

A Case Study of English Language Lecturer's Classroom Behaviours and Pedagogical Knowledge in Distance Learning in a Chinese University

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Abstract

Distance learning has become increasingly prominent ever since the COVID-19 pandemic. In modern society, distance learning has become a primary mode of education available globally. This allows students at all levels to conveniently access education, including English language learning, from their locations. Addressing the gaps in understanding educators' teaching behaviors and attitudes, the high educational expectations and demands, as well as the methods of lesson delivery in the distance learning within the context of higher education English language learning, this study aims to illustrate classroom lecturing behaviors and attitudes, along with the types of knowledge these educators exhibited. Guided by the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge theory (TPACK) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this study utilizes a single-site case study design incorporating classroom observations, document analyses, and semi-structured interviews among 10 Chinese English language lecturers on a selected distance learning platform. This study provides a better overview of how distance learning occurs in China, and the findings of this study can assist in developing the English language lecturers' professionalism in teaching based on the two guiding theories. Higher education institutions could help improve the professionalism and teaching quality among lecturers.

Keywords: Distance Learning, Online Learning, English Language, Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

Online learning has existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic (DeMatthews et al., 2023; Hockly, 2023; Jeong, 2023; Zhang & Wu, 2022; Zhou, 2022; Zhou & Zhou, 2024). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning and other forms of learning, including distant learning, were treated as secondary means of receiving education; they were also hardly prioritized as

an effective way of delivering lessons among students (DeMatthews et al., 2023; Hockly, 2023; Zhou, 2022). However, its importance has grown since the pandemic and lockdowns (Hockly, 2023; Jeong, 2023; Zhou, 2022). This led to the widespread implementation of online education at all educational institutions (Jeong, 2023; Zhou, 2022; Zhou & Zhou, 2024). All stakeholders—such as the ministry, parents, schools, principals, and teachers—embraced this forced transition to ensure the continuation of teaching (DeMatthews et al., 2023; Jeong, 2023; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). Learning is possible with an Internet connection, and Wi-Fi (Jeong, 2023; Zhou, 2022). Concepts like blended and distance learning have gained prominence in today's post-pandemic era (Jeong, 2023; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021; Zhou & Zhou, 2024).

Although all nations experienced lockdowns for prolonged periods due to the pandemic, English language learning remained a key subject for students across different institutions (Hockly, 2023; Jeong, 2023; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). The English language is a primary means of communication for political, economic, social, and cultural exchanges worldwide (Hockly, 2023; Jeong, 2023; Lee & Cho, 2025; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). When teaching mode has transited from physical classes to online learning, evidence has shown that many teachers were ill-prepared for such a transition, leading to poor conduct in English language learning (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). Many sessions went through trials and errors to ensure the effective delivery of the English language in different countries (Jeong, 2023; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). Consequently, English language learning has been reconceptualized since the COVID-19 pandemic, and given the prominence of online education, distance learning, and hybrid learning, there is a continuous effort across institutions to ensure quality English language lessons are delivered to students at various levels of education institutions (Hockly, 2023; Jeong, 2023; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

In China, the recognition of the English language continues to be the prioritised language for different purposes. Even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, English language learning remained available in most higher education institutions in China (Han, 2021; Pan et al., 2021; Zhou & Zhou, 2024). Language lecturers in China conduct language learning sessions through online platforms, such as Tencent (腾讯), NetEase Cloud Classroom (网易云课堂), and Youku (优酷). These platforms operate in a manner similar to global online learning tools such as Zoom and Google Meet.

While English language educators possess language proficiency and knowledge, they tend to enter classrooms with distinct teaching behaviours and varied pedagogical knowledge¹ (De Silva & Devendra, 2023; Zhou & Zhou, 2024). Due to the diverse purposes of language learning, a language educator's classroom behaviors may adjust and adapt to enhance effective language teaching and learning. When English is a foreign language for learners, language educators often rely on drills and formal conversations (De Silva & Devendra, 2023). Educators may adopt a more casual communication style with their students in an English as a Second Language setting. These behaviors are not exhaustive, and the variety of language learning modes has increased diversification of these behaviors (De Silva & Devendra, 2023; Teng et al., 2023).

¹ Pedagogical knowledge refers to an educators' extent of knowledge in using various teaching approaches, methods, strategies, and principles to convey the subject matter into the classroom (Durham, 2024; Mei et al., 2018; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021).

By narrowing the focus, the present study intends to understand how language educators, specifically those from a selected Chinese university, exhibit different classroom teaching behaviours and display relevant pedagogical knowledge. This is to explore deeper into the context of English language teaching and learning, providing a comprehensive observation of current teaching and learning practices at a selected Chinese university. This paper aims to understand how English language lecturers conduct distance learning by displaying classroom teaching behaviours for students who are interested in and enrolled in English language courses at a selected Chinese university. The findings of this research could be beneficial in developing confidence among English language lecturers, demonstrating pedagogical knowledge and showing skilled technological knowledge in delivering lessons through distance learning (Bahari, 2022).

The following informs the *research objectives* of the present study:

- **Research Objective 1:** To explore the English language lecturers' classroom behaviours and pedagogical knowledge through Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK).
- **Research Objective 2:** To explore the classroom behaviours exhibited by the English language lecturers through Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

The *research questions* are presented in the following list:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the classroom behaviours and pedagogical knowledge exhibited by the English language lecturers through TPACK?
- **Research Question 2:** What are the classroom behaviours and pedagogical knowledge exhibited by the English language lecturers through TPB?

Theoretical Background

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

TPACK is an education framework previously established by Shulman, Mishra and Koehler (Durham, 2024; Gozukucuk & Gunbas, 2022; Mei et al., 2018; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021). In 1986, this education framework integrated two core knowledge: pedagogical content knowledge and technological knowledge (Durham, 2024; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021). TPACK emphasizes the importance of using technology for education, integrating subject knowledge, and fostering a digital environment where students can learn and demonstrate effective pedagogical methods during lessons (Durham, 2024; Mei et al., 2018; Noakes & Hook, 2020; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021). Furthermore, advocates of TPACK believe that integrating technology with pedagogical knowledge can enhance effective teaching and learning, which is essential in today's technology-driven era (Durham, 2024; Gozukucuk & Gunbas, 2022; Mei et al., 2018; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021). TPACK comprises three kinds of knowledge all educators should possess to foster a digitally-driven educational environment (Durham, 2024; Mei et al., 2018; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021):

- **Technological Knowledge (TK)** – This knowledge requires teachers to demonstrate proficiency in using technological tools for lesson delivery, such as online teaching platforms, educational software and applications, and various educational tools.
- **Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)** - This knowledge involves teachers demonstrating pedagogical expertise while showcasing various effective teaching methods, approaches, and lesson delivery strategies.
- **Content Knowledge (CK)** - This knowledge involves mastering the subject matter to teach a group of students effectively.

However, these forms of knowledge are not entirely independent of each other. Advocates of TPACK argue that the components can interconnect, leading to additional forms of knowledge that may enhance teaching and learning effectiveness (Durham, 2024; Gozukucuk & Gunbas, 2022; Mei et al., 2018; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021). The other forms of knowledge are shown below:

- **Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK)** - This form of knowledge refers to the extent of knowledge displayed by teachers to use technology in effectively teaching and delivering lessons and subject knowledge to the students.
- **Technological Content Knowledge (TCK)** - This form of knowledge refers to the extent of knowledge displayed by teachers to use technology to enhance the effectiveness of content, such as making it more detailed, simpler, and clearer for the students to comprehend.
- **Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)** - This form of knowledge refers to the extent of knowledge displayed by teachers in delivering lessons, subject knowledge, and subject content effectively and meaningfully to the students.

TPACK offers a framework that helps teachers understand the knowledge required to be effective educators, effectively providing students with practical knowledge on various subjects through technology (Gozukucuk & Gunbas, 2022; Mei et al., 2018; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021). In a technologically-driven society, TPACK is necessary for teachers to bridge the gap between their technological knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, concurrently exploring more strategies, methods, skills, and approaches to ensure an effective and meaningful learning process (Durham, 2024; Gozukucuk & Gunbas, 2022; Mei et al., 2018).

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action that was previously developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (Ghahremani et al., 2022; Gray & Evans, 2024; Leung et al., 2023; Nyasulu & Dominic, 2019; Qin & Tao, 2020; Roland et al., 2018). TPB serves as a practical theory that informs an individual's beliefs, expectations, and control over actions that affect and influence his or her behaviours in a given setting (Gray & Evans, 2024; Leung et al., 2023; Nyasulu & Dominic, 2019; Qin & Tao, 2020; Roland et al., 2018). The effectiveness of this theory is that it has been widely applied across different fields; alongside the field of education, other fields such as psychology, health and medicine, and business also apply TPB to predict certain behaviours in a given setting (Ghahremani et al., 2022; Gray & Evans, 2024; Leung et al., 2023;). TPB generally concerns three key factors, which are an *individual's attitude*, *societal expectations and norms*, and *perceived behavioural control* (Ghahremani et al., 2022; Gray & Evans, 2024; Nyasulu & Dominic, 2019; Roland et al., 2018), with each explained in the following:

- **Attitude** - This refers to an individual's way of thinking and feeling about something, leading to specific consequences resulting from the thought and feeling.
- **Societal Expectations and Norms** - This refers to an individual's way of perceiving the social pressures that include expectations and norms, resulting in how they act in a given setting.
- **Perceived Behavioural Control** - This refers to an individual's extent of the ability to control his or her behaviour and perform accordingly in a given setting.

Through an individual's attitudes, societal expectations, and perceived behavioral control, the lecturer will form a behavioral intention, which will then be reflected in the actual behaviors exhibited (Ghahremani et al., 2022; Gray & Evans, 2024; Nyasulu & Dominic, 2019; Qin & Tao, 2020; Roland et al., 2018). This helps us understand the willingness of English language lecturers to share their knowledge during lessons. The TPB also highlights the societal pressures that may influence the classroom behaviors of English language lecturers at Chinese universities when teaching on online learning platforms during distance learning.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1. This study primarily focuses on distance learning as the main environment. To understand how language lecturers manage their classrooms, we will examine their behaviors using the TPACK and TPB frameworks. This method will offer a comprehensive insight into the role of English language learning in distance education in China.

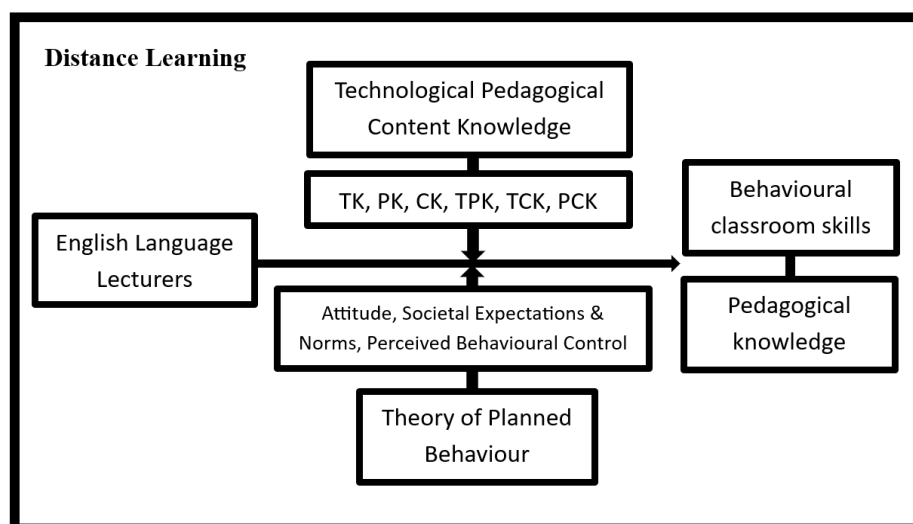


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design employs a *single-site case study approach* to achieve the established research objectives. Case study design is a qualitative research method that involves an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon or a unique case. The focus of a case study may be on an individual, a group, or an institution that is either directly or indirectly related to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017; Housel & Oranjian, 2021; Nanni, 2021; Ong, 2019; Ton-Nu & Nguyen, 2024; Younas & Inayat, 2025). This in-depth exploration aims to reveal how the participants engage with the phenomenon, providing a deeper understanding of their lived experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017; Housel & Oranjian, 2021). By concentrating on a single-site case study, the researcher seeks to understand how English language lecturers conduct language lessons in distance learning classrooms, guided by the frameworks of TPACK and TPB.

Research Population and Sampling

Purposive sampling was chosen to select the research site and participants. Among the many prestigious universities in China, Sichuan International Studies University, also known as

Sichuan University, requires its students to enrol in English language courses. In this study, 10 lecturers (N=10) will be recruited to teach English classes to undergraduate students. The research will be conducted over one semester, specifically from the end of September 2024 to the end of January 2025. The researcher has secured the necessary permissions and ethical clearances to proceed with the study during this period.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

The research instruments used in this study include classroom observations, document analysis, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. All distance learning lectures in this study are conducted using Tencent Classroom, which the target university has selected for educational purposes.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations allow researchers to witness the natural dynamics between educators and students within a classroom environment. This approach describes how classes and lessons are conducted during a lesson (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017; Law et al., 2019; White, 2018; Wilson, 2022). While being a non-participant observer, the researcher utilized the revised classroom observation scale (COS-R) by VanTassel-Baska et al. (2005) as the primary reference to rate classroom observations. The COS-R is adapted with slight modifications to tailor the research objectives established.

The researcher in this study requested permission to obtain recordings of a specific English language lesson in the classroom. This is to cross-check the observation field notes and reconfirm the data by re-watching the classroom recordings, which reinforces the data's trustworthiness for the classroom observation instrument.

Document Analysis

The present study selected document analysis to achieve the research objectives. First, it involves analysing the English language lecturers' teaching plans during distance learning. Then it also includes the teaching materials used to conduct English language lessons during distance learning. Finally, the assessments that evaluate students' performances during English language lessons in distance learning are also referred to for document analysis. The researcher uses Cardno's (2018) guidelines for document analysis as a reference to ensure all details are covered. Cardno's (2018) guidelines involved two main categories, which are (1) document production and location and (2) teaching content.

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Finally, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with English language lecturers in the target Chinese university. The in-depth semi-structured interviews will illustrate the educational practices demonstrated by English language lecturers in their classes, enabling the researcher to contextualize how the teaching and learning processes are carried out. The interview questions were developed based on the elements of TPACK and TPB outlined in the conceptual framework.

Data Analysis

These three instruments' data analysis methods are standard, using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (TA). This study uses ATLAS.ti version 9 as the primary qualitative software

for coding and interpretation. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher conducts a comparative analysis (CA) based on the guidelines of Zhang and Wildemuth (n.d.). This analysis involves comparing the findings from three research instruments: *classroom observations*, *document analysis*, and *semi-structured interviews*.

The researcher follows specific steps to avoid mismatches or missed data representations. Figure 2 displays the flowchart of the procedures the researcher adhered to throughout the study. Note that the university and research participants' names are later concealed, and a pseudonym is assigned to the study.

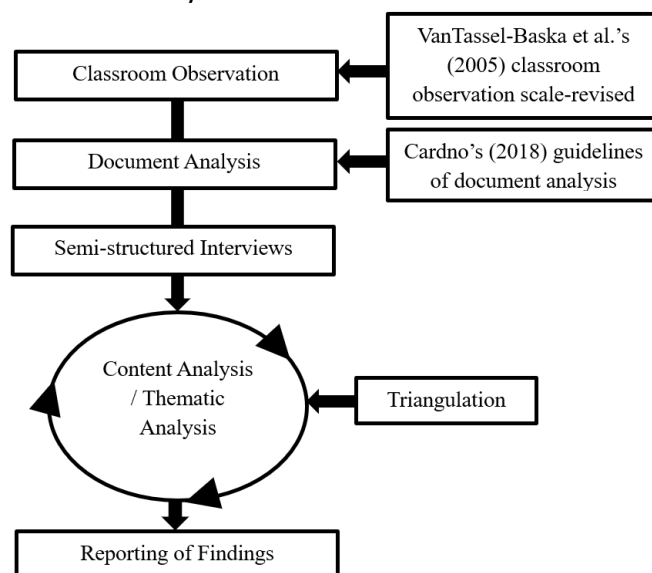


Figure 2 Summary of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Main Findings

Identification of Participants

This study recruited 10 English language lecturers from the two colleges of the target university. The English language lecturers were identified using the format of SELL X and BELL X, with X representing the first 10 letters of the English alphabet, S stands for English language lecturers who were in the College of English Studies, and B stands for English language lecturers who were in the College of Business English. Based on the pseudonyms assigned, the following informed the background of each English language lecturer in terms of gender and years of teaching English language experiences:

- SELL A – Female, 5 years
- SELL B – Female, 6 years
- SELL C – Male, 4 years
- SELL D – Female, 4 years
- SELL E – Female, 8 years
- BELL F – Male, 5 years
- BELL G – Female, 10 years
- BELL H – Female, 6 years
- BELL I – Female, 9 years
- BELL J – Female, 7 years

Findings from Classroom Observations

Based on the COS-R by VanTassel-Baska et al. (2005), the researcher was able to rate each item in the six categories in terms of Effectiveness (E), Somewhat Effective (SE), Ineffective (I), and Not Observed (N/O). Besides being a non-participant during the classroom observation, the researcher reviewed the recordings thrice before providing the final rating based on the COS-R (Table 1).

Table 1
Ratings of Each Item

Categories	Items Rated
Curriculum Planning and Delivery (CPD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set expectations for student performance. (E) Incorporated hands-on activities for students to apply new knowledge. (SE) Incorporated technology-based activities for students to apply new knowledge. (SE) Engaged students in planning, monitoring or assessing their learning. (SE) Encouraged students to express their thoughts in the target language. (E) Had students reflect on what they had learned. (SE)
Accommodations for Individual Differences (AID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided opportunities for independent or group learning. (E) Accommodated individual or subgroup differences. (SE) Encouraged multiple interpretations of events and situations. (SE) Allowed students to discover key ideas individually. (I)
Problem Solving (PS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed brainstorming techniques. (SE) Engaged students in problem identification and definition. (SE) Engaged students in solution-finding activities and comprehensive solution articulation. (SE)
Critical Thinking Strategies (CTS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraged students to judge or evaluate situations, problems, or issues. (SE) Engaged students in comparing and contrasting ideas. (SE) Provided opportunities for students to generalise from concrete information to the abstract. (SE) Encouraged students to synthesise or summarise the information within or across disciplines. (SE)
Creative Thinking Strategies (CRTS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicited many diverse thoughts about issues or ideas. (E) Engaged students in the exploration of diverse points of view to reframe ideas. (SE) Encouraged students to demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance of imaginative, sometimes playful solutions to problems. (SE) Provided opportunities for students to develop and elaborate on their ideas. (SE)
Research Strategies (RS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required students to gather evidence from multiple sources through research-based techniques. (I) Asked questions to assist students in making inferences from data and drawing conclusions. (N/O) Encouraged students to determine implications and consequences of findings. (SE) Provided time for students to communicate research study findings to relevant audiences in a formal report/presentation. (SE)

Besides the ratings from the COS-R by VanTassel-Baska et al. (2005), the researcher also noted how the English language lecturers taught during the language sessions. Generally, all 10

English language lecturers were friendly and approachable in the virtual classrooms, but lecturers SELL C, SELL E, BELL H, and BELL I were somewhat strict. During the lesson, the researcher noted that BELL F made some jokes to lighten the classroom atmosphere.

Nearly all English language lecturers consistently mentioned assignment updates in class. For example, SELL C mentioned the same thing about the assignment, *"You all should be doing the assignment by now. Anything we'll discuss after the class."* After mentioning the assignment, SELL C also put up the due dates of the assignment in the chat box for the students.

However, throughout the classroom observation, the researcher noticed incidents where the English language lecturer used translations from English to Chinese Mandarin for the students to understand. The researcher believed the translation method was used to clarify terminologies from the translations. However, at the same time, Chinese Mandarin was used by the lecturers as a form of greeting before the start of the lesson of the day.

Besides using Chinese Mandarin to communicate with the students, the observed English language lecturers utilized technology for various purposes. One instance was that some English language lecturers were seen checking their microphones and cameras before the lesson. As another example, BELL J, SELL A, and SELL C used some videos to deliver lesson content to the students after informing them about a video-watching session. Breakout rooms were used for the students to initiate discussions and group presentations, and each session lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. Except for audiovisuals and breakout rooms, some English language lecturers were seen using digital pens or typing functions and uploading documents in the chat boxes. When displaying the lesson contents on the screens, the English language lecturers also noted a few additional points for the students to remember. During the classroom observations, the English language lecturers provided facilitation that resembled prompts rather than traditional feedback. For example, during the classroom observation, BELL J mentioned *"You may consider societal and economic factors to strengthen your points."*

Findings from Document Analysis

This section served to inform the findings from the document analysis conducted. To restate, textual analysis and Cardno's (2018) guidelines for document analysis were followed. Initially, the document analysis revealed that prescribed textbooks were the most frequently listed teaching resources in the teaching plans; additionally, supplementary references were included at the end of these plans. One of the additional references found was related to TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), such as *"The Official Guide to the TOEFL iBT Test," "Introducing Linguistics: Theoretical and Applied Approaches,"* and *"Business Vocabulary in Use."* It is important to note that the researcher found the names of the audiovisual materials intended for classroom use were included in the teaching plans, along with the prescribed textbooks and additional resources.

During the analysis of the teaching plans, the researcher found that there was an incorporation of different teaching skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. There were also details of teaching grammar and vocabulary in the teaching plans. However, it should be noted that the teaching of each skill and grammar and vocabulary component

were tailored to specific English learning courses, either for the College of English Studies or Business English. An example showing the differences in terms of reading was listed in the following:

- In one of the teaching plans in the College of English Studies, the teaching objective was written as *“To analyse the literary devices used in ‘Mark Twain’s Roughing It.’”*
- In one of the teaching plans in the College of English Studies, the teaching objective was *“To analyse the presentation strategies of written reports in SMEs.”*

Mid-semester quizzes were designed to evaluate students' understanding of the knowledge acquired. The specific questions of the quizzes were not revealed as they were confidential for adaptation purposes in other semesters, but the quizzes contained multiple-choice tasks, short-paragraph tasks, and essay-related tasks; as these quizzes were conducted amidst distance learning modes, they were designed to be in the form of open-textbook quizzes, wherein the students could utilize the Internet and their notes to attempt the quizzes². The duration of the quizzes ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes.

In the analyzed teaching plans, clear steps outlined how the day's lecture would be conducted. The reasoning behind the teaching steps was clearly articulated for the following reasons: (1) the skill to be learned was mentioned, such as “read,” “share,” “write”; (2) the allocated time was mentioned, such as “four minutes”; (3) the specific material was mentioned, such as “Passage B,” “Part A,” and “Passage A”; (4) the instructions to conduct certain activities, such as “play the video at least twice” and “divide the students into breakout rooms.” Notably, none of the teaching plans analyzed included any teaching or educational policies. Consequently, it was unclear whether the components and content of these policies were adhered to.

At the same time, there were no explicit mentions of assessment methods throughout the teaching plans. However, report writing assignments based on specific contexts were included in the assignment guidelines, which were provided in a separate document distributed to the students. Rubrics were also provided in the assignment guidelines for the report writing. This included a breakdown of marks for specific criteria and keywords and phrases that determined which mark category the students' written reports would fall into. At the same time, checkboxes were available for the English language lecturers to allocate specific marks after assessing the written assignments.

Regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the English language lecturers accepted the use of artificial intelligence, but they also provided warnings for students intending to use AI to search for answers:

Artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek are permitted, but students must exercise caution and adhere to ethical standards. Assignments found to be AI-generated will receive a zero, and disciplinary action may be taken.

In summary, the key elements present in the teaching plans analyzed included a clear breakdown of steps and the reference materials to be used. There were also assignment

² The quizzes were conducted in both online sessions and offline sessions. In the online sessions, the students were required to be present, turn on their cameras, and attempt the quizzes within the duration of the lecture; in the offline sessions the students were given a specific duration which usually lasted within a day for quiz completion and submit to the lecturers.

guidelines informing the rubrics. However, no existing educational policies were mentioned in the teaching plans analysed.

Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews

Theme 1 - English Language Lecturers Perceived Facing Several Challenges in Distance Learning

One of the sub-themes the researcher obtained was students' discipline when conducting English lessons through distance learning. While the university's policy made clear that students had to turn on their cameras during classroom learning, during the interview sessions, the lecturers claimed that not all the students turned on the camera throughout.

"Some of them are not turning on the camera(s). They should know about it already," (SELL B)

The issue of students not turning on their cameras led lecturers to believe that the students were not actually present in the classroom. This gave the impression that students were pretending to be engaged in the virtual environment while, in reality, they were not participating at all.

"When I call(ed) them, they were unresponsive. As they didn't turn on the cameras, how would I know if they were there or whether they understood the lesson?" (BELL G)

Other than the issue of not turning on the cameras, another sub-theme found amongst the English language lecturers' responses was that some students had issues submitting their assignments on time. The following quotes exemplified the sub-theme.

"I can't remember the last time when everyone submitted the assignments before the deadline. I'm already used to it. There are always reasons from the students." (SELL A)

The responses from the lecturers indicated that not submitting assignments according to the deadlines was a long process that persisted throughout the semester. These lecturers were well aware of the issue and were already used to it, citing that there were always excuses among the students.

Another sub-theme found amongst the lecturers' responses was that the lecturers were aware that their language proficiency was not good enough.

"I sometimes get stuck, but I try my best. It doesn't sound like how foreign people typically speak." (SELL E)

Despite the years of teaching experiences mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, these lecturers believed that they were not good enough at conversing and teaching in English. They believed communicating with the students in English remained a challenge for them.

Theme 2 - English Language Lecturers Considered Themselves as Having Positive Personalities

The second theme from the interview sessions with English language lecturers was their self-perception as positive individuals. As illustrated in the following, the first sub-theme identified was that many expressed they were friendly towards their students.

"I think I'm a friendly person (laughs). Well, some students seem to enjoy talking (to me). Maybe." (SELL A)

"Friendly, I think? At least I believe I am... Approachable." (SELL D)

From the language lecturers' responses, it could be seen that other behaviours involved being approachable, nice, and positive, as seen in the responses by SELL A and SELL D. These personalities were intertwined and related with the personality of being friendly by the English language lecturers.

Other than being friendly, some language lecturers interviewed also mentioned being quite strict regarding teaching.

"Strict... Yeah, they are adults, but you still have to be strict when necessary. If not, there will be less respect." (BELL H)

When it came to being strict, the three exemplified quotes explained why these lecturers considered themselves strict. The reasons involved discipline remained necessary regardless of age (BELL H), staying focused in classes (BELL I), and meeting learning expectations in English (SELL D).

Alongside being friendly and strict, some lecturers viewed themselves as having the desire to make students achieve better development of English language proficiency. When asked how they would deliver the lessons, they tended to consider themselves as wanting the students to perform better. Accordingly, the following exemplified the quotes drawn from the transcriptions as evidence.

"I need them to be better. English is difficult, but it is needed for work. So I need to keep push(ing) them. Otherwise, how can they use English?" (SELL D)

From the responses quoted above, it could be seen that these English language lecturers saw themselves as figures wanting to push the students to perform better in using the English language. Each provided their justifications, such as the necessity for work (SELL D, SELL E, and BELL G) and the need to travel abroad (BELL F). The feedback from the responses indicated that the lecturers were both motivating and assertive. At the same time, their tone had an aspect of strictness when they posed rhetorical questions.

Theme 3 - English Language Lecturers Considered Themselves as Technologically and Pedagogically Knowledgeable

In this section, the English language lecturers were mainly asked how well their knowledge was by drawing the principles of TPACK. The questions derived from TPACK were asked among the eight English language lecturers, and the first sub-theme obtained was that the lecturers

believed they were equipped with the necessary technological skills. The following listed are the quotes from the English language lecturers' responses after transcribing the interviews.

"Technology? Erm... I think I'm good enough to use it. It's just about cameras, showing (the) contents, and use it to do presentation(s). These would be enough," (BELL F)

The responses showed that the English language lecturers were confident about navigating around the technology to conduct distance learning with the students. The use of technology included lecturers using them to deliver lessons (BELL F, BELL H, SELL B, and SELL D), utilize other digital resources (BELL H, SELL B), and receive assignments (SELL D).

Other than considering themselves as being equipped with technological skills, the English language lecturers interviewed also perceived themselves as able to demonstrate their pedagogical skills to deliver English lessons, which this became the second sub-theme. The following listed are the quotes from the English language lecturers:

"(I'm) not as good as the Americans, but I think I can still speak well. I often look at those words that I think is (are) difficult and then ask students to make sentences. This would make vocabulary meanings easier to remember. I sometimes also ask them to read the passages," (SELL A)

At the same time, the English language lecturers also mentioned that they accepted artificial intelligence as part of the teaching and learning processes.

"We have to accept it. It greatly helps in doing homework. However, they cannot be copy pasting the answers. If not, there will be no real learning," (SELL E)

"(They) can use, but there must be restrictions. Copy pasting is one (thing), and they cannot just accept the answers. There will still be mistakes regardless of how perfect it is," (BELL F)

Based on the responses, it could be seen that the lecturers accept the use of AI among students. They believed it was a new way of learning, but there were restrictions to using AI as English lecturers believed plagiarism would occur.

Theme 4 - English Language Lecturers Were Aware of Expectations

Finally, the last theme obtained was that they were aware of certain expectations regarding English language lessons in distance learning. One of the first sub-themes was that the English language lecturers knew they were working in one of the top universities.

"A lot of students are here because of our reputation. I'm sure you know if you don't do well, it will affect us," (BELL I)

When the English language lecturers were asked to elaborate more about the expectations they would know about outside of the university, they seemed to be aware of others' impressions of them, as exemplified in the following.

"Of course...who doesn't have expectations? Students are vocal, and whatever you do goes to social media," (SELL B)

The responses showed that the English language lecturers were well aware of their position in the university they were working in, especially when the university was one of the top-ranked universities in China. Concurrently, these English language lecturers were also aware of the students' expectations, leading them to strive to achieve learning goals and meet their needs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Exploring the Classroom Behaviours and Pedagogical Knowledge Through TPACK Technological Knowledge, Technological Pedagogical Knowledge, and Technological Content Knowledge

The findings show that English language lecturers possess basic technology skills. According to the semi-structured interviews, they responded that they were able to use the cameras, microphone, sharing functions using the contents from the WPS Office, audios, and visuals, breakout room functions, document upload functions, and the student portals. These tools were effectively used to implement student-centred methods, such as initiating discussions and preparing presentations via breakout rooms. These practices indirectly foster autonomy, independence, and teamwork among students. (Ali et al., 2020; Allen & Mizumoto, 2024; Jeong, 2023; Wan et al., 2020).

The technology usage among English language lecturers met the requirements for distance learning. The use of additional resources by English language lecturers, including sharing these materials through student portals and chat boxes during lectures, has made learning more accessible for students. This accessibility is a fundamental requirement for effective distance learning (Davis et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2021; Sarwari et al., 2022; Wotto, 2020; Zhou, 2022).

At the time of data collection, none of the English language lecturers incorporated AI into their lectures. Nevertheless, the English language lecturers stated that AI was permitted, but students must be responsible and exercise caution when referring to the responses of AI. The language lecturers also made clear that plagiarism in assignments was strictly prohibited, and they assured that if there were detections of AI-written content and plagiarism, it would be reported. These findings indicate that the use of AI is allowed, though with certain limitations, as educators recognize that AI plays an essential role in the learning process (Jarvis et al., 2024; Lee & Cho, 2025; Hockly, 2023). Classroom observations showed that English language lecturers intended to keep lectures authentic rather than using AI to achieve explanations, aligning with previous scholars who favor authentic learning experiences (Jarvis et al., 2024; Lee & Cho, 2025; Hockly, 2023).

Pedagogical Knowledge, Content Knowledge, and Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Lecturers displayed their pedagogical knowledge but only to a certain extent. Classroom observations indicated that the English language lecturers used teacher-centred and student-centred teaching methods, where the students passively listened to their respective lecturers. At the same time, there were discussions and presentations in the virtual classrooms. The English language lecturers assigned students to present their discussion findings. This approach aimed to engage students in the lessons, encouraging interaction rather than having them passively sit through lectures without any activities.

However, while the teaching plans did not mention anything about the lecturers needing to enter the breakout rooms during the discussion sessions, the researcher noticed that the lecturers entered the breakout rooms provided their feedback and facilitated the discussion processes, where the lecturers used phrases like “*You may consider adding on...*” and “*Think about why else...*” illustrating the forms of teacher-centred lecturing (prolonged explanation of contents) and student-centred learning (feedback, facilitations, discussions, presentations, and questionings), as previously discussed in the literature by Han (2021), Cheraghi and Rahimi (2024), Liu and Hong (2021), and Jackel et al. (2021).

In terms of content knowledge, the English language lecturers were also found to be able to demonstrate content knowledge to the students. For example, SELL A explicitly corrected the students' mistakes with verb usage by translating the term into Mandarin Chinese (e.g., 动词) and explaining that verbs indicate actions. Similarly, BELL F and BELL J translated sentences from the content to help the students understand more easily.

The researcher would critically note that frequent translation in lectures would result in students relying on Chinese Mandarin to understand texts, passages, and audiovisuals. At the same time, there was no proper English language learning, as the students might not apply their language knowledge meaningfully due to the reliance on Chinese Mandarin, as asserted by previous scholars of the flaws of the translation method (Imami et al., 2021; Zainudin & Awal, 2012).

Exploring Classroom Behaviours through the TPB*Displayed Attitudes*

Three main behaviours were identified based on the English language lecturers' responses, which were *friendly, strict, and pushy*. These behaviours were also reflected in how they taught the students during the online English lectures. The literature on teaching personalities highlights friendly and strict traits, as discussed by previous scholars (e.g., Bahari, 2022; Teng et al., 2023; Toubasi et al., 2023; Zhang & Wu, 2022). Additionally, the researcher observed that most students interacted with the lecturers in a friendly manner, although some were strict during lectures. This further proved that positive personalities existed in the lecturer-student interaction, as claimed by the literature.

Societal Expectations and Norms

The semi-structured interview indicated an expectation that could be interpreted in two ways. As one of the top universities in China, English language lecturers were well aware of how others viewed them in terms of reputation and credibility, as discussed previously. The English language lecturers understood the significance of teaching English during lectures,

including in distance learning. They recognized that proficiency in English is crucial for their students, particularly for job opportunities, travel, and further education, as well as for addressing national needs and global challenges. This understanding aligns with previous literature regarding Chinese perspectives on learning English (e.g., De Silva & Devendra, 2023; Han, 2021; Hockly, 2023; Jeong, 2023; Pan et al., 2021).

Unlike the participants in Fagell's (2020) research, the English language lecturers in the present study appeared more resilient despite the numerous societal expectations different parties had on them. They acknowledged that they were employed in a top university, and having to show the necessary performance to make ends meet was part of the process.

In addition to the expectations imposed by society, these English language lecturers also had expectations for their students. They asserted that the students had to do well, and they expressed clear intentions in online lectures by providing the necessary feedback and corrections. This was also informed in the assignment guidelines where the English language lecturers were strict in having the students produce the necessary quality reports, further freeing from any forms of plagiarism and AI-written content, which showed that the English language lecturers were strict in upholding professionalism in students' work (Jarvis et al., 2024; Lee & Cho, 2025; Hockly, 2023). Despite not using AI during the online lessons observed, these English language lecturers embraced the emergence of AI and accepted that for modern learning to progress, proper utilization of AI was necessary.

Furthermore, while this was not considered as a part of the expectations reciprocated by the lecturers to the students, the English language lecturers also embraced that social media was the new form of acquiring English other than being a platform to be vocal among youths in the present. These findings were in coherence with the literature that the Chinese acknowledged social media as the new form of learning (Jeong, 2023; Wan et al., 2020).

Perceived Behavioural Control

In the context of TPB, perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's extent of the behaviour control capabilities he or she has in any given setting (Ghahremani et al., 2022; Gray & Evans, 2024; Nyashu & Dominic, 2019; Roland et al., 2018). Based on classroom observations, the English language lecturers exhibited professionalism despite facing challenges with student discipline, particularly concerning assignment submissions and overall class performance. The lecturers remained calm and engaged throughout these difficulties, maintaining their commitment to their roles.

Although the researcher noticed that there were occasional instances when the entire class went silent during a question asked by the lecturers, the lecturers appeared to remain composed and they would randomly appoint a student to answer the questions. These lecturers successfully maintained control over their behavior during class and were able to conduct the lectures until the end of each session.

Practical Recommendations

Findings from the present study showed that the TPACK and the TPB were suitable for providing further insights into distance learning and English language learning. Regarding TPACK, all forms of knowledge were found among the English language lecturers in all three

research instruments. TPACK was considered suitable for identifying the specific knowledge that English language lecturers exhibited during lectures. The characteristics of each type of knowledge described in TPACK could serve as a standard for evaluating the demonstrated knowledge, and findings confirmed the intertwined nature of TPACK (Durham, 2024; Gozukucuk & Gunbas, 2022; Mei et al., 2018; Voithofer & Nelson, 2021). The researcher offers the brief guidelines as shown below:

- **Technological Knowledge** – As the English language lecturers already have the basics of using the online learning platform to conduct distance learning and English lectures, they can incorporate artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek, or e-reader. This enhances Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (the use of AI to generate relevant images, provide relevant topical exercises, and read passages aloud) and Technological Content Knowledge (utilize AI to provide more specific examples of English usage).
- **Pedagogical Knowledge** – Attend more training courses to identify how else student-centred learning pedagogical methods should occur. For example, providing assignments involving designing digital portfolios, making podcasts, engaging in role-playing, and making short clips based on certain topics. This enables lecturers to demonstrate their Pedagogical Content Knowledge, showcasing their English language proficiency expertise and ability to guide students effectively.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher acknowledges that the research had limitations that require addressing. Learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in tertiary education varies based on the specific type of ESP students are enrolled in, as Tan (2023) noted. For future research, involving more ESP courses from China, such as those from other universities and making comparisons with the manner of learning English. Secondly, there is a lack of quantitative inquiries that can be further used to support the present data and findings. Although VanTassel-Baska et al.'s (2005) observation scale has provided quantifiable data for this study, incorporating a mixed-method research design that includes quantitative inquiries, such as surveys, will strengthen the findings. Lastly, the research can be extended by including two semesters of English courses for similar analysis in the future. Having another set of similar data from another semester and involving the same group of English language lecturers can strengthen the findings of the same research topic. Expanding the comparative analysis across semesters and instruments can enhance the findings by providing richer insights.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aims to examine how English language distance learning is conducted in Chinese higher education institutions, with a focus on the classroom behaviors of English language lecturers and the pedagogical knowledge they demonstrate during their lectures.

This research aims to explore how English language distance learning is conducted in various institutions, focusing specifically on the classroom behaviors of English language lecturers and the pedagogical knowledge they demonstrate during their lectures. Two main research objectives have been defined, along with corresponding sub-objectives. The study utilizes a single-site case study design, incorporating three qualitative research instruments and relevant data analysis methods. Overall, the research objectives were successfully met, as there was coherence among the observed lectures, analyzed documents, and interviewed

lecturers. These findings underscore the effectiveness of English language learning in distance education environments and highlight the lecturers' ability to adapt their pedagogical approaches.

The study recommends several strategies to enhance distance language education. First, lecturers should expand their technological knowledge by incorporating AI tools to make lessons more interactive and personalized. Second, improving pedagogical knowledge through training in student-centred approaches to enrich teaching practices and increase student engagement. These insights not only provide a solid basis for further research but also present practical implications for improving the quality of virtual English language instruction in higher education.

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