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Promoting Positive Emotions during the Emergency Remote Teaching of English for Academic Purposes: The Unexpected Role of the Constructionist Approach

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Abstract: Despite the significant research on the effectiveness and challenges of emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the global COVID-19 pandemic, few studies have focused on the systematic facilitation of positive emotions by classroom teachers. This study aimed to identify the strategies that teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) used during the ERT period, by interviewing 18 university English teachers in Hong Kong. Our results suggest that one traditional learning theory, the constructionist approach, played an unexpectedly important role in facilitating positive student emotions, as well as encouraging learning. Cognitively demanding tasks helped divert students' attention away from the negative emotions they faced and towards their learning. Interactions also played an essential role in helping students learn and in reducing negative emotions. These results shed light on the significance of positive emotions in an online or ERT environment, with significant implications for university teachers who want their teaching to systematically promote positive emotions.

Keywords: English for Academic Purposes; positive; emotions; emergency remote teaching; constructionist

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1. Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of researchers have explored the importance of positive psychology in second language (L2) acquisition and teaching [1,2]. However, the adoption of emergency remote teaching (ERT) [3] by universities worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic affected learners' well-being. Recent studies have found that university students suffered from moderate or severe stress [4] and depression [5]. Language learners also faced heavy workloads [6], and many lacked the digital competence [7], time-management skills [8] and resources (e.g., adequate bandwidth, laptop, quiet place to study) that full participation in online learning requires [9]. Research has also shown that fear of COVID-19, Internet issues, imperfect study environments and online anxiety [10] directly affected students' learning experiences and academic achievement [11]. Finally, students miss opportunities for positive interaction in the classroom [12], making these opportunities a crucial component of online learning [13].

Studies have established that promoting positive emotions among online learners is crucial in minimising negative feelings, such as loneliness, isolation and anxiety [14,15]. Notably, however, little research to date has explored the strategies instructors adopt to promote positive emotions and influence L2 learners' behaviour and motivation in an ERT context. More importantly, few studies have theorised about the strategies that teachers can systematically employ in ERT to promote positive emotions. Therefore, to address this gap, this paper reports the findings of a qualitative study that explored how instructors of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in Hong Kong encouraged positive

emotions, while delivering online classes, and countered some effects of negative emotions among learners.

2. Literature Review

During the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions worldwide transitioned from in-person, face-to-face instruction to a new educational format and pedagogy. ERT functions as 'a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternative delivery mode due to crisis circumstances' [3]. Studies of the benefits and challenges of planned online learning have been available for decades [16], and the research has revealed that effective online learning requires careful instructional design and several months' planning [17]. When the design of the learning platform—the space where the learning occurs (e.g., Blackboard, Google Classroom, Moodle, Microsoft Teams, Zoom)—as well as activities and materials serve a purpose, learners will more likely accept the new mode of learning and perceive it positively [18,19].

Most EAP programmes in Hong Kong incorporate blended learning tools (e.g., wikis, forums, blogs) purposefully and focus on quality course design, teaching and learning. This is in stark contrast to ERT's haphazard development of online courses that often do not incorporate various modes of learning [3] because the only intention is to maintain the academic calendar. Implementing ERT effectively requires flexibility and creativity, especially in a time of significant uncertainty (e.g., [6]). This creates stress for both learners and instructors and negatively impacts their emotional well-being. As past studies have focused on online learning in general, understanding the role of emotions during unprecedented events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is crucial.

Emotions do not simply exist as a dichotomy of positive and negative. Rather, they are multifaceted phenomena, challenging to grasp but essential to facilitating effective teaching and learning [20]. The control-value framework that [21] proposed identifies several discrete emotions related to academic settings and classifies them as directly related to achievement activities (e.g., enjoyment, boredom) or outcomes (e.g., hope, pride, anxiety, shame). Furthermore, categorising emotions represents their valence (positive or negative) and level of arousal (psychologically activating or deactivating) [22]. For example, positive activating emotions include enjoyment, hope and pride; students who experience these emotions have committed to learning and achievement [21]. Negative deactivating emotions include boredom and hopelessness [22]; those who experience these emotions often have no intention of making an effort. Students who experience positive deactivating emotions are generally favourably disposed to learning activities but unwilling to invest the necessary time and effort, and they prioritise other things. Finally, students experiencing negative activating emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety and shame) tend to spend time and effort on activities but appraise them negatively. The notion of positive/negative emotion aligns with L2/L2 online education literature indicating that teaching and learning activities should promote enjoyment [23] and avoid boredom [24]. Thus, despite not mentioning the notion of positive/negative emotion, they promote effective teaching and learning.

In addition, emotions—especially emotional states—can be contagious, affecting other students individually and supporting the construction of 'collective emotions' [25]. For example, when students work together in the learning process, one student may become happy after discussing something with a positive teammate. Thus, emotional contagion is 'a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behaviour of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioural attitudes' [26] (p. 50). Researchers discovered that emotional contagion also occurs in computer-mediated communication, in which students post to an online forum [27]. In the context of L2 learning, the collective positive emotion in online forums is important to the success of L2 teaching [28].

Previous research has established the critical role of learners' emotions in online learning environments [29]. Specifically, such studies identify frustration, confusion, anxiety, isolation, enjoyment, confidence and fear as the predominant feelings that online learners

experience [30]. Naturally, the pandemic and the forced transition to ERT may have exacerbated these negative emotions and created additional challenges (e.g., technical problems, illness, lockdown) that hampered students' learning trajectories [10,31,32].

In conjunction with these difficulties, instructors' limited experience, skills and knowledge in transferring material (e.g., course notes) online [6] and lack of digital pedagogical strategies that would support uninterrupted and continuous learning through ERT [33], including those from the L2 context [34,35], have limited their success. Despite research on the nature of emotions and their effect on students during ERT and online learning, no studies provide a systematic and holistic understanding of how the online classroom can promote positive emotions. Even fewer studies specifically focus on positive emotion in the L2 context.

Moreover, as negative emotions hinder progress [36], teachers must focus on promoting positive emotions to facilitate teaching and improve performance. In a traditional, synchronous, face-to-face classroom, nonverbal cues, such as gestures, changes in tone, physiological changes (e.g., sweating, blushing) and facial expressions (e.g., smiling, frowning, scowling), can communicate emotions [37]. These verbal cues have long stood as important indicators in L2 physical classrooms [38]. However, in asynchronous teaching, using nonverbal emotional cues to communicate one's social presence can be difficult [39].

Successful online learning requires engagement in a range of interactions (e.g., student–content, student–student, student–teacher) [40] and teaching tasks (e.g., virtual field trips, collaborative worksheets, online presentations) [31]. Along this vein, researchers have investigated the built-in functions of video-conferencing software that aim to promote interaction (e.g., chatrooms, breakout rooms, polls, emojis) [40]. Researchers have also suggested that in online education, 'high levels of interaction typically need to be present for learners to have a positive attitude and greater satisfaction' [41] (p. 328). Therefore, constructivist learning theory is relevant to online learning, requiring students to interact to complete assignments, final products and assessments.

Although interaction is a key component of successful online learning, the literature shows that instructors face challenges motivating learners to interact with each other and engage with the content [8,42]. Therefore, understanding the types of interaction and online tools instructors adopted to promote positive emotions among L2 learners during the period of ERT is crucial. Exploring the roles that interactions and positive emotions play in ERT in general is even more important.

Instructors play an essential role in facilitating a positive online learning experience, using such strategies as encouraging autonomy [43]. For example, to reduce unnecessary stress among learners, instructors can provide them with choices (e.g., flexibility in topics, assessments, learning materials), avoid using controlling language [44] and offer personalised learning [45]. Scholars have demonstrated that enabling learners to make their own decisions fosters their engagement and adds to their feeling of empowerment [46]. Similar research in L2 shows promising results from providing flexibility and reducing stress [47]. Additionally, learners who receive significant autonomy have better overall time-management and concentration skills [48] and enjoy their lessons more [49]. They are also more willing to speak up and communicate with their instructors when they face obstacles [50,51] and display more positive emotions during interactions [52]. Consequently, instructors should adopt a 'caring pedagogy', show warmth and affection and foster genuine student–student, student–teacher and student–content relationships [53].

In addition to means of facilitating positive emotions, this study also considered how studies have theorised online learning. Generally, scholars suggest that a suitable learning structure allows online learners to feel engaged, competent, effective and challenged [54]. Such a structure includes well-designed learning-management platforms [16], small group discussions and discussion forums [45,55], collaborative learning environments comprising group work and peer review [56], detailed feedback on tasks and encouragement throughout lessons [57] and adapted learning materials that correlate with learning outcomes [58]. L2 research also provides a similar perspective on effective L2 online learning, as the review

on L2 online teaching by [59] shows. Many of these activities relate to the constructivist view of learning as a generative activity [60].

When learners engage in hands-on online activities, they encounter information. To process it, learners relate the information (i.e., the task on which they are working) to what they have learnt in the past. These processing procedures can be completely internal (i.e., within the learner), that is, the cognitive constructivist approach. However, they can also be social, with students processing and making sense of the information with the help of their peers, i.e., social constructivism [61].

The literature provides a general consensus on how teachers can use constructivist approaches and activities to facilitate learning. Recent online learning research has also highlighted cognitive load theory, which concerns how learning activities can overwhelm learners mentally. Receiving too much information (e.g., via 'inappropriate instructional procedures') [62] (pp. 27–28), they may not learn well. While cognitive load theory applies to instructional design and online learning in general, its connection to positive emotions remains incompletely explored.

Given the importance of L2 learners' emotions to their academic success and the limited research on how they manifest in ERT, understanding how instructors promote positive emotions and develop a systematic approach to doing so is crucial. Such knowledge is critical to promoting a positive learning environment, defusing any negative feelings and easing the transition from traditional learning to ERT. Specifically, this study explores the following broad research question: What strategies did EAP instructors employ to promote positive emotions among L2 learners participating in ERT?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participant and Procedure

This study employed a qualitative research approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue and gather in-depth insights relevant to the research question. The authors invited 14 English language instructors at a language centre in one of Hong Kong's largest publicly funded universities to participate. All participants (8 females and 6 males) held a master's degree in language teaching. Their ages ranged from 32 to 50, with teaching experience varying from 8 to 25 years. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they had been teaching online via Zoom for three years to minimise face-to-face contact. Prior to their involvement in the study, participants received an information sheet outlining the study's purpose, research procedures, their rights as participants and any potential risks or benefits their participation could entail. We asked them to sign an informed consent form, indicating their voluntary agreement to participate in the research.

Semistructured interviews occurred via Zoom to (i) minimise face-to-face contact because of the COVID-19 pandemic and (ii) allow participants to describe their experiences and perceptions in detail. The authors developed an interview guide and shared it with three researchers with extensive qualitative research experience to establish the study's face validity and content validity. After incorporating their suggestions and feedback, the authors finalised the interview guide. The interview questions were:

- How do you adapt your teaching style to create a warm, caring and supportive online environment for your students?
- In what ways do you connect with your students and understand their feelings or struggles during your online classes?
- Can you share some examples of how you've incorporated fun and exciting elements into your online classes to motivate students?
- How do you balance the need to challenge students academically while minimising stress and negative emotions related to the course work?
- What strategies do you use to promote collaboration and interaction among your students during online learning tasks?
- How do you incorporate verbal and nonverbal cues in your online teaching to create a more engaging and positive learning environment?

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Each interview lasted 22 to 35 min, took place in English and was audio-recorded. We analysed the data using a thematic analysis framework based on [63] to yield a comprehensive, detailed and rich understanding. After transcribing the interviews, we shared the transcripts with participants in the first member check [64]. Both authors independently read and re-read the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Next, they coded the transcripts, generated initial codes and shared them in a Google Doc. The authors discussed and refined the codes before reaching a consensus on the themes and subthemes. To ensure the dependability of the qualitative results, we followed the code–recode strategy that [65] suggested. After the initial coding, a two-week gestation period preceded coding the data again to observe any differences. No significant changes arose, indicating the dependability of the findings. For the second member check, participants received a summary of the study's findings, including the identified themes and representative quotations [64]. None of the language instructors suggested or requested any amendments during either of the two member checks.

4. Findings

The findings presented below encapsulate the teachers' experiences in promoting a positive learning environment. Four themes emerged during the iterative analytic process, resulting in the final thematic map that appears in Figure 1.

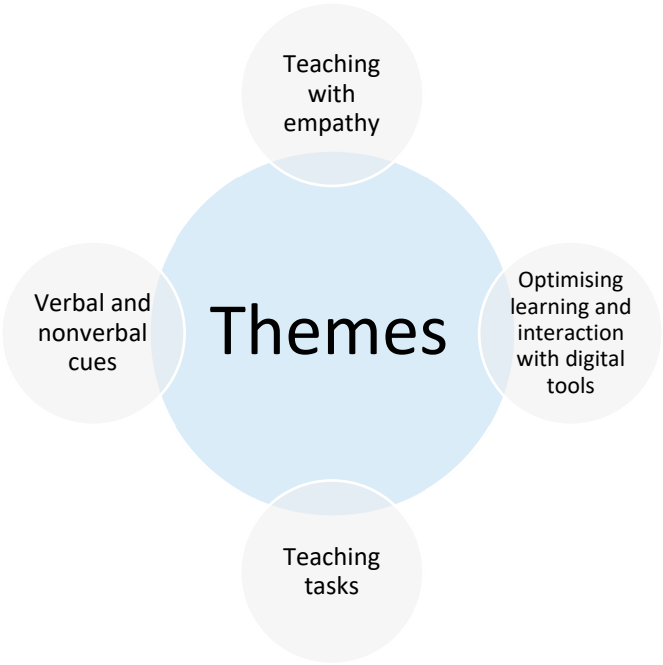


Figure 1. Themes.

4.1. Teaching with Empathy

The majority of the participants indicated that they focused on teaching with empathy. They discussed the responsibility they felt for creating a warm, caring and supportive online environment to combat negative emotions students may have been experiencing, such as boredom, fear and anxiety. S5 shared:

> *It's not easy right now, and students have to stay at home in a crowded apartment with slow Internet and focus on attending one online class after another. And they also need to worry about not being infected with COVID-19 and possible lockdown.*

Similarly, S8 added, '*It is tough for students to stay positive amidst closure of dine-in restaurants, parks, gyms and forced to study online*'. All participants mentioned various

difficulties students faced. S9 said, '*My students feel vulnerable and confused by the disruption to their schooling and daily activities*'.

Participants saw connecting with their students as a key strategy for combatting this. For example, S10 shared that it was important '*to understand how they feel and let them know that they're not alone*'. S14 elaborated, '*It is about thinking about a way to make them understand we are doing this together . . . and work through difficult moments together'*. To understand their students' feelings, participants tapped into their own experiences and shared them. However, several participants mentioned the importance of '*not overdoing it'* (S1) as it is possible '*to come across as disingenuous*' (S5). S2 suggested speaking with students and avoiding such phrases as '*What you need to do is . . .*', suggesting instead using '*I hear that you . . .*'. By staying positive, sharing their own experiences and listening to their students, teachers could develop a shared sense of hope.

Several participants also noted the importance of providing multiple modes of participation because not all students are comfortable sharing aloud. S7 started each lesson with '*thought-provoking questions—for example, tell us what's most difficult for you this week using Mentimeter and the word cloud function*'. S3 had a similar idea, using Padlet to create a word wall where students could share what they felt or struggled with anonymously, comment on each other's posts and offer support.

Another tool participants employed was Google Jamboard: 'We can display pictures of facial expressions and emotion words, asking students to match a picture with a word to express their feelings' (S12). Then, if students indicated that they were frustrated, lonely or angry, teachers would step away from their lesson plans, talk to them and try to understand or offer help. They saw starting each lesson on a positive note as important, to ensure students did not negatively affect each other. For example, S4 said, '*If one is angry, then he might transfer this anger to a group mate*'.

The teachers saw gaining students' trust as a long-term process. Students were frequently reluctant to share their feelings in the first few classes, and teachers often had to share first. This entailed engaging in self-reflection. For example, S14 would ask herself, '*What more do I need to learn and understand their experience to help them, even though I'm experiencing my own negative emotions?*' S6 elaborated, '*If I want to establish a genuine relationship with my students, I need to let some of my personality show, let them know what I have or am going through*'.

As these comments suggest, teachers felt that it was important to show empathy and offer students understanding and support by reflecting on their own experiences. Generally, participants reported that this process invited students to feel relaxed and relieved, creating positive conditions for learning.

4.2. Optimising Learning and Interaction with Digital Tools

Another theme that emerged from the analysis was how teachers made rational decisions about learning materials. For example, S2 commented, '*I try to think how I can adapt the course materials so they can collaborate, work in pairs or groups to share their experiences*'. Similarly, S14 noted, '*We need to work together; they can't just listen. It will only make their experience more isolated*'. Several participants mentioned the importance of making learning fun and exciting so students would look forward to it each day. Striving towards this goal, the teachers discussed transferring the primary course content to an e-book format and incorporating augmented reality, differentiated worksheets and teacher- and student-produced videos. Twelve participants used self-developed e-books as their primary teaching materials. In particular, S9 articulated the process:

> *Okay, like my colleagues, I used Book Creator to create short and impactful e-books. I inserted a positive quote on the first page and ensured how I worded the content was very positive and humorous. I think this really made a difference as students seemed more motivated than the usual 'complete Activity 1A'.*

Participants highlighted incorporating Nearpod activities and Edpuzzle videos into their e-books to provide students with a variety of learning activities. S2 commented

that these features allowed her to visualise and support students' understanding. S16 mentioned that students '*could work through the activities themselves later through self-paced learning*'. In the interviews, most participants discussed making learning more multimodal (e.g., videos, images) and interactive (e.g., polls, collaborative boards, quizzes), mitigating the feeling of boredom and rigidity often associated with online learning. S8 commented:

> *like that even though we're not face-to-face, I can include many images and videos and create many opportunities for my students to interact and collaborate, similar to our regular classroom.*

Participants frequently mentioned using the software ThingLink to create immersive visual experiences. S8 described how the software made it '*possible to create an interactive classroom*' using images and clickable tags (e.g., polls, writing boards, URLs). S1 shared their use of photos taken around the city before the pandemic and integrating them into activities using tags, giving students a sense that '*they were out and about and working on assignments*'. Overall, this suggests an awareness of the possibility that using technology can mitigate negative emotions and help students overcome their difficulties with motivation and sustained learning.

4.3. Teaching Tasks

The third theme described how teachers tried to ensure students did not suffer from stress while completing their coursework. The teachers were aware that some students had poor Internet connection, no laptop or no quiet place to study. All participants mentioned the need to avoid giving excessive homework, ensuring the completion of most work during class. S8 explained, '*This was to avoid the anxiety that they [students] could not access and complete tasks after class*'. Another participant, S14, elaborated:

> *I try to avoid individual activities and divide students into groups so they can work together. This is more fun; they can help each other. And if one can't access or doesn't know how to complete something, hopefully the other students can help.*

Teaching tasks were also developed to support the construction of collective emotions as students shared in the learning process. S2 noted, '*By making activities fun and having them complete them together, they can influence each other*'. Others discussed trying to incorporate collaborative worksheets for after-class tasks. Four participants brought up the software Wizer that allowed them to create differentiated tasks. S1 said, '*Wizer makes it possible for me to differentiate learning, and my students can work on the areas they need to improve*'. Throughout the interviews, participants stressed the importance of helping their students feel competent and effective to minimise negative feelings while still challenging them by using adapted learning materials aligned with the learning objectives and course outcomes. Participants took care to design lessons that encouraged collaborative student engagement.

The interviews clarified that when students interacted in completing learning tasks, they appeared to enjoy the learning process more. Many participants mentioned that they asked students to use videos instead of requiring written responses on blogs or forums. S10 explained that she asked students to upload short videos, recorded on their phones using Flipgrid, so they could watch and listen to each other's answers. S3 elaborated, '*This minimises loneliness and isolation . . . Flipgrid increases interactions, and they know they are not just a name in Zoom*'. Participants noted using a range of software programs to scaffold learning and ensure students' active involvement in the learning process.

4.4. Verbal and Nonverbal Cues

The fourth theme emphasised how teachers adopted various strategies, including such nonverbal cues as gestures, changes in tone and facial expressions, to mirror face-to-face teaching. S8 stated that he used '*gestures such as thumbs up, raising my hands, even standing up to give some resemblance of teaching in the classroom*'. Likewise, S8, S9 and S14 shared that they made exaggerated facial expressions, stood up and swivelled their chairs. S11 noted the importance of giving a big smile or nod when asking or answering a question. Likewise,

several participants brought up the idea of physically giving students a 'thumbs up' when they answered a question correctly. Others mentioned that students started to physically raise their hands to answer questions or ask for clarifications when they, as the teacher, used nonverbal cues proactively. These cues showed students that the teacher cared and was listening.

Participants also mentioned how including physical gestures in online teaching increased interaction between students and between students and teachers. For example, S2 noted, '*Students seemed to be more active and took the opportunity to volunteer answers*'. Furthermore, he used gestures to indicate uncertainty or the need to pause. S5 explained the importance of '*not only talking into the screen*', emphasising '*we are not robots*'. Instead, the participants expressed the need to communicate, speak and facilitate all types of interaction, so students would trust each other and work together. Generally, the participants agreed that students were more positive as a result of their efforts to make online classes similar to face-to-face classes, in terms of body language. The use of nonverbal cues increased trust and rapport between students and teachers and created a positive learning environment.

5. Discussion

The original intention of this study was to understand how EAP teachers promoted positive emotion during ERT, but the results provide strong evidence that the constructivist learning approach is a potential candidate for systematically promoting positive emotions. We argue that constructivism facilitates not only learning but also (unexpectedly) positive emotions among L2 learners. This includes the cognitive constructivist [66] and social constructivist approaches [61].

In the cognitive constructivist approach, students learn by completing learning tasks. Through task completion, students connect what they are learning with their prior knowledge [67]. The teachers in this study achieved the same end by using a variety of tasks, software and applications, but they aimed to mitigate the boredom and rigidity of online learning. While these cognitively demanding tasks facilitated learning, as cognitive constructionist theory predicts, they also distracted students from the boredom and anxiety that social isolation or other COVID-related factors caused. This could appear to be 'cognitive overload' but, in this case, it promoted positive emotions, showing an unexpected emotional benefit of the constructivist approach.

However, the role of distraction comes as no surprise. While cognitive load theory is not new to studies of online learning [67], research has also suggested that even in an in-person class, constructivist learning activities can help students avoid distraction (e.g., 'sleep[ing] in class') [68] (p. 115). Our study confirms that basing learning tasks on constructivism diverted students' attention from negative emotions to these tasks and promoted positive emotions during ERT.

Similarly, social constructivism suggests making meaning through social interactions (i.e., students helping each other make sense of content). This theory identifies facilitating learning as interactions' primary purpose [69]. While promoting satisfaction [41] and positive emotions [46] in online learning, our study shows that constructivist learning theories see interactions as significant in the learning process.

In this case, one objective of the collaborative activities was for students to help each other, an expected benefit. More importantly, the teachers used these collaborative activities to show empathy, gain students' trust, minimise loneliness, build a sense of togetherness during difficult times and promote positive emotions. In other words, the interactions in these social constructionist activities became a tool for relieving anxiety from other sources. Once again, this shows that the teachers in our study adopting the constructionist approach not only facilitated learning but also brought unexpected emotional benefits.

Our study also shows the effective use of constructivist strategies to carefully navigate the potential challenges of ERT. One interesting point to note is that teachers did not just adopt a social constructionist approach, giving students many 'overloading' tasks and hoping they would lead to positive emotions. According to social constructionists, if

students do not have positive emotions, interactions only spread negative emotions [25,70]. Therefore, the teachers in the study were strategic and started with whole-class interactive activities to assess their students' emotions. If their emotions did not appear to be positive, the teachers discussed their feelings instead of allowing negative emotions to spread.

Another interesting strategy was teachers adopting interactions to mitigate technological issues, a known stressor in online learning that affects students' emotions [32,71]. Regardless of students' technological competence, they face various challenges in an online setting (e.g., accessing a file or opening a web page). As a social constructionist approach, teachers promoting interactions allow students to help each other. Learning includes not only the course learning outcomes but also technological competence. This minimises the frustration that technology in ERT causes and promotes positive emotions.

In addition to assigning cognitively demanding tasks that encourage students to exert effort, many of which the participants adopted, recent research into constructivist approaches has suggested various human-based principles. These include using human voices and gestures in learning materials [60]. The intention is to ensure that students exert effort to process the materials. The teachers in this study also used gestures and facial expressions, aligning with the human-based principles researchers have suggested [60]. However, in our case, the effect of these features was to distract students from their negative emotions or anxiety, once again showing the unexpected benefits of employing constructivist strategies in ERT.

Generally speaking, our results oppose those of past studies suggesting that ERT is challenging for students [8,42]. In our study, technology had a useful impact and promoted positive emotions, showing that how teachers used technology became the key to promoting positive emotions. In the interviews, many of the teachers highlighted the strategies they used or procedures they followed to complement technology (e.g., applications or software) and promote positive emotions. For example, some used tools to allow students to express their thoughts. In this case, the key was expression, not the use of a particular tool or technology.

This echoes various past studies that found the keys to online teaching to be teachers' attitudes towards technology (e.g., having a key objective for use or not) [72] and alignment with their beliefs about effective teaching [73]. This may have implications for the creation of professional development on the use of technology to promote positive emotions. There also seems to be a need for instructional designers and frontline EAP teachers to work together to explore means of effectively facilitating both learning and positive emotions through research and professional development activities.

Limitations

This study has two major limitations, and readers should interpret the results with caution. While maintaining an interpretivist approach, this study used a relatively small sample. Its results cannot be generalised to EAP teachers. Also, students' emotions can depend on their attitudes towards the EAP course, e.g., whether the course can boost their academic standing, enable them to meet requirements or serve as an elective. Such predeterminations can affect students' emotions no matter what teachers do to promote positivity. This affects this study's reliability.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to explore strategies that EAP teachers used to facilitate positive emotions among students during ERT. We found that teachers adopted a range of strategies that realise constructionist views of learning, which unexpectedly promoted positive emotions. In particular, cognitively demanding tasks diverted students' attention away from negative emotions related to the pandemic and towards the learning tasks. Interactions (both teacher–student and student–student) not only facilitated learning but also mitigated technological challenges and relieved negative emotions. With the unexpected emotional benefits of constructionist learning strategies, more research and professional development

activities will benefit both teachers and researchers who aim to implement ERT and online learning more effectively.

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