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## *Enacting teacher emotion, agency, and professional identity: A netnography of a novice Chinese language teacher's crisis teaching*



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### Abstract

Netnography, a qualitative research approach, entails observing, analysing, and interpreting online data. This netnography explores how teacher agency, emotion regulation, and professional identity were enacted by a novice Chinese language teacher in response to emergency remote teaching (ERT) in Australia amid the global pandemic. Ecologically sound, netnography creates uncoerced spaces to allow participants to have their voices heard, thus enabling researchers to discover nuanced patterns linked to the social-emotional state and wellbeing of the community members, regarding fears, tensions, and resilience triggered by ERT. Multiple data sources were triangulated from the teacher's reflective journal, digital teaching artifacts, debriefing sessions, interviews, and online questionnaire responses. Thematic analysis reveals teacher identity was re-envisioned through crisis teaching pedagogy and the regulation of negative emotions to facilitate agency, which reciprocally bolstered teacher identity. The findings also indicate teacher identity development is challenged and shaped by negotiating a new role in remote teaching, thus impacting pre-ERT identity. Hence, the emotion regulation trajectory of ERT can stimulate and encourage technology-enhanced professional learning as teacher agency and resilience reinforce a new identity reimagined as a capable online teacher. By situating novice teacher agency, emotion regulation, and emerging identity in crisis teaching, this netnographic research conceptualises how ERT presents not only challenges for novice teachers' identity development and emotion but also the sustainability and empowerment of online teaching and professional growth of impacted teachers of Asian languages.

**Keywords:** emergency remote teaching (ERT); language teaching; emotion regulation; teacher agency; professional identity

## Introduction

The inauspicious COVID-19 shook up the landscape of teaching and learning normally held in a physical classroom. This unprecedented outbreak dramatically shifted the predominance of face-to-face teaching to online teaching, with this crisis-response often referred to as emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020). While technical support, resources and training are typically well placed at the macro (Faculty) and meso (School) levels within Australian universities, little is known about how Asian language academics adapted to ERT at the micro level and, more specifically, how the COVID-19 crisis presented an opportunity for re-positioning identity as capable online teachers.

In the university where this study was conducted, the Chinese major course had been delivered predominately on campus before the pandemic. Not until COVID-19 disruptively forced all the teaching professionals into ERT did the Chinese lecturers and tutors start to experience online teaching. Unprepared and perplexed, they were forced to make uninformed decisions on the feasibility and suitability of transferring in-class assessments and tasks to the electronic format. Inevitably, they were confronted by the urgent and drastic demands of moving all the course units online and were in dire need of the technical skills required for online delivery (Chen, 2021).

Evidently, the ERT phenomenon has accentuated the relatively under-researched aspect of Chinese language professionals, namely, how teacher social-emotional state affects the development of professional identity and agency (Chen, 2019). Framed by emotion regulation (Gross, 1998, 2015; Morris & King, 2018), teacher agency (Durrant, 2020; Tao & Gao, 2017) and professional identities (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Wolff & De Costa, 2017), this study explores how ERT impacted teacher emotion regulation and agency, thereby shaping the development of a new professional identity. To this aim, we adopt netnography to shadow the lived experience of Julie, a novice Chinese language teacher, who had begun teaching on-campus Chinese language units at an Australian University before the pandemic outbreak. The unexpected transition to remote teaching, albeit daunting, illustrates how a novice language teacher adapted to ERT and overcame obstacles to reposition her identity as a capable online language teacher. This netnographic approach further gives voice back to the classroom language teacher, while documenting her empowered professional growth and highlighting the successes and challenges faced in ERT that can resonate with like-minded language teachers (Chen & Sato, 2023).

## Language teacher emotion regulation

Triggered by COVID-19, ERT is an unprepared response to delivering face-to-face programs fully online due to unexpected circumstances (Hodges et al., 2020). This rapid shift to remote teaching while maintaining quality teaching and student engagement in a fully online environment posed challenges to tertiary language programs that were predominately classroom-based (Chen, 2021). Indeed, low familiarity with online teaching, at least in the initial stage of ERT, has been reported to be one of the critical elements overwhelming teachers (Choi et al., 2021; McAlinden & Dobinson, 2021). Language teaching may result in high stress if teachers experience negative emotions about their teaching performance or when emotional well-being is endangered (Smith & King, 2018). Certain situations require teachers to regulate emotions such as anger if learner misbehaviour impacts the class dynamic, or anxiety when teacher competence is challenged (Morris & King, 2018). Emotion regulation reflects how a person may (un)consciously monitor their emotions, and how and when emotions are experienced or expressed to reduce negative states and increase positive states (Gross, 1998, 2015).

Emotion regulation occurs in different stages— *antecedent-focused emotion regulation* (before emotion being generated) or *response-focused emotion regulation* (after the emotion response has been generated) (Gross, 1998, 2015). Antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies include *situation selection*, *situation modification*, *attentional deployment*, and *cognitive change or reappraisal* (Gross, 2015). These strategies act prior to a “complete activation” of emotional response and modify the entire temporal course of the emotional response before they are generated (Cutuli, 2014, p. 1). *Situation selection* entails teachers choosing situations which generate desired or diminish unwanted emotions (e.g., a teacher avoiding teaching a specific unit), whereas *situation modification* implies modifying a situation to bring about a more positive emotional impact (e.g., a teacher rearranging classroom seating to enhance students' behaviour) (Gross, 2015; Morris & King, 2018). A teacher's attention may be purposefully redirected within a situation to impact the emotional response, known as *attentional deployment*, for example, thinking about the semester break to alleviate frustration (Gross, 2015).

A further antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategy, *cognitive change or reappraisal*, alters the reappraisal of a situation in order to manipulate the emotional impact (Gross, 2015). In adopting this strategy, a teacher changes how they think about an emotion-eliciting situation to transform its emotional impact before its occurrence, such as a teacher considering a student's background when interpreting their (mis)behaviour (Appleton et al., 2014). Cognitive reappraisal is significant in enabling a motivating teaching style (Moè &

Kat, 2021) and can help language teachers regulate and transform negative emotions from frustration to empathy in teaching, thereby (re)establishing rapport with students and leading to positive emotions (Morris & King, 2018). Teacher empathy encompasses understanding learners' personal and social situations, feeling concerned about learners' emotions, and expressing "genuine care" towards students (Meyers et al., 2019, p. 161). Hence, teachers who employ reappraisal strategies generally experience fewer negative emotions (Chang & Taxer, 2021) as reappraisal is better at increasing positive-emotion expression and more effective than suppression in emotion regulation (Jiang et al., 2016).

In contrast, response-focused emotion regulation occurs later in the emotion generative process and directly influences physiological, experiential, or behavioural responses (Gross, 1998). One response modulation strategy is *venting* in which negative emotions are intentionally allowed to flow outside of the presence of the source of the emotion (Morris & King, 2018, p. 446). A teacher may vent when intentionally expressing negative emotions to a student which provokes an emotion.

A further response-focused emotion regulation strategy, *suppression*, involves inhibiting the expression of emotion that happened in response to an emotion-eliciting event (Appleton et al., 2014). As suppression happens late in the emotion-generative process, it entails managing emotional responses as they occur which diminishes cognitive resources impacting social performance (Cutuli, 2014). For instance, a teacher may pretend a behaviour does not cause bother or may maintain a pleasant face despite feeling angry in a confrontational student situation; however, this fails to decrease the intensity of emotion felt and may be detrimental as it consumes cognitive resources (Gross, 2015). Increased levels of suppression are related to teachers adopting a controlling pedagogy (Moè & Kat, 2021). As suppression is considered ineffective in reducing teachers' negative emotions, it is best avoided as an emotion regulation strategy (Jiang et al., 2016).

The inability to manage negative emotions may cause teachers' self-estrangement, resulting in emotional dissonance between what is felt and what is performed (Smith & King, 2018). Morris and King's (2018) study of Japanese EFL teachers found the success of emotion regulation behaviours hinged upon teacher confidence and control over the stressors, such as student silence or apathy towards language learning. Eradicating stressors can be challenging so teacher awareness of tapping into emotion regulation strategies to reduce emotional responses is crucial (Morris & King, 2018).

## **Teacher emotion, agency, and identity**

Teacher emotions may be conceptualised as ideological, relational, and sociocultural and generally connected with identity transformation (Norton & Toohey, 2011). The ERT by-product of stress, confusion and anxiety experienced by language teachers cannot be ignored as it can jeopardise the online learning experiences of students. Negative emotions threaten existing identities whereas positive emotions transform or reinforce emerging teaching identities (Jeongyeon & Young, 2020). Hence, identity, a fluid multifaceted construct, is negotiated and co-constructed through one's interaction with and performance in a given setting (Wolff & De Costa, 2017). The contextual nature of identity allows a person to share different versions of the self in specific contexts (Norton & Toohey, 2011). A case in point is that language pedagogy, before the pandemic, was generally intertwined with the face-to-face environment so the sudden shift to the online environment may have severely impacted language teacher agency (Choi et al., 2021).

Emotions may act as a source of agency (Benesch, 2018). Fluid and contextualised, varying levels of agency may be enacted in different contexts or temporal frames (Vitanova, 2018). Teacher agency can be defined as the ability to perform the role of teaching while considering factors such as teacher beliefs, attitudes, and the constraints and resources available in the working environment (Tao & Gao, 2017). Agency also shapes professional identity construction as teachers progress through the different stages of teaching trajectories (Durrant, 2020). Teachers with increased agency experience less emotional exhaustion and employ a higher use of cognitive reappraisal to regulate emotions (Donker et al., 2020). ERT has likely created confusion for teacher agency and disrupted identity construction and teacher emotions (Wang & East, 2020). When teachers take action to tackle educational changes such as ERT, they consequently activate agency in response to the shifting contextual conditions (Tao & Gao, 2017). Hence, language teachers' digital pedagogical competence can be developed by activating agency and awareness, thus empowering them to incorporate digital tools in ERT (Zhang, 2020). Yet as technology-enhanced pedagogy in remote teaching takes time and training for language teachers to develop, let alone those who have never taught online before, it bears relevance to what language teachers may have experienced in the context of the global pandemic.

## Research questions

On the following pages, we present the case of Julie<sup>1</sup> as a novice Chinese teacher and document how she managed emotion regulation and agency during ERT while transforming her professional identity as an online teacher. Informed by netnography that mirrors the suitability and practicality of gathering data remotely in the context of the pandemic (Kozinets, 2020), we illustrate in the methodology how we captured a fuller picture of Julie's ERT trajectory by tapping into a variety of digital data sources, such as her online reflection journal, digital teaching artifacts, debriefing sessions, interview, and online questionnaire responses. Specifically, we addressed two primary questions which guided the study:

- 1) How does a novice Chinese language teacher respond to the challenges of ERT throughout the pandemic?
- 2) To what extent are emotion regulation, teacher agency, and professional identity enacted in her ERT practice?

## Methodology

### *Setting and participant*

Originally from Taiwan, Julie, a 40-year-old female, taught English at a Taiwanese high school before immigrating to Australia. Despite her previous teaching experience in Taiwan, Julie had only around two years of Chinese language teaching experience in tertiary education before the pandemic hit in 2020. Nevertheless, the Chinese Major Course Coordinator saw the potential in Julie and offered her a sessional (part-time tutor) position to teach beginner Chinese to first-year students at a Western Australian university.

The Beginner Chinese units usually consist of 20 to 25 students in class. The units are designed for first-year Australian students without previous (or with limited) Chinese learning experience. Before the pandemic, on-campus teaching was the sole delivery mode of the Chinese Course. When COVID-19 disrupted all in-class teaching, the Chinese teaching staff, including Julie, were rushed into ERT almost overnight. Due to the time pressure in moving all in-class materials to Blackboard, a Learning Management System, it was only possible to "copy over" the same content materials (mostly in print) and lecture activities without further modifications. The Chinese language team needed to learn how to record lectures via Echo360 (a lecture capture system for students to watch at home) and relearn the "Collaborate" features via Blackboard (e.g., breakout room, screen sharing, digital Whiteboard) in order to hold virtual class sessions with their online students.

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym is used throughout the study to protect the participant's confidentiality.

Ethical clearance was sought in advance of the netnographic ERT project. The Chinese Major Coordinator and academic tutors were informed of the purpose and voluntary nature of the study. Seeing the merit of the project, Julie expressed her interest and signed a consent form to participate while allowing us to document her reflective ERT practice.

### *Data collection through netnography*

Ethnographic and interpretive in nature, netnography heralds the primacy of studying people's behaviors, shared values, beliefs, and meaning making in a target online community/culture, harnessing ethnographic techniques such as active participant observation and prolonged engagement (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015). Netnographic studies enable researchers, as complete observers, to gather naturalistically occurring, unobtrusive data through open multimodal data shared on the Internet and/or via social media and mobile devices (Kozinets, 2020). While netnographers aim to understand the transformative nature of human connectivity, technological advances allow for greater participation and interaction as well as increased opportunity for co-creating value within an online community of practice (Kozinets, 2020).

Given the lockdown restrictions during the pandemic, all teaching and learning activities could only be observed and documented remotely. Hence, netnographic research reflected the ERT phenomenon, justifying the research design of this study. Ecologically sound, netnography creates uncoerced spaces to let participants have their voices heard, thus enabling researchers to discover nuanced patterns linked to the social-emotional state and wellbeing of the community members, regarding fears, tensions, and resilience triggered by ERT (McAlinden & Dobinson, 2021). Specifically, it helps unearth how online community members make sense of the phenomenon through co- and re-constructing meaning with each other (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015).

Following the netnographic approach, the project lead observed Julie's remote teaching while taking a *participant-as-observer* role (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in shadowing her throughout her reflective journaling. This enabled the authors to establish rapport with the participant in a supportive virtual environment in order to get a better sense of *insider perspective*, which is integral to any type of ethnographic research (Creswell & Báez, 2020). In this study, we focus on three types of netnographic data: *immersive*, *interactive*, and *investigative* (Kozinets, 2020). According to Kozinets (2020), the first type (*immersive*) operates through reflective and contextual documentation (e.g., immersive journals, researcher field notes and recorded observations) in order to capture rich and authentic samples (p. 194). The second type (*interactive*) manifests itself in "researcher interference, questioning, or prodding", such as surveys and interviews (p. 193). The last type (*investigative*), carefully curated by the netnographer, contains archival resources and contents created by members under



investigation as part of their normal activities (p. 193).

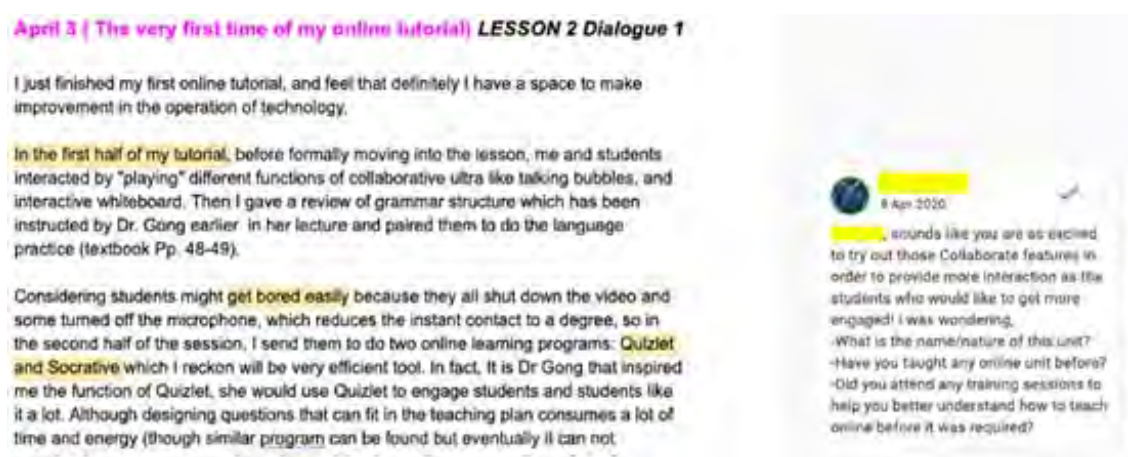
Below we present a categorisation of triangulated data sources in accordance with their associated netnographic data types:

### 1) Immersive data

- Reflective journal: Julie kept a teaching journal to document her ERT debut throughout the first half of the pandemic year using Google Docs. After each remote teaching session, she critically reflected on what worked or did not work in her online class. As part of netnographic practice, the lead author conducted his virtual “field work” by observing and documenting Julie’s reflective practice while offering guided support in every step of her ERT trajectory. Collectively, her journal entries generated 10496 words from April 1 to July 30, 2020. Figure 1 illustrates her first entry side by side with commenting provided by the lead author as an online shadowing mechanism.

### Figure 1

Julie’s first journal entry shadowed by the project lead



- Teacher debriefing sessions: The lead author held regular Zoom-enabled sessions with Julie and the Coordinator to debrief their ERT practices. These debriefing sessions also enabled Julie to reflect on her virtual class with the students, including pedagogical and technical difficulties encountered, issues (un)resolved, and strategies utilised. All the Zoom sessions were recorded, transcribed, and analysed as part of the data collection and analysis procedures.



## 2) Interactive data

- Online questionnaires: A pre-course and post-course online questionnaire was administered (via Google Forms) to gather Julie's demographic information such as her years of teaching, online teaching experience, and technological skills. Items also explored her overall experience of the ERT and how it impacted her teacher identity, wellbeing, and professional development.
- Follow-up interview: At the end of the first pandemic semester (June, 2020), we conducted a semi-structured interview with Julie via Zoom to elaborate on her journal entries and questionnaire responses and to further explore how Julie prepared for crisis teaching.

## 3) Investigative data

- Digital teaching materials: Digital artifacts are also pivotal to netnographic research as they provide authentic data sources that paint a dynamic picture of insiders' perspectives and life experiences in and with the real world (Kozinets, 2020). Incorporating digital tools (digital flashcards and games) to enhance students' Chinese language acquisition and reflecting on their effectiveness mirrored the technological and pedagogical aspects of Julie's ERT practice and experience.

## Data analysis

Thematic patterns were triangulated from the multiple data sources to provide data corroboration and verification (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An iterative and rigorous coding procedure was followed to analyse the digital data: We first screened and organized the raw data into coding categories; familiarized ourselves with the data sources through frequent accessing and reading them as a whole; conducted individual coding before comparing and discussing our initial coding results; resolved discrepancies and sought agreements in coding; attached codes to related verbatim segments and original sources; refined thematic patterns across data sources before collapsing them into higher conceptual levels that capture the essence of Julie's ERT journey (Creswell & Báez, 2020).

Given the immersive and rich netnographic data, we adopted the *thick description* approach to detail the process while using participant verbatim, in vivo codes, as empirical evidence to support the results (Kozinets, 2020). Researcher reflexivity was addressed via the researcher journal kept by the project lead to reflect and document their observation and "immersive engagement" in their online fieldwork of shadowing Julie throughout her reflective journaling. Peer debriefing was also conducted between the authors, followed by sharing initial data interpretation with Julie for member checking (Creswell & Báez, 2020).

## Findings and discussion

This study sought to explore how a novice Chinese language teacher responded to the challenges of ERT throughout the pandemic and the extent to which emotion regulation, teacher agency, and professional identity were enacted in her ERT practice. As an online teaching novice, Julie faced technological and teacher agency challenges, as well as increased emotion regulation triggered by ERT. We present and discuss the findings based on the emerging themes drawn from the triangulated data, highlighted by Julie's in vivo codes across multiple sources.

### *Situation selection and modification due to technological challenges*

Before the pandemic, Julie did not consider herself technologically competent. Emotional states of stress and anxiety were only worsened by her qualms and lack of experience in online teaching. In her initial online questionnaire response, Julie primarily reported feeling “very uncertain about how teaching would be conducted and worried about students’ engagement” and was “nervous, anxious, lost” when asked about how she felt teaching online. Her lack of self-efficacy was apparent when she noted that her “phobia of the operation of IT” meant she was fearful of incorporating new online tools in her unit delivery. This anxiety resulted in Julie avoiding certain teaching opportunities which may have otherwise benefited her students, as evidenced in her reflective journal entry:

*I need to admit that I show an obvious phobia of the operation of IT, especially when the teaching model had to switch into online patterns, which resulted in my dare not try new functions in my class (Excerpt 1, Reflective Journal).*

Julie's phobia resulted in situation selection – an attempt to regulate emotions by actively avoiding circumstances associated with negative affect (Gross, 2015). That is, she attempted to avoid implementing technology in her teaching practice to prevent a potentially stressful situation (i.e., digital phobia). Yet, the detrimental impact of the pandemic might be mitigated by using technological devices to maintain teacher-student relationships although teachers' preparedness and attitudes are also integral to the success of remote teaching and learning. Julie experienced reluctance due to her pre-ERT classroom teacher beliefs that teachers should remain in control and not be “unknowledgeable” in case of being judged negatively by students:

*For one thing, I am not fond of asking students for help (even though this is what I think can deal the problem most effectively), for another, I am afraid whether the bothering would become a negative comment on my teaching performance (students might wonder why the teacher seemed not to have digital knowledge to conduct an online lesson) (Excerpt 2, Reflective Journal).*

Language teachers' motivation and willingness to improve online pedagogy is a key factor in developing their digital competence (Zhang, 2020). While Julie's use of situation selection was intended to avoid negative emotion, her overvalued avoidance of utilising digital tools came at the cost of building her efficacy in online teaching. Further, Julie also expressed how her transition to remote teaching was costly in terms of time and effort during the first semi-structured interview:

*... I'm not an I.T person, so I think I did spend a lot of time to explore the platform and how I can use it. This is the most difficult part for me (Excerpt 3, Interview).*

As Julie moved from situation selection to situation modification, she attempted to regulate negative emotions associated with low efficacy in technology through investment in self-learning. Situation modification may be employed by teachers to regain control over external factors (Gross, 2015). Thus, by altering her level of engagement with different technological tools, she sought to reduce her anxiety. She not only engaged in professional learning to foster her pedagogical knowledge (e.g., attending workshop webinars), but also learned the technical skills needed to effectively conduct online sessions.

Throughout ERT, Julie made frequent reference to the increased workload due to online delivery, which confirms that teacher wellbeing was negatively impacted by the global pandemic due to heightened workload in increased lesson planning and technical demands (Flack et al., 2020). Her state of emotional exhaustion and diminished accomplishment is evident in her interview response:

*This is really energy consuming, time-consuming because I need to do a lot to try to include every consideration in my teaching. So the workload is triple, triple more (Excerpt 4, Interview).*

Julie sought to regulate negative emotions by implementing new pedagogical strategies to enhance the online student learning experience, which caused exhaustion, nevertheless. Her lack of efficacy with online teaching resulted in planning for every eventuality as a coping mechanism to avoid feelings of incompetence. Despite attempting to regulate negative emotions through situation modification, a state of stress remained.

Increased emotional exhaustion is linked to lower agency (Donker et al., 2020). In Julie's case, her pedagogy prior to the pandemic was predominantly entwined with classroom-based teaching. The abrupt move to remote teaching significantly impacted her levels of stress, leading to increased emotional exhaustion and reduced teacher agency. As ERT progressed, her technological and pedagogical agency were gradually enhanced as Julie built confidence to explore different tools such as Quizlet to facilitate remote language teaching. To upskill her technical capabilities, she sought support from colleagues and engaged in self-directed professional development by conducting online sessions, as mirrored in her journal communication:

*I have been empowered and keep learning by attending online conferences with excellent and experienced teachers from all over the world, which is really really great!! (Excerpt 5, Reflective Journal).*

Being a proactive teacher who enacted professional learning to upskill digital competency, Julie began to reconstruct her online language teacher identity. However, a further challenge for Julie was the technology itself. Despite seeking to alter the situation by engaging with all available online resources provided by the university, Julie considered them as inadequate to the language learning context, as evidenced in Julie's follow-up interview response:

*Collaborate, Blackboard is kind of challenging for me because in the language class, ... I need to show students a video, so I need to play a link and I need to set them some listening activity with a video. But for the online class, if I used [Collaborate], I cannot do that, or all I can do is just send them the link and tell them around maybe three minutes I'll call you back. So I kind of lose the control of the class... This is the weakness I feel (Excerpt 6, Interview).*

Indeed, language learning arguably involves considerably more speaking and listening tasks than typically other university courses. Julie struggled to recreate authentic tasks through Blackboard which may have impacted her agency in attempting to control the learning environment to achieve desired outcomes. While the integration of appropriate digital tools can alleviate the psychological distance due to time and distance constraints (Chen, 2019),

existing tools used for ERT, and students' home internet access may not be conducive to viable language teaching and learning. Such limitations can restrict content delivery and language practice, thus impacting student engagement and teacher efficacy. As well as battling technological challenges, Julie at times felt frustration at how the institutional space operated, which, in her view, did not place as much priority on language education as she perceived necessary:

*I hope people can treat language acquisition more seriously, after all, this is something directly related to the competitive power of our young generation. I [hope] all the authority concerned could treat this issue seriously too. A more comprehensive plan is required to build up our students' ability - My big concern and a small complaint (Excerpt 7, Reflective Journal).*

Julie's criticism foregrounds how the lack of institutional support and poor planning for online teaching can jeopardise teacher emotion and agency. Competing tension may exist between a teacher's self-empowerment and the constraints faced in teaching. Ideally, technological applications for online language teaching should meet the general requirements of a virtual classroom, while accommodating the specific needs of language education. Notably, the challenges brought by ERT also presented opportunities for Julie to upskill and foster teacher agency. After the "roller coaster" of ERT, Julie reported the necessity to transition online had reciprocally led to her acquisition of new skills:

*... I feel myself sitting in the roller coaster. It looks like I am pushed to take actions in response to the unprecedented situation, I confess I am kind of reluctant in the beginning, but when I accepted that I have no other options but to do something, I did it and I grew. I have explored a lot of online tools and attended some PDs, which are all the extra bonus I had. Being able to explore the areas that I have long been afraid of (IT) is super (Excerpt 8, Reflective Journal).*

Indeed, Julie's emotion regulation strategies of moving from situation avoidance to situation modification appear to have facilitated teacher agency. By striving to regulate negative effects amid ERT through situation modification, Julie's newly acquired technological and pedagogical competence led to a better affective outcome. She invested emotionally in professional learning despite challenges in spending more time and energy on adopting a new online pedagogical approach.

### ***Regulation of negative emotion associated with ERT***

Online student engagement and participation was another hurdle confronting Julie. Julie's pre-COVID identity reflected active student engagement in class, yet the face-to-face context differs significantly from remote teaching. Prior research finds teachers regard tele/co-presence as an integral part of distance learning (Chen et al., 2020a, 2020b). Julie reported online delivery affected her perceived relationship with students as they appeared less inclined to participate in online discussions, coupled with their cameras and microphones turned off. This phenomenon has also been reported in the literature (Chen et al., 2020a). To delineate her frustration, Julie opted for a response modulation strategy of suppressing her negative emotion during online teaching sessions:

*That makes me frustrated because I hope we can see face to face and then I can make sure you are there ... check your progress by seeing you, but I used to call a student's name and no response. So all of a sudden the classroom just [went] very quiet... I [felt] so embarrassed. So I just try to come back and move on (Excerpt 9, Teacher Debriefing Session).*

Julie experienced frustration with the students' silence but fought to suppress negative emotion by acting as if the silence did not impact her. Instead, Julie chose to suppress her embarrassment and "move on" with the lesson. Although this suppression strategy may reduce visible behaviours, it fails to diminish the intensity of emotion felt and can be detrimental as it consumes cognitive resources (Gross, 2015).

The lack of perceived student participation and engagement resulted in increased emotion regulation for Julie to maintain a positive online learning environment. Silence can "spur teachers into agitated, anxious, and even angry states, especially because teachers' appraisals of non-responsive silence tend to be negative, even if there is truly no negative emotion behind the silence" (Smith & King, 2018, p. 331). The frustration felt by Julie when students' silence affected not only the virtual class dynamics, but also her self-perception as a capable online teacher, perhaps leading to feelings of resentment. As the emotional state is inextricable to the way teacher and student emotions are sensed (Smith & King, 2018), the possibility of emotional exhaustion highlights the need to support novice teachers both professionally and social-emotionally.

Students' opting out of using microphones and cameras during online sessions increased Julie's sense of anxiety vis-à-vis silence and engendered trust and respect concerns. However, students' reluctance to turn on their cameras or microphones to speak in front of their online cohort may have arisen from self-consciousness (e.g., low proficient language

learners) or the lack of virtual community building (Chen et al., 2020a). Her perceptions of how a language class should have operated were challenged by ERT delivery as her teacher mindset rested in language students being actively engaged in communication in order to acquire the target language:

*There were students entering the session but in fact not taking the lesson, for I call a student a couple of times to answer my question but no answer back, then the rest of class fall "strangely silent." It is still a bit overwhelming that I cannot "see" all the present students and manage any occurrence accordingly. Unlike other units, language class demands a huge amount of interaction and it is what I reckon the biggest challenge for me (Excerpt 10, Online Questionnaire).*

Due to crisis teaching, students' online learning experiences may be impacted by unstable networks, lack of concentration, and unilateral interactions amid ERT. Hence, teachers may need to be more adaptable to better accommodate specific learning needs and styles of online students, while debriefing netiquette to avoid misunderstandings (Scull et al., 2020). Considerations of the educational and technological environment, and instructor's empathetic approach can be vital in maintaining online student engagement. Empathy plays a pivotal role in fostering teacher knowledge to humanise online teaching and ensure that appropriate pedagogy is implemented, particularly in the context of ERT (Wang & East, 2020). As voiced in Julie's reflective journal entry:

*... students would make excuses like my microphone is on and off, or the Internet connection is weak in his/her side that they cannot hear clearly my instruction and respond.... under the protective umbrella of privacy policy, students have rights to not show their face or be silent, but c'mon, this is a language class! A language classroom never should be like that. I have to admit that sometimes I strongly feel like exposing their lies and tricks, for they show their disrespect to everyone in the classroom (Excerpt 11, Reflective Journal).*

Another case in point is Julie's belief that students were behaving disrespectfully when they did not participate or stayed silent throughout collaborative sessions. Her language choice of "exposing their lies and their tricks" perhaps signals a non-empathetic response to the students' situation as their behaviour is viewed as indicative of incivility. Despite her frustration, she chose not to single students out or employ a response modulation strategy of "venting" her negative emotions to the students who were the "culprits" of the emotion (Morris & King, 2018, p. 446). Cognitive reappraisal was also not used as a means to take a more empathetic approach (Gross, 2015) as Julie did not reflect on the likelihood of some



students having poor Internet connection or restrictive living arrangements that could have hindered the use of cameras or microphones. Cultivating empathy towards challenging students and attempting to understand their behaviours and motivations may assist teachers in regulating negative emotions (Jiang et al., 2016).

Notably, teachers' frustration with learners is likely to be heightened when they consider learners to be apathetic as opposed to negotiating external difficulties such as living in challenging circumstances (Morris & King, 2018). While online instructors can navigate the lack of physical presence by creating a supportive virtual learning environment, Julie's desire to closely monitor students' progress and participation is curbed by ERT, as evidenced in the debriefing sessions:

*I receive a message telling me, oh, the microphone is out of order or something, but I don't really trust it... I think it's really important for me to be able to know the immediate reaction from the students, I think to get a student in the same physical classroom is important because I can see all the students' participation at the same time (Excerpt 12, Teacher Debriefing Session).*

Julie's initial struggle with adapting to online delivery and the technological and emotional challenges it presented may have been compounded by her beliefs around "good" language teaching in class. Increased levels of emotion suppression are related to teachers employing a more controlling pedagogical approach as the exhaustion from suppressing teacher emotions may lead to an attempt to control learners' responses and requires an ongoing effort in emotion regulation (Moè & Katz, 2021). For Julie, this likely led to the depletion of cognitive resources which may have otherwise been allocated to more positive online interactions with her learners. Thus, suppression as a strategy is disadvantageous as it consumes cognitive resources that could have been made available for other teaching activities (Gross, 2015). Through suppression, Julie struggles to identify as a competent online teacher, making frequent reference to emotions of stress, anxiety, and frustration.

Under ERT, social isolation is a hurdle for not only students but also teachers who miss connections with students and colleagues in person (Flack et al., 2020). The issue of how to construct positive relationships online is pertinent to student engagement. Since Julie's identity as a capable online teacher was only emerging, she was negotiating and re-examining her existing conceptions of what it meant to be a good "online" language teacher. As voiced by Julie,

*I feel kind of bad [when students have camera off] because I hope I can see their response and I can have an interaction with them, I can see how they feel from their appearance or something, but they just disappear (Excerpt 13, Teacher Debriefing Session).*

*I still can use [Collaborate] to have the personal discussion. I don't know why they just don't want to participate, even though the conversation is between one on one (Excerpt 14, Interview).*

The lack of contact with students and subsequent diminished relationships appears to take an emotional toll on her teacher identity. Online student interaction was affected by the lack of physical presence and this perceived reduction in online student engagement likely confronted her language teaching principles grounded in classroom instruction. Evidently, Julie experienced a loss of control as her classroom-based pedagogy needed to be revamped for online delivery (Chen et al., 2020b). To overcome negative emotions triggered by frustrations with less active online students, Julie adopted suppression as an emotion regulation strategy, but this approach failed to build rapport with her students, particularly in a fully online environment.

### ***Reimagining professional identity through emotion regulation***

The trajectory of engaging in ERT appears to have shaped Julie's professional identity as a competent online language teacher. Before the pandemic, Julie would spend time in her face-to-face teaching to provide extra support and build rapport with students in class. Julie's pre-ERT identity as a confident language teacher was safeguarded by evoking her on-campus class as an engaging and interactive learning environment:

*I feel the lack of contact with students this semester after all the rest lessons were shifted online... Maybe it is me that needs to adjust the mindset. I think I belong to the old-fashioned party that prefer to stick together with my students and can see them every session. The physical class always brings me and my students great happiness (Excerpt 15, Reflective Journal).*

By reminiscing about how pre-ERT teaching brought happiness, Julie appears to have adopted a strategy of attentional deployment. That is, she purposefully directed her attention away from the present "unpleasant" situation to evoke memories that generate a more positive emotional state. Notably, the move to ERT resulted in stress and forced her to reconsider what it meant to be an effective language teacher in the context of online teaching and learning.

*Not being able to see my students face-to-face stressed me, for when the lesson is given inside the classroom, I can check everyone's reaction immediately and adjust my pedagogy accordingly, students join in group activity, interact with each other, and learn together, the classroom is dynamic and lively (Excerpt 16, Reflective Journal).*

Julie's reflection that her pre-ERT teaching was more "dynamic and lively" also manifests attentional deployment to upregulate more positive emotions. Emotion regulation, in Julie's case, may have resulted in a reprieve from the reality of ERT. However, it also challenged her to transform her professional teacher identity through negotiating her new role and belonging as an online language teacher and accepting or contesting these discourses that shaped her pre-ERT teacher identity. Despite her preference for face-to-face instruction, Julie gradually reimagined her identity as a capable online teacher through an ongoing process of emotion regulation. Positive student feedback further validated her efforts in upskilling technological and pedagogical competence, thus consolidating her professional identity as an effective online teacher:

*[... a student] telling me that how she liked this online platform and she was using it as a tool to prepare for the final exam, which is truly thrilling because I feel all my money, time, and energy were not spent in vain... [to receive] the gratitude and recognition from my students (Excerpt 17, Reflective Journal).*

Julie's identity as a capable online teacher is further legitimized by her perceived impact on students' achievement and wellbeing. As a result of fostering pedagogical agency through undertaking professional learning, Julie indicated she had become a positive role model for her students while improving their language skills:

*It is wonderful to be able to help equip them with some ability that makes them stronger and competitive to face their life challenges... happy to be the one that my students can trust and depend on (Excerpt 18, Reflective Journal).*

It appears the efforts associated with regulating her feelings and phobia of online teaching paid off given her teacher agency empowered and professional identity transformed throughout crisis teaching. As documented in her final reflection and follow-up interview,

*Personally, I prefer conducting physical class more than online class because I like to have the instant and direct interaction and feedback with them and from my students but if I'm asked to conduct an online lesson with my students [again], I think I'm confident to say, yes, I can do it too. I just don't panic and stay calm. And the last reminder is that*

*besides looking after our students and our loved ones, I think please also remember to look after ourselves because I think the pressure is really huge (Excerpt 19, Interview).*

Indeed, identity formation is complex, multifaceted, contested, and imagined (Norton & Toohey, 2011). For Julie, being a novice teacher of both Chinese language and online teaching, the trajectory of her identity (re)development was fraught with doubt, anxiety, frustration, and a sense of reluctance as she struggled to secure her “safe” classroom teacher identity. Julie’s pre-pandemic teacher identity, shaped by beliefs in a more classroom-driven pedagogy, was confronted by her initial ERT practice. As ERT progressed, Julie’s beliefs about online teaching also shifted as she employed various antecedent-focused and response-focused strategies to regulate emotions. Thus, her praxis evolved as she rose to the challenges presented by ERT with her adaptive pedagogy reflecting the 21st century teaching of collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. While ERT pushed an unexpected move towards fully online teaching and learning, it also propelled language teachers, such as Julie, to reevaluate teacher beliefs around technology-enhanced pedagogy. Specifically, this change in teacher agency was not solely due to the requirement of utilising technology in ERT, but rather teacher pedagogical beliefs that were challenged to make online learning more learner-driven and interactive (Choi et al., 2021). For Julie, this meant adapting her teacher-centric pedagogy, from a sole knowledge provider in the classroom who closely monitored student learning behaviour, to a facilitator who relinquished control and accommodated different learning needs and styles in the online environment.

### ***Conclusion and Implications***

This netnographic study explored how a novice Chinese language teacher regulated her emotions to respond to the challenges posed by ERT. The emotion regulation spent as a result of the ERT evoked teacher agency and promoted the pursuit of technological skills needed for fully online delivery. Julie’s teacher identity was re-envisioned through crisis teaching pedagogy as she regulated negative emotions to engage in professional learning by exploring and applying various digital tools to facilitate student online engagement (agency), which reciprocally bolstered her sense of a competent online instructor (teacher identity). That said, this trajectory was not without unforeseen obstacles and the implications are highlighted below.

Teacher emotion regulation plays a critical role in teacher well-being (Chang & Taxer, 2021). Given that this study centres only on a single case, generalisability should be interpreted with discretion. Despite this limitation, the additional workload, technological anxiety, and stress experienced in Julie’s trajectory is not a standalone case, but one of a much broader experience shared by many language teachers amid the pandemic. Julie’s reluctance to engage with online language pedagogy, reasoning with negative emotions, and

efforts made to maintain positive emotions may resonate with other teachers during ERT. Teachers' first-hand experiences and voices need to be heard so that institutions are better prepared for future ERT situations. Since negative emotions can have a detrimental impact on agency whereas positive emotions can facilitate innovative strategies, teacher emotions are conceptually significant (Chen, 2019). At the beginning of ERT, Julie feared shifting her role from a classroom teacher to a fully online teacher. Initially, she utilised situation selection and situation modification strategies to manipulate the environment and to decrease negative affective states. However, she did not utilise cognitive reappraisal to better accommodate her learners' situations, perhaps resulting in the lack of empathy for and understanding of their online silence. Since the shift to ERT was as unexpected for students as it was for the teachers, students may have also experienced anxiety regarding transition from face-to-face to remote learning and using technologies with related technical issues. When Julie was confronted with online students' disengagement (i.e., microphones or cameras turned off), she appeared to overlook that their behaviour could be due to factors such as poor Internet connection or a lack of privacy in their home environment amongst others.

Given the ERT circumstances, teacher empathy plays a pivotal role in gaining understanding of students' social and personal situations (Meyers et al., 2019). Adopting a strategy of reappraisal means teachers are more likely to be emotionally responsive (Moè & Katz, 2021). Empathy is valuable in teaching as it not only helps to modulate emotional experiences, but also fosters more positive teacher-student relationships (Jiang et al., 2016; Morris & King, 2018). Reappraisal allows teachers to maintain more positive affective states and makes them less likely to use suppression as a strategy (Chang & Taxer, 2021), and less prone to high emotional exhaustion (Donker et al., 2020). However, Julie's negative emotions associated with students' silence were regulated through suppression as an attempt to maintain a positive learning experience. As evidenced in this study, suppression as an emotion regulation strategy should be discouraged as it may hinder development of positive teacher-student interactions (Jiang et al., 2016). Furthermore, teachers need to develop greater awareness of the breadth of emotion regulation strategies and how to employ them adaptively (Morris & King, 2018). Language teachers could benefit from training provided either by their own institution or professional self-learning on how to enact reappraisal and reduce emotional suppression. Indeed, ERT challenges teachers to teach outside of their comfort zones by rethinking how to sustain relationships with students remotely.

Similarly, teacher agency is pivotal in sustaining teachers' professional development (Durrant, 2020; Tao & Gao, 2017). The global pandemic may have amplified teacher agency as many language teachers demonstrated both willingness and resilience to rise to the

challenge. Teachers with increased agency experience less emotional exhaustion (Donker et al., 2020). In this study, Julie regulated her negative emotions to seek opportunities to effectively integrate digital technologies, paving the way for a deeper connection with her online learners and a stronger teacher agency. This agency development was fostered by her resilience and her pre-ERT identity as an effective classroom teacher, as well as enhanced by her unwavering effort to engage her learners, seeking support from colleagues, and ongoing critical reflection.

Nevertheless, much anxiety and stress could have been avoided had Julie possessed the technological and pedagogical skills needed for online delivery before the pandemic. Despite the university policies to accommodate students' learning needs amid ERT, we also witness a pedagogical and social-emotional clash between Julie's classroom-dominant teaching style and students' online learning styles during this transition. Further, laying out clear expectations about online "netiquette" would help avoid potential misunderstandings about students' online presence or engagement for both students and teachers (Scull et al., 2020, p. 8). Professional self-learning that is tailored to both technological skills and a more student-centred, collaborative learning approach may unlock empathy in online teaching, thus transforming teacher identity.

While disrupting the normalcy in language education, ERT also sheds light on the primacy of online teacher training, mentoring and ongoing professional learning (Chen & Sato, 2023). Taken together, the understandings drawn from this study are conducive to not only novice teachers' professional growth but also the sustainability and reinforcement of the online learning experience of impacted stakeholders in language courses. Moving forward, language programs may need to re-evaluate the effectiveness of current digital technology platforms and infrastructure alongside language pedagogy delivered remotely. Whilst generally overlooked prior to ERT, emotion regulation strategies should also be foregrounded and scaffolded through professional development training. Finally, administrators could promote blended learning for language programs to gradually build digital literacy of both teachers and students and seek stakeholder perspectives in policy making so that the impacts of future ERT can be mitigated.

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