree? Why? Can you give an example, a counter argument, etc. [...] I didn't leave it to the students to put their hands up because the first few lessons no one put their hands up. [...] When I tried to encourage them by just saying, what do you think? Oh, I think you have a good idea because... [...]. I felt that gave them the push to speak more, to communicate more, to interact more. (T025)

These accounts illustrate how instructors adapted synchronous pedagogy to suit online delivery, emphasising clarity, scaffolding, and rapport-building. However, some participants observed that achieving engagement outcomes often required more time online compared to previous on-campus experiences.

Practitioners developed targeted questioning techniques adapted to online constraints. T055 shifted from open-ended to closed questions to encourage online participation, utilising digital tools as substitutes for body language. Working with 17–18-year-old students who lacked confidence in verbal online engagement, she modified her approach to permit short oral or chat-based replies, gradually building students' confidence.

[I changed] to the smaller questions, [such as] yes and no kind of answers and what's the correct 1, 2, or 3? So, it's easy for them to press just one thing. That really changed how I was teaching. (T055)

The challenge of maintaining engagement, tutor presence and support led some practitioners to extend availability beyond traditional boundaries. T025 noted in-person teaching allowed students to ask questions privately at the end of each class, an option no longer practical online. To address this, she encouraged use of alternative communication channels and remained responsive throughout the day

I encouraged them to speak up, if they had any questions, they could privately send me a message, an email, etc. I was constantly working with them all day. I didn't break at all. I would get off class, for example, [1pm] [...] and they would be texting me at [1-2am], and I'm fine, because I'm working on my computer anyway. So, they always felt that there was a lot of support from me. I was always there to give them any piece of information they needed. [...] after the lesson was over, I would invite them all to communicate with me via email, via text, [...] and I would respond straight away. (T025)

This support was not explicitly requested by programme leaders; however, T025 felt it necessary to establish strong tutor presence, foster student engagement and provide a sense of community. While effective for short-term courses, such intensive approaches raised sustainability concerns for longer programmes.

These results suggest students were perceived as less engaged online compared to previous on-campus pre-sessional programmes. Consequently, practitioners adapted their teaching practices to enhance interaction and engagement in virtual classrooms, addressing some challenges posed by online EAP learning. This aligns with Farrell's (2021) argument that engaging students online requires different strategies. In TPACK terms, this represents a pedagogical adaptation supported by targeted use of technology to maintain interaction quality in the absence of physical presence. Nevertheless, participants' comparisons often focused on online engagement during the pandemic versus pre-pandemic in-person interactions - two very different contexts. These findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously as practitioners were unfamiliar with online language engagement strategies and likely assessed student engagement through their on-campus lenses.

4.4. Enhanced instructional practices

The online environment demanded greater precision in instructional delivery, with approximately one-third of participants (N=7) reporting heightened need for detailed instructions compared to in-person teaching. As T052 noted, "[We need] to be more careful online with instructions." The lack of non-verbal cues and reduced opportunities for immediate clarification required tutors to anticipate possible misunderstandings and communicate instructions with increased clarity. L007 explained, "If you're giving them instructions [online], you have to allow for any misunderstandings and explain everything doubly."

Detailed instructions served to mitigate these limitations by enabling students to complete tasks independently. Without real-time monitoring, students risked misinterpreting instructions, making errors, or failing to complete tasks. Tutors could often only address these issues upon entering breakout rooms, where challenges were compounded by time constraints or language barriers. As T011 observed,

Face-to-face is much easier to monitor what's going on with students, easier to see if they're on task or not. This year, [I felt] that they were perhaps not as engaged in the tasks, not understanding the tasks as well as they should have done. (T011)

This issue was particularly pronounced during breakout room activities, where tutors could not supervise all groups simultaneously. T006 highlighted the importance of clear guidance: "This has involved really tightening up on instruction-giving, so that students are given exact tasks to carry out, within an exact time limit because the [teacher] can't keep an eye on all groups at the same time". In in-person settings, tutors often rely on concept-checking, body language, and hesitancy to gauge understanding. Online teaching, however, requires more explicit and multimodal communication. To ensure clarity, practitioners delivered comprehensive and explicit multimodal instructions using text, video, audio, and visuals to enhance instructional understanding. This use of multiple channels for delivering instructions exemplifies the Augmentation level in SAMR, where technology can enhance task clarity without fundamentally changing its design.

Studies indicate that online asynchronous instruction delivery differs significantly from in-person methods (Harris & Parrish, 2006; Lierman & Santiago, 2019; Morrison et al., 2019; Weston et al., 1999). Research on synchronous instruction for online language learning tasks remains limited; however, some evidence suggests it also differs from in-person approaches (Hampel, 2006; Satar & Wigham, 2020). Effective strategies for synchronous online task instruction include eliciting learner responses, providing written instructions in advance, using body language for reinforcement, offering clear and concise guidance, employing multimodal communication, and maintaining regular check-ins and feedback loops (Ibid.). While the multimodal and detailed instruction strategies align with existing literature, participants demonstrated limited awareness of online task instruction methods, highlighting the need for CPD focusing on online EAP task instructions and further research into their development and effectiveness.

4.5. Adaptation of learning activities and resources

Practitioners (N=6) identified that some traditional EAP activities were less effective in virtual environments and required alternative approaches online. For example, L014 recognised limitations of traditional comprehension exercises: "there's not a huge amount of point in those if you're going to ask them to watch or listen to something at home." Such exercises require students to comprehend stimuli, infer meaning, and demonstrate comprehension from language and context. These were frequently employed to foster listening and reading skills in on-campus teaching, but L014 now felt they were best exploited asynchronously. Providing comprehension exercises asynchronously enhances accessibility and equity in learning, allowing students to complete tasks at their convenience, selecting suitable time and duration. Consequently, they can be better prepared for synchronous classes and meaningful discussions.

Physical activities, previously used for engagement and variety, required creative adaptation. T070 addressed this challenge by incorporating brief activities or breaks to introduce variety, thereby sustaining student engagement during online sessions.

[Students] aren't moving around [online] which is an issue especially for more reticent students or those over reliant on phones/transcriptions/closed captions or less motivated for any reason. I'd normally engage those students through task-based activities with an element of physical activity [...]. [For instance], students are going to use the transcription or closed captions, so I [ask] them to identify language features as well as listen and then do discussions/activities. [...] it's important to have some snappy activities as starters/reviewing language, 1-2 breaks [...] a change of scene. (T070)

Participants primarily focused on adapting learning activities and resources to align with online platform constraints, rather than capitalising on new affordances offered by digital environments. Many resorted to repurposing previous in-person teaching materials, which proved ill-suited for virtual delivery. Their capacity to redesign content was further constrained by limited time and technical expertise.

These findings indicate that traditional on-campus EAP activities and resources may be unsuitable for online learning due to their reliance on in-person interaction, immediate feedback, and physical group work. Online learning necessitates more visual, interactive materials and effective use of multimedia and collaborative tools. When these resources are used online without adaptation, they merely substitute original methods without enhancing the learning experience, aligning with the Substitution level of the SAMR model. In this study, most activities fell within Substitution, Augmentation, and Modification levels. Some tutors Augmented their online teaching by adding minor modifications, such as shifting listening comprehension exercises to asynchronous formats; whilst others Modified their teaching by redesigning tasks, such as incorporating interactive elements to maintain engagement, or utilising platforms such as Flipgrid to facilitate peer interaction through digital listening logs. These findings are consistent with other studies examining technology integration levels during the pandemic (Bicalho et al., 2023b; Lee & Jung, 2021; Svrcek et al., 2022). From a TPACK perspective, the more transformative redesigns required integration of content knowledge in academic language, pedagogical knowledge in digital pedagogy, and technological knowledge in using online platforms to support interaction, something that only a subset of participants achieved.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how EAP practitioners adapted their teaching practices during the pandemic. The findings reveal that practitioners not only recognised the necessity for pedagogical change but implemented transformations that redefined their instructional approaches. Initially, practitioners attempted direct transfer of in-person practices, aligning with the Substitution stage of the SAMR model. However, this approach proved inadequate, compelling them to develop online-specific methodologies across five key areas: enhanced lesson planning, reconceptualised synchronous-asynchronous boundaries, adapted learning activities, modified interaction strategies, and enhanced instructional practices.

The adaptations documented here represent more than emergency responses; they constitute a comprehensive transformation of EAP pedagogical practice with implications extending beyond the immediate pandemic context.

The shift from content delivery to facilitation, the integration of multimedia activities through flipped learning, and the strategic use of collaborative technologies collectively fostered more holistic, interactive, and personalised learning environments. The findings suggest that effective online EAP instruction requires reflection, support, and collaboration among programme stakeholders while adhering to established methodologies and promoting 21st-century learning skills.

This research contributes to CALL literature by providing empirical evidence of how emergency contexts can catalyse comprehensive pedagogical transformation, moving beyond technology adoption to innovation and reconceptualisation of teaching practice. The practitioners' trajectory from technological substitution to pedagogical transformation offers practical insights for the design of future online and blended EAP programmes, suggesting that effective digital instruction depends on embracing the unique affordances of online environments and rethinking established practices, rather than replicating traditional classroom methods. A key limitation of this intrinsic case study is that, while it provides rich contextual insights, the findings might not be easily generalisable across different institutional and cultural settings. Future research should therefore investigate the long-term development and effectiveness of practitioners' adapted approaches through comparative studies in varied institutional settings to advance understanding of how contextual factors shape online EAP pedagogy.

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