

“Suspending Classes Without Pauses for Learning”: What Do Chinese Secondary Teachers Think About Remote Teaching Following the Pandemic?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This qualitative study investigated Chinese secondary teachers’ perceptions and experiences of remote teaching immediately following the pandemic. Forty-two secondary teachers participated in the study. Data included 30-hour interviews and were analyzed using inductive methods to identify emerging codes and themes. Findings showed a wide variability in teachers’ experiences with online teaching ranging from the workload change, parental involvement, and availability of technology resources. However, teachers developed a negative attitude toward remote learning while feeling underprepared to teach online. In addition, greater access to technology use during online teaching did not change Chinese teachers’ views towards the goal of education and their overall teaching philosophy and pedagogy. The study provided practical implications regarding how to prepare effective classroom teachers using technology and improves distant education development and management.

INTRODUCTION

There is a critical need to understand the experiences and perceptions of teachers toward pandemic-incurred remote teaching. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 invariably forced educators and students around the world to rapidly transition to educational experiences in the remote settings. All

stakeholders in education, be it administrators, teachers, parents or students, were left with no choice but continue educating school-aged children online. From March to May, 2020, the Chinese Ministry of Education, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, implemented a nationwide initiative that expressed itself in such a slogan as “suspending classes without pauses for learning” (Yang, 2020). The initiative required all public schools to provide online classes for students on a daily basis. The traditional Chinese social, cultural and educational contexts tend to support teacher-centered pedagogy with an emphasis of use of memorization and rote learning as a basic acquisition technique, teacher’s authority, and covering the whole curriculum designed by the administration. It is also worthy to note that the current educational reform in China aims to transform the classroom instruction to student-centered education and the full development of students’ overall competence (Liu & Wu, 2015, p.46). Given that remote teaching has inherent challenges for both teachers and students, it is important to understand this unique experience among in-service teachers regarding their perceptions toward technology use in the classroom and the effectiveness of remote teaching. With this aim in mind, this chapter presents a qualitative study with 42 secondary teachers to answer the following questions: What were Chinese secondary in-service teachers’ experiences with remote teaching following the Covid-19 outbreak? How did their experiences shape their views toward the role of technology in education?

BACKGROUND

Online teaching and learning were not a new thing in China when COVID-19 plagued the country. Remote instruction has been promoted and put into practice before the year of 2020. It was viewed and advocated as an effective way to equip the younger generation with the technological and media literacy skills and narrow down the digital divide that gradually became a serious social and educational issue (Ding, Niu, & Han, 2010). After the COVID-19 outbreak, actions were taken at the government level to ensure teachers and student to have easy access to internet and online learning resources (Zhan, Huo, Yao & Zhong, 2021, p.2). Teacher training on remote instruction was also offered by the school districts and school at the provincial and local levels. However, Covid-19 created such a drastically different social environment for teachers, leaving most of them feeling underprepared and stressed (Huang, Tili, Chang, Zhang, Nascimbeni, & Burgos, 2020).

Even with the long-advocated remote instruction in China, there was research evidence since decades ago showing that teachers were reluctant to teach with technology (Collins & Halversont, 2010). Teachers’ reluctance with technology can be explained by a myriad of reasons. One reason is related to teacher’s negative perception and experience toward technology use in the classrooms. Research showed that teacher attitudes and perceptions of technologies, their experiences with technology, as well as the educational policy are likely to be key factors in the successful integration of learning technologies (Cope & Ward, 2002, p.72). On the other, remote teaching has inherent challenges for both teachers and students, including but not limited to low motivation of students and stronger needs for teachers to create student-centered classrooms (Schoor & Bannert, 2011). Studies on technology use in China pointed out further that Chinese teachers tend to use technology mainly for teacher-centered purpose (Li & Ni, 2011). While teachers who preferred more student-centered approaches are more likely to use technology with sophisticated usages, teachers who preferred more teacher-centered approaches mainly uses technology to support a predominantly teacher-driven class with minimum interaction between students (Rao, 1996).

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