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Innovations in English Language Education: New Issues and Trends

Edited by Bronwen Hughes and Margaret Rasulo



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LUCIA ABBAMONTE*

How (Thoroughly) Does the Medium Shape Teaching? Some Considerations on Doctoral Courses in EPP at Vanvitelli University

Abstract

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, ELT teachers and their students at all levels of education were driven from the physical classroom to the remote teaching/learning dimension, and the acquisition of a new set of skills became immediately necessary. Indeed, greater trepidation lay in the increasing focus on the technology rather than the content of teaching activities, with the entailed consequences. After referring to the rich literature on teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Moorhouse, Kohnke 2021, 2020; Fitria 2020; Yunus, Ang, Hashim 2021; Mahib ur Rahman 2020), this study will propose some considerations on the media-channels continuum and on how their affordances shape the messages they transmit, with predictable consequences for specific teaching domains. In this light, some insights will be provided into the 2021-2022 English for Publication Purposes doctoral courses held at the Doctoral School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Vanvitelli University.

Keywords: ELT /EPP, remote teaching, media-channels continuum, affordances, Doctoral Courses.

1. Introduction and aims

It is now an accepted notion that in this day and age, pandemics, like wars, lead to an acceleration in the fields of science and technology. In recent times, the field of education has been one of the main *foci* of technology, and the digital divide in school populations has taken centre stage due to both the lack or paucity of resources in many (educational) contexts and the digital skills gap among users. Furthermore, in English language teaching (ELT), the utilization of apps, platforms and social media has been amplified and improved to make synchronous online teaching possible and more effective (Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, etc.).

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled ELT teachers at all levels of education to develop their distance teaching skills rapidly. As a result, some of them ceased to be the 'all-knowing voice' in their virtual classrooms, and this entailed some transient, though not necessarily negative,

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identity issues. Indeed, while admitting uncertainty or some measure of skill inadequacy would lead to a negative performance appraisal in terms of corporate communication, the dynamics can be different in the educational sphere. A less assertive teacher or a sincere request for cooperation can engage students more actively, hopefully leading to more collaborative attitudes in the teaching/learning process. In the vast and multifaceted ELT domain, attention should also be paid to the difference between the communicative value of a lesson prepared for recording and a synchronous online distance lesson that the students request be recorded.

Overall, given the abundance of (free) online resources for teaching English and the growing expertise of teachers in using them, once language learning platforms and tools were up and running, many educational experiences were considered positive (Moorhouse/Kohnke 2021).

This study will briefly refer to the literature on ELT during the COVID-19 pandemic, offer some thoughts on aspects of current communication modes, and then provide some insights into the 2021-2022 English for Publication Purposes doctoral course held at the Doctoral School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Vanvitelli University.

Lessons at the Vanvitelli University were initially held online and subsequently in a blended dimension for a total of 90 students. The teaching approach was informed by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) methodologies, specifically English for Publication Purposes (EPP). The selection of topics and materials was a crucial issue, given the variety of study domains involved, and the students' production of written materials played a central role in the implementation of the course objectives. The functions of Microsoft Teams served to facilitate the sharing of these and other materials. A sample of the students' production will be analyzed for the purposes of this study. At the end of the course, following an oral examination, a report on each student's acquired abilities in EPP was issued.

2. The experience of remote education: ELT teachers' perspectives

As is now widely known, the COVID-19 pandemic drove 1.38 billion learners from the physical classroom to the remote teaching/learning dimension (UNESCO 2020). Emergency remote teaching (ERT), not entirely a novelty, nevertheless became the mandatory mode of educational delivery, and a new pandemic pedagogy emerged to cope with issues of motivation,

accessibility, and efficacy. Fiorucci (2023) provides a comprehensive analysis of such matters, focusing on students' assessment and the dimension of intercultural communication in online teaching/learning communities.

Interestingly, a longstanding question in our web-wired mediascape – ‘digital natives’ vs ‘digital immigrants’ – had already been reshaped by Wang et al. (2013) as a continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy. In their literature review, they identified determining socio-demographic characteristics, organizational and psychological factors, and behavioural intention, which together influence digital fluency (Figure 1).

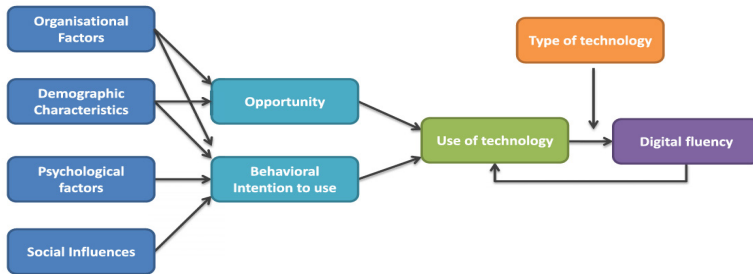


Figure 1. Digital natives vs digital immigrants model (Wang et al. 2013).

Thus, even before the pandemic, a great deal of attention was given to digital skills in education, but in 2020, predictably, a significant amount of trepidation lay in the increasing focus on the ‘technology for education’.

The multifaceted scenario of ELT unfolds across countries and continents. From the ELT teachers' perspective, Fitria (2021) evaluated the experience of teaching English through a variety of online learning systems in Indonesia as positive. Along the same lines, Mahib ur Rahman (2020) emphasized the usefulness of focused teacher training to better face challenges in Saudi Arabia, and Chaturvedi et al. (2021) illustrated some effective teaching practices deployed in India. Neither an entirely positive nor an entirely negative picture of the effects of ERT on language learners emerges from the review of studies conducted by Akbana et al. (2021) for foreign and second language teaching in Turkey. The COVID-19 emergency also brought about interesting revisitations or re-functionalizations of existing theories, such as those put forward by Yunus et al. (2021) regarding the situation in Malaysia.

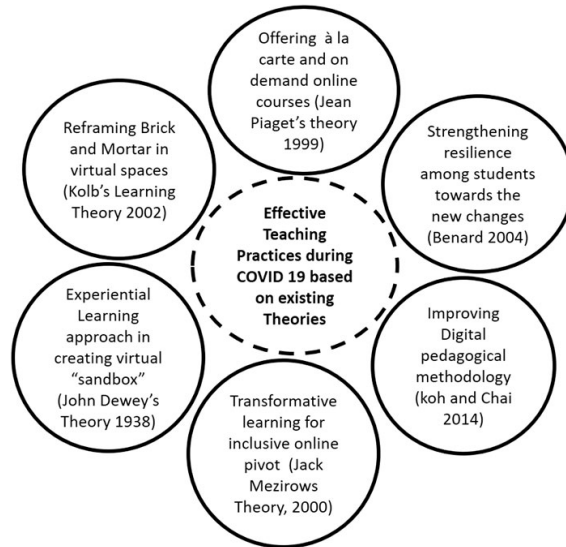


Figure 2. Viewpoints affecting TESL postgraduate students' online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia (Yunus et al. 2021).

The researchers showed in detail how factors of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions (see Figure 3) – under the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology model – consistently affected the learners' intention to use online learning. They conclude that the usefulness of online learning should be highlighted by the authorities.

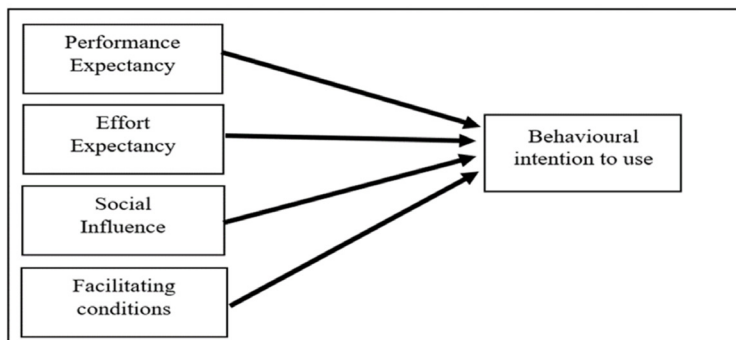


Figure 3. Factors affecting TESL postgraduate students' behavioural intention regarding online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia (Yunus et al. 2021).

On the flip side, Adnan and Anwar (2020), considering the situation of Pakistani higher education during the pandemic, emphasized how the issue of access to online resources, and hence to a learning community, has been challenging for most students in underprivileged countries.

In short, a full-fledged study of the variety of socio-cognitive and pedagogical stances and teaching practices across the globe through the lens of the COVID-19 emergency ought to be conducted. Although a complete review of the global scenario lies outside the focus and limits of this study, it is worth considering a quantitative overview of ELT teachers' responses to the emergency. The thematic review of empirical studies provided by Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021), mainly conducted through Web of Science and SCOPUS, identified the key knowledge generated by the English-language-teaching community during the pandemic.¹

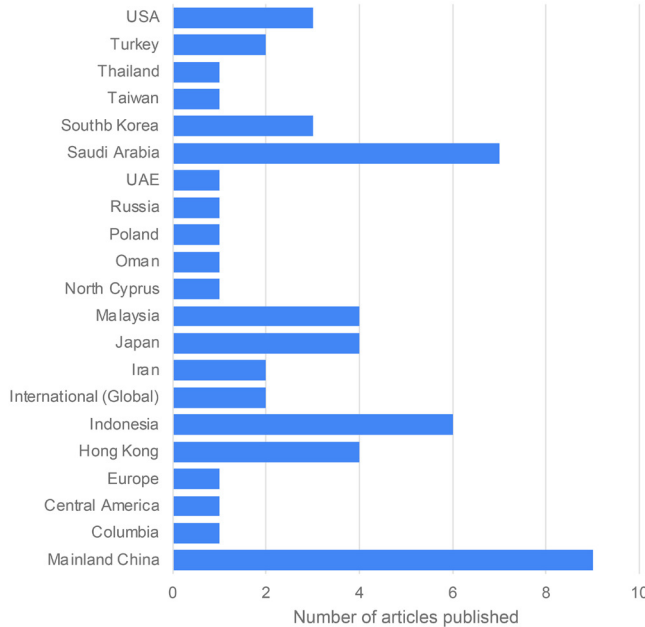


Figure 4. Responses of the ELT community to the pandemic (Moorhouse/Kohnke 2021).

¹ Moorhouse and Kohnke located peer-reviewed empirical studies published since January 2020 that included the keywords 'COVID-19', 'coronavirus', and 'pandemic' with each of the following terms: 'ELT', 'language teaching', 'language teacher', 'language learner', 'teacher education', 'TESOL', 'ELT', 'EFL', and 'ESL'. Out of 267 articles identified in the first round, only 55 papers remained.

The researchers concluded that when the available online language learning platforms and tools were well-functioning and updated/adapted, the educational experiences were considered positive (Moorhouse/Kohnke 2021). Yet, predictably, considering the great variety of such experiences unfolding in different political and geographical scenarios and shaped by various ideological stances and socio-cognitive issues, generalizations are not easily achievable.

2.1. New mode, new phrases

One aspect that may be worthy of explicit attention is that, especially at the beginning of ERT, there was greater trepidation concerning the increasing focus on the ‘technology’ rather than the ‘contents’ of teaching activities. In this mandatory computer-mediated communication mode, old and new phrases acquired specific meanings and pragmatic values, such as,

- *I can't see/hear you*
- *My mobile doesn't let me do X*
- *You're on mutelfrozen*
- *Please connect your camera when you speak*
- *Try to get out and enter [the meeting] again*
- *First, open your PDF, then share your screen*
- *Re-try*

These and similar expressions point to the efforts to overcome technological challenges while engaging students in effective communication. Such efforts were occasionally bidirectional (e.g., both teachers and pupils experienced difficulties with their Microsoft accounts or in using some of the tools) and were often experienced as a joint venture, occasionally resulting in the (positive) effect of reaching a common ground of shared achievement.

Privacy was also an issue, so much so that it was inadvisable to require/ask students to switch on their cameras in order for teachers to respect the privacy of their students' homes. On the other hand, teachers were not at ease with their students' requests to record their lessons. The difference between the communicative value of a synchronous online language lesson

(SOLL) and a pre-recorded lesson can hardly be overstated. Indeed, in real-time classes (with students participating via computer or iPhone), a considerable amount of time was ‘wasted’ in overcoming connection/tools problems, establishing contact, eliciting students’ interventions and discourse, etc. Predictably, these contextual needs – which do not exist in the totally different genre of pre-recorded lessons – spoil the SOLL’s effectiveness when it is accessed later.

3. Fast-emerging resources in ELT

Typically, in addition to the more traditional (print) resources, in the domain of ELT, over the past decades, we have been faced with an embarrassment of riches: a great variety of online materials (also freely available) has constantly been produced, such as courses for every need, from general English (all levels) to professional, occupational, research English(es). Additionally, in the world of entertainment, popular TV series (e.g., *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Suits*, *Friends*) exist in versions for students, not to mention the game-based learning platforms.

Predictably, in the ERT years, to make synchronous online teaching possible and more effective, new affordances were developed by reshaping/re-adapting existing platforms (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, etc.) and, increasingly, the employability of mobile apps, platforms and social media came to the fore.

But what about content? Can we identify any significant innovation in this area? Or, in other words, are innovations in teaching content as fast and momentous as those in the media, channels, and modes of communication?

3.1. Channels and media: only connect?

In our web-wired mediascape, with the ever-faster-evolving affordances of contemporary digital technologies (see, among others, IN4ACT 2023), which seamlessly link activities, processes, and human participants and trigger new processes, some considerations on the perceived channel-media-information-content continuum are appropriate.

The classical definition of a *medium* as the means of communication and a *channel* as the means of transmission of a message between the sender and the receiver no longer seems fully satisfactory. Let us briefly consider

this issue from the perspective of the contemporary world of advertising, where effective communication is of paramount importance:

Medium: A means of verbal or non-verbal communication. Examples include text ads, video ads and radio ads. *Channel*: A means of transmission or distribution. Examples include display, social media and TV advertising. [...] The terms *medium* and *channel* are often used *interchangeably*. For example, the Internet could be described as both a medium and a channel. (Clearcode 2020: chap. 5, emphasis added)

These definitions are becoming more flexible, and the ‘medium-channel’ boundary is being surpassed. Accordingly, the Internet and YouTube could be described as both media and channel, and when considering popular websites providing resources for teaching English, such as *BBC Learning English*, also accessible via YouTube, the communicative mode is not dissimilar:

Learn English with these free learning English videos and materials from BBC Learning English. This site will help you learn English and improve your English [...] with these free learning English videos and materials [...]. As part of the BBC World Service, BBC Learning English has been teaching English to global audiences since 1943, offering free audio, video and text materials to learners around the world. (BBC n.d.)

Similar websites display the characteristics of both a medium, as they produce and provide content in the form of audio-visual and written texts, and a channel, since they broadcast such content. A further level of discussion could be that content is shaped according to given rules (e.g., textual genres, TV formats, etc.).

On the other hand, the characteristics, economic resources, and digital affordances of the (media) channels determine the typology and quality of the messages and contents, or, in other words, their genres and functions. This line of thought brings us back to Marshall McLuhan’s definition, “The medium is the message”.² Provocatory as this might sound, McLuhan has been highly influential in promoting the understanding of the media’s functioning and effects on society.

² McLuhan titled the first chapter of his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* ‘The Medium is the Message’ (McLuhan 1994 [1964]).

Let us briefly consider the formation of ‘native ads’ in advertising:

Native ads are designed to blend in with the rest of the surrounding content by following the natural form of the user experience and matching the design and behavior of the web page, application, or platform. (Clearcode 2020: chap. 5)

In other words, the digital affordances of the webpage determine the nature of the ads so as not to disrupt the user’s experience. Undeniably, a common effect of this new channel-media continuum is the easier and quicker accessibility of such content for an ever-increasing number of people, at least for developed countries, with the predictable consequence of much greater availability of information, knowledge, practices, opinions, attitudes, etc. The entailed outcome should amount to augmenting the user’s ability to acquire and process information, knowledge and expertise to become informed decision-makers, etc. Gaps *should* thus be easily bridged, human knowledge exponentially heightened, and rational behaviour expected.

However, when focussing on specific domains, such as ELT, the scenario is not so simple. Only connecting to or relying on web-wired self-study does not seem to be a fully productive path to effective language learning. The real novelty apparently consists in the variety of communication modes. The abundance of resources can be confusing for (some) students; hence, the long-established procedure of preliminary needs analysis and then the selection and gradation of the contents still seems necessary for a productive teaching/learning process, at least for the time being.

3.2. More to come: the metaverse

The ‘metaverse’, a 30-year-old word, is also defined as a 3D Internet. It can be envisioned as the latest stage of computing and networking, following the mainframes of the 1950s–1970s, the personal computers and the Internet of the 1980s–2000s, and the contemporary mobile and cloud age.

According to Matthew Ball (2022), it cannot be equated with immersive virtual reality headsets, nor augmented reality devices or games, blockchains or cryptocurrencies; instead, it is a parallel virtual plane of existence embracing all digital technologies and uniting both our digital

and physical economies. It will reshape our lives in many ways, hopefully for the better.

Recently, especially during the ERT period, the metaverse has played an increasingly important role in education. Indeed, the affordances of virtual reality technology (e.g., avatars, 3D graphics, Google's 'Project Starline') and instant communication tools (Second Life, Minecraft, Roblox, Zepeto) can dramatically transform language learning. By wearing virtual reality headsets, students are immersed in environments where they can participate in virtual conversations or visit virtual language schools, not to mention gamification in a variety of different scenarios. Furthermore, there are projects to develop virtual campuses, e.g., in the Eastern Caribbean, which would be much cheaper than real campuses and, therefore, particularly convenient for developing countries (Angel-Urdinola et al. 2022).

Nevertheless, the virtual learning experience is constrained by the level of digital literacy of both instructors and learners, and it must be developed for successful English learning, or indeed any remote learning. Furthermore, there is insufficient data on the pedagogical and educational value of virtual learning, and the lack of real interaction raises some concerns (Li/Yu 2023; Wu et al. 2023).

In any case, digital skills and literacies are foregrounded mostly in relation to language learning and are a major focus of intervention in education, as shown, for example, by the implementation of the European Multimodal and Digital Education for Language Learning (EU-MADE4LL) project. It is the product of a European research project that designs, implements and tests a transnational syllabus on these topics, some training workshops for the practical application of skills, and a "Common Framework of Reference for Intercultural Digital Literacy (CFRIDiL) [which] is an adaptation and expansion of both the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) and the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.0)" (EuMade4ll n.d.).

However, remarks on the need and usefulness for human interaction in addition to platforms and virtual interaction abound in the mentioned literature, and a blended pedagogy seems the best option, possibly in a technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) environment.

4. New uses of the language laboratory: a blended PhD course

It cannot be overemphasized that the foreign language laboratory was typically based on a behaviourist approach, assuming that the repetition and memorization of sentence patterns and dialogue sequences were conducive to correct and effective language learning. Though variously criticized, such practices, as well as oral pattern drills, have not totally disappeared from contemporary TELL, where software for encouraging learners' oral and written production, with immediate feedback and self-correction, is often fungible (Heinrich 2023). Increasingly, the functions and use of the language laboratory are being revisited and expanded.

During part of the ERT period (2021–2022), two lecturers led a 50-hour doctoral course on English for Publication Purposes at the Doctoral School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vanvitelli University (Caserta, Italy) for first-year students in a new, well-equipped multimedia language laboratory. The construction of the laboratory had been planned and implemented in the pre-pandemic years, and although the facility could not be used in 2020, students started to come to the laboratory as the sharing of physical spaces became gradually possible.

The lessons were initially held in a blended dimension for a total of 90 students; the two lecturers and some students were in the laboratory, though most were connected via Microsoft Teams. The undeniable value of eye contact, proxemics and body language – i.e. of sharing the same physical space – was thus partly recovered.

The Vanvitelli lab is equipped with videoconferencing software, allowing learners to interact with each other in real time and making it possible for the students and lecturers physically present in the laboratory to see themselves on the screens. In a way, a kind of shared virtual class was created that encompassed the physical classroom, with some occasional *Verfremdungseffekt* due to seeing one's own body variously mirrored and refracted.

Various teaching materials, such as web-accessed audio and videos, including from the online platforms mentioned above and from TV documentaries, were used and shared via Microsoft Teams. Common characteristics of such materials include strong multimodal cohesion and intersemiotic texture, i.e. text-image-sound relationship (Bateman 2014: 159–171), to make the messages clear and fungible for teaching purposes.

The resulting communicative situation is the broadcasting of online multimodal and multimedia content via Microsoft Teams. Such content was accessed only via computers or mobiles by students learning remotely, and via computers and overhead projection on a large screen in the language laboratory for students physically present in the room. Bateman (2014) and Bateman and Hiiippala (2021) have offered relevant considerations on such multilayered communication – multimodal, multimedia content, including hypertextual links, transmitted through other media/channels – and suggested that such modes can be defined as hyper-mediatic. Overall, given the correct functioning of the resources of the Vanvitelli laboratory, such computer-mediated communication was an enhancing factor for the learning process.

The teaching approach was informed by ESP methodologies, specifically EPP, with some insights into research methodologies when necessary and feasible. After an initial analysis of the PhD students' learning objectives and needs, the second step was the selection of shareable, engaging, and useful topics for their different PhD programmes:

1. Architecture, Industrial Design and Cultural Heritage
2. History and Transmissions of Cultural Heritage
3. Comparative Law and Integration Processes
4. Psychology and the Sciences of the Mind

Since it is neither feasible nor advisable to teach EPP in abstract, trans-disciplinary topics were chosen together as a collaborative operation from the domains of health, environment and sustainability, gender, and race. One-fifth of the students came from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Southern Mediterranean area; thus, cross-cultural communication issues were also chosen and approached with interest.

One more issue was coping with the unevenness of a mixed-ability intercultural class, where it was not easy to give great attention to grammar and basic vocabulary; hence, basic language skills gaps were addressed by providing resources for asynchronous and autonomous learning in the language laboratory or online self-study activities, with some support from the lecturers. Instead, aspects of textual coherence, cohesion, discourse patterns and genre were prioritized during the lessons. Students were also encouraged to build their personal language portfolio by recollecting,

recording and organizing their main language-learning achievements and experiences along their language-learning and language-using itinerary. The group's plurilingualism and different cultural backgrounds made this a fruitful educational experience for all students, with interesting topics for discussion.

In more detail, the typical procedure involved students familiarizing themselves with the selected topics via online multimodal texts, starting from easier journal articles (online version) and videos up to scientific literature, with a focus on the analysis of both verbal and multimodal languages. The cohesion (or lack thereof) in the text-image relations was often highlighted and discussed, and the students were expected to produce both written reports and PowerPoint presentations for oral reporting. Such materials played a pivotal role in the unfolding of the course, and Microsoft Teams made the necessary sharing of these and other materials, including selected texts from the students' portfolios, possible, (relatively) easy, and immediate. It is worth noting that implicit teaching content – originating not exclusively from the lecturers – included the full use of Microsoft Teams, its channels and repositories, and the various platforms and websites utilized.

After preliminary interventions by the lecturers, the revision of the students' written materials, based partly on autonomous reading and research, was conducted collectively as often as possible, and questions of scientific method were occasionally raised and collectively discussed. Issues of effective textuality, taking the conventions of discourse genres into account, were prioritized.

4.1. Examples of PhD students' texts

Below are some examples of the students' written texts, turned in towards the middle of the course. Revisions to the examples are highlighted using the effects delineated in the legend below.

Legend:

Teacher's additions, in ***bold italics***

Parts to be moved and/or rephrased, in *italics*

Words to be eliminated: ~~crossed out font~~

Teachers indications and suggestions in square brackets: []

The first example is an abstract by a student of Architecture, Industrial Design, and Cultural Heritage. Although the readability of the text was not satisfactory, the teachers' comments were encouraging and focused more on the interest of the project. Improving the text's conciseness and some re-ordering were recommended, and the corrections did not alter the identity of the text. Language issues were also signalled in the text.

Cultural Heritage Sustainability in Swat, Pakistan: Sustainable Approach through SDG 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities

[INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND] Cultural heritage and sustainability are closely connected, although little straightforward consideration has been paid to the sustainability issues of heritage in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The overall aim of the 2015 SDGs, sustainability, is easier to achieve following the criterion of conservation, preservation, hence protection, set by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). Moreover, the festival of cultural heritage ~~does~~ entails engrained principles of sustainability and provides guidelines as well. Many countries have already pursued the lead of SDGs in their tourism development models. However, in developing countries, the ~~pursue~~ *pursuit* of SDGs in true letter and spirit has been suffering back push *has suffered a major setback* due to the more reliance on essential needs of mankind *because of the increased urgency of basic human needs*. Doing so has disabled the communities and cities to be sustainable and resilient. [The latter notion is speculative]

Similarly, in Pakistan, even though there exist numberless *with its numerous* heritage assets belonging to the Indus Valley and Gandhara civilizations, there remained a deadlock among locals and sustainability of cultural heritage sites. In addition, swift urbanization has also compromised the physical and virtual status of many cultural heritage sites. [Consider summarising the lines below in italics and move them here, after revising their form, to avoid repetition]. Remained as Cradle of the two major civilizations of Indus Valley and Gandhara, the country of Pakistan has remained a *point focus* of attention for many national and international archaeologists *and* stakeholders practitioners, *unveiling its extensive heritage potential* [not very clear, consider rephrasing].

Archaeological expeditions from Japan, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy *over the course of time* [a bit generic] have been quite engaged in exploration and restoration **activities**. Among these, **the** Italian Archaeological Mission has been leading from the front and **is** still eagerly engaged in sustaining the cultural heritage assets of Swat Valley. Now, because as-

[AIMS] ~~Yet, -community activists has been needing of~~ **need time to start**, and locals must be activated; **thus**, this study aims to address this grey area and highlight the grounded issues and problems behind the community's **lack of engagement** [is this what you intended to say?] **active approach** in sustaining local cultural heritage assets.

[METHOD] Considering the social nature of ~~this -these~~ issues **in hand**, **a** qualitative research ~~time~~ **approach** will be followed in this study, and semi-structured interviews will be conducted with ~~from~~ target community **members**. In addition, collaborative workshops ~~in align with~~ **on** the ~~targets~~ **objectives** and sub-goals of SDG 11; will be organized to ensure *community collection of their viewpoints and perceptions* [not clear] regarding the **such** issues and **their possible** potential solutions of ~~issue~~ **under question**. *Collaborative workshops in the Asian context have proved to be adoptive [??] and effective predominantly in the face of urban regeneration. In the Swat, similar issues of urbanization have been arising, and the public is neglecting the physicality of sites and constructing the premise* [Move these lines above and summarise them; consider revising the form].

[DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS] The ~~possible~~ analysis of **the** data **collected** through interviews ~~to~~ and collaborative workshops with the community will reveal the veiled issues and their expected solutions. These results will enable the researcher to structure inductive themes and **promote** discussion. ~~To this end, it will allow the~~ **Furthermore, the researchers will be able** to set policy recommendations and implications for sustaining **both** the cultural heritage in particular ~~while~~ and for sustainable cities and communities more generally.

Keywords: Sustainability, heritage, Pakistan, Swat, community.

The second example is a brief summary of a PhD student's research project in History and Transmission of Cultural Heritage. Apart from

some language problems, the lecturers felt that this very short text should be enriched with the motivation for the research, the context, and information about the methodological approach.

The fifteenth-century vulgarizations of the *Tractatus de spera* by Giovanni Sacrobosco

The research project **expands *continues and extends*** the studies completed for the master's degree [Whose? Please, specify] **thesis**, The title of it is "The fifteenth-century vulgarizations of the *Tractatus de spera* [*Tractato de la spera*? Please check what the most accepted title is] by Giovanni Sacrobosco". These vulgarizations are part of the wide flowering of translations that accompanied the revival of the vernacular in the fifteenth century. The foci of the work are the vulgarization of the *Constitutio Textus*; the editing of the *Stemma Codicum*; a lexical, morphological and syntactic comparison between the various vulgarizations; the formation of dating hypotheses for the vulgarizations; a study of the scientific terms present in the vulgarizations, contextualized with evidence of scientific prose from the period of the Origins; the placement of linguistic *facies* within the evolution of the Florentine dialect during the period of the Origins; and a semantic study of scientific terms.

The timing will be as follows: first year: investigation and review of the manuscripts; second year: transcription and collation of *witnesses*; third year: drafting of the *Stemma Codicum*.

The third example, also by a History and Transmission of Cultural Heritage student, was chosen as a specimen of a less effective abstract, requiring heavier intervention. Apart from some language problems, the lecturers felt that this very short text was ineffective in terms of communication. In particular, as the lack of a title suggests, the abstract does not give exact information on the aims or the methodological approach. It should also be enriched with the motivation for the research.

[Insert TITLE]

This research studies the historical ~~A~~analysis of the sacred *Alam* motif. It is a sacred replica of a flag banner with a mast connected to a historic

battle fought on a religious background [You must be more specific]. This research seeks to study the entry of the *Alam* motif into the Indian sub-continent and the gradual evolution of its forms, shape, and size, along with *deducing methods* for its future preservation [The notion is not clear; consider rephrasing]. The thesis aims to apply several social concepts such as honour, status, and community to analyze scenarios and occasions in which sacred symbols succeed in becoming, or are approximated to, a deity. In popular culture, we know that in Pakistan and India, various symbols serve as reminders of the events that ~~transpired~~ **took place** at the Battle of Karbala. Among the most potent symbols that have emerged to represent Karbala is the Alam. These case studies will not only support the main argument [that is?] of the thesis but also contribute to an understanding of the ethical and theological content of the historical records, as well as their literary fabric. [What about the methodology/procedure? And, possibly, expected results?]

Keywords: Alam, flag, evolution, subcontinent, Karbala, sacred symbol...]

The fourth example is an abstract by a student of Comparative Law and Integration Processes. The lecturers felt that the lexis of this abstract was quite accurate, though the syntax created some readability problems. It could also be lengthened, particularly as far as the motivation for the research is concerned.

Pandemic emergency and pending contracts

The pandemic has resulted in dense, often spasmodic legislation aimed at regulating the sanitary emergency and, consequently, the economic crisis. The legislator acted through vertical norms (regarding the State-private individual relationships) by distributing incentives and/or subsidies and through horizontal norms, which directly affect private individuals' relationships, especially contractual and mandatory pending ones. Among the many measures, of particular significance is the so-called "Decreto Cura Italia" (Law Decree no. 18 dated March 17, 2020), which in art. 3, paragraph 6 bis provides that "compliance with the containment measures set out in this decree is always assessed in order to exclude, in accordance with articles 1218 and 1223 of the Italian Civil Code, the debtor's responsibility [...]".

[Avoid long sentences] The provision, which has been the object of great attention on the part of legal theory and jurisprudence, apparently establishes a legal judgment on the potential suitability of the necessary compliance with the containment measures to produce hypotheses in the event of the impracticability of the service.

However, the issue becomes more complex when it comes to the legislator's failure to act, particularly in relation to contractual relationships for which no appropriate measures have been taken.

It is therefore necessary to verify the consequences of the measures of containment on pending contracts and analyze the directions of both doctrine and jurisprudence, which seem to be divided on two opposing principles: *pacta sunt servanda* and *rebus sic stantibus*. Ultimately, it would be useful to carry out a comparative survey of our system and other legal realities and experiences in order to find a possible solution, especially with reference to:

- a) pecuniary obligations
- b) rental contracts for commercial properties;
- c) tax debt payments and tax settlements.

KEYWORDS: pandemic; pending contracts; containment measures; solutions

The fifth example is a proposal for a conference presentation by a student of Psychology and the Sciences of the Mind. This shorter text required lighter editing. The lecturers pointed out that more cautious language and some hedging phrases could be utilized.

The Effects of Economic Inequality on Political Participation: Could Economic Inequality Be an Obstacle to Political Participation?

An **analysis of** the literature shows us how, over the years, many scholars have tried to highlight, with correlational studies, that belonging to a disadvantaged socio-economic class [*can affect* is a more cautious expression] affects citizens' participation in in the event of elections. This giving **lends** support to the theory of relative power. What is missing, **however**, is the presence of experimental studies that can confirm this hypothesis or not. **either confirm or disconfirm this hypothesis.**

For this reason, we created two experimental studies where participants could become citizens, in an immediate and immersive way, of a new society called Koor, which could be, according to the study, a society demarcated by economic inequality and/or economic equality. The participants (920 in the first study and 2,079 in the second) responded positively to our manipulation, showing how belonging to a specific social class can influence opinions not only on the society they belong to but also, and above all, on political participation. In fact, **our results** show that the rich tended to show more interest in going to vote as they believed that their vote is *was* more useful for changing society *more* than the poor, thus showing *lending* support for *to* the theory of relative power.

4.2. Discussion

In such a mixed-ability class, including differences in age, various issues were predictable. While the lecturers' feedback was more immediate and effective during the speaking activities and oral (guided) communication, the differences in the students' written outputs were starker.

Some focused interventions made the students more aware of existing conventions in the more frequently utilized research genres (abstracts for papers or conferences, research reports, projects), as well as tasks to be accomplished while reading and consulting guides to academic and scientific writing.

One fundamental aspect to consider is that the students were in the initial phase of their doctoral research and studies. Hence, their subject knowledge and research methods were still developing, and while CLIL is a feasible option at middle or high school level, PhD language courses require greater caution during interventions. It was thus agreed that they would be given the opportunity to deliver a short report to check their progress in effective scientific communication towards the end of their three-year PhD courses.

The students' acquisition of the ability to speak from a PowerPoint presentation was a quicker process, and the use of figures, well-connected verbal captions, and graphic symbols and resources greatly enhanced the efficacy of communication. To keep track of the students' progress, a

certificate of assessment was issued for each candidate at the end of the 50-hour course after an oral examination (Appendix 1). The exam was mainly based on a PowerPoint presentation of their research project to their fellow students, who participated in the assessment of the speaker's clarity and efficacy of presentation.

5. Concluding remarks

ERT was an unforeseen experience that made the employment of new tools mandatory and foregrounded the new oxymoronic concept of 'remote presence'. Teachers and students alike faced huge challenges in the pandemic years, but these also provided a unique opportunity to understand the potential affordances of online teaching. The use of ERT tools has actually outlived those dire times of emergency, and many have found them convenient in a variety of circumstances. Undoubtedly, such tools save valuable time and make useful materials readily available to an interest group. Teachers have learnt and are learning to fully exploit their evolving potential, though the advantages of lessons based on human interaction are not easily overvalued. Furthermore, concerns abound about the effect of the lack of human contact on young learners' physiological development and balance, not to mention the negative effects of frequently reduced class time and decreasing attention spans. Hence, in addition to the return to traditional classroom teaching, blended teaching seems an acceptable option when necessary, especially when the digital resources function well.

As regards the specific experience of this blended PhD course at the Vanvitelli University, thanks to the resources of its well-equipped multimedia laboratory, this dimension allowed students living abroad, even outside Europe, to participate in and share a perceptible spatial dimension which erased the distance to some extent. They were able to see the whole laboratory, including their fellow students present, and the projection of their faces and upper bodies on the big screen on the laboratory wall. Verbal and conversational exchanges were thus fluent, and the sharing of information and different perspectives from diverse research domains was effective and authentic. At a content level, the unfolding of each teaching module evolved from more general information to more specific research methods and data for each selected topic. The role of the EPP lecturer was to orient the topic selection so as to foreground those that were more

engaging and easily fungible by learners of different scientific backgrounds while keeping a constant focus on the various textualities.

An important aspect of the availability of such enhanced communication channels and media is the evolution of the characteristics of the written genre, which the exploration of different research domains during the course brought to the fore. Although scientific methods and criteria move on a different plane, the use of pictures that can be enlarged, hypertextual links, and even alerts (offered by journals) are now common features in scientific articles. Enhanced abstracts (with links to the data and their graphical representations) have circulated for years. Interestingly, though no radical change has been advertised in the basic format of research articles, the possibility of reaching the original text of a cited author with one click erodes the need for long quotations in the text. Although writing a scientific article does not simply equate with writing for the web, ESP teachers in the 2020s need to foreground such digital resources when promoting the advancement of their students' publishing skills.

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Appendix 1. Certificate issued at the end of the course

HEADING (to be adapted, and completed with a different logo, according to the course and cycle)

*This is to certify that XXX has been awarded Grade X in:
English for Publication Purposes
PhD course in – XXX... cycle
and that s/he is:*

Scientific Writing and Reading	Scientific Speaking and Listening
<p>1. <i>Scientific discourse comprehension</i>: able to read and comprehend scientific texts, to understand specific terminology, academic vocabulary and the sequence of discourse markers;</p> <p>2. <i>Scientific discourse analysis</i>: able to recognise the authorial disposition of the information and alignment to theories (e.g. in the Introductions of Research Articles); able to recognise authorial purposes, positioning and stance.</p> <p>3. <i>Scientific discourse writing (SCW). Organization and Flow</i>: able to write with cohesion at lexical, sentence and discourse level, according to the uses of the major research genres.</p> <p>4. <i>SCW. Lexicogrammar</i>: able to build meaning cohesively in writing by using varied and appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures.</p> <p>5. <i>SCW. Understanding the Sources</i>: able to support ideas for one's own authorial purpose through well-chosen citations.</p> <p>6. <i>SCW. Ideation and Development</i>: able to develop and support an original position that clearly expresses its own stance.</p>	<p>1. <i>Genres in Speaking and Listening</i>: able to analyze and convey developed, complex ideas in spoken academic genres.</p> <p>2. <i>Interactional Speaking and Listening</i>: able to perform complex spoken interpersonal tasks in order to elaborate and develop ideas in discussion or control flow of discussion.</p> <p>3. <i>Lexico-grammar</i>: able to choose and use vocabulary and grammar appropriate for academic/scientific communication.</p> <p>4. <i>Pronunciation</i>: able to present ideas in academic settings with clear English pronunciation.</p>

Grade	Marking criteria	Grade	Marking criteria
A+	<p>Excellence in advanced grammar and academic/scientific vocabulary;</p> <p>Excellence in synthesizing and analyzing ideas and notions;</p> <p>Excellence in listening and oral presentation skills;</p> <p>Excellence in scientific discourse writing.</p>	B	<p>Good use of grammar and academic/scientific vocabulary Evidence of very good comprehension skills and conciseness;</p> <p>Very good listening abilities and presentation skills;</p> <p>Expertise in communicating scientific discourse in written form.</p>

How (Thoroughly) Does the Medium Shape Teaching?

A	Mastery in advanced grammar and academic/scientific vocabulary; Ability to synthesize and analyze ideas and notions; Excellent listening abilities and oral presentation skills; Mastery in communicating scientific discourse in written form.	C	Adequate use of grammar and academic/scientific vocabulary; Evidence of good comprehension skills and conciseness; Good listening abilities and presentation skills; Acceptable expertise in communicating scientific discourse in written form.
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