Comparison of Interpreting Teachers' Use and Perceptions of Distance Interpreter Training (DIT) Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interview-Based Study

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Abstract

The study indicates that before the COVID-19 pandemic, despite its importance, distance interpreter training (DIT) was not positively perceived or widely used in higher education institutions that offer Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting (BTI) and/or Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programs in China. However, the pandemic has changed almost everything in the world, with no exception of DIT, prompting the authors to have a follow-up study in August 2020 of the same 14 full-time interpreting teachers from different BTI and MTI institutions in different parts of China who had been interviewed right before the pandemic. This interview-based comparative study shows that all the interviewees used DIT during the pandemic shutdown and their perceptions of DIT have altered greatly,

becoming more objective than subjective and more positive than negative. The pandemic has, to some extent, boosted the further development and acceptance of both the online and blended approaches to interpreter training.

Keywords: COVID-19; distance interpreter training (DIT); interpreting teachers; use and perceptions of DIT

1. Introduction

Professional interpreter training or interpreting education in China is mainly carried out in regular higher education institutions (HEIs) which have been approved the right to run Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting (BTI) and/or Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programs, which were initiated in 2006 and 2007 respectively. As of 2020, there were 281 and 253 universities and colleges offering BTI and MTI programs respectively (for convenience's sake, they will be referred to as BTI and MTI institutions). These institutions include almost all types of universities and colleges, with different histories and divergent education resources, affecting either positively or negatively the quality of their BTI and MTI education (Xu, Zhao & Zhong, 2020).

In order to share high-quality education resources among all HEIs, bridge inter-collegial and interregional disparities, and boost education equity, the Ministry of Education and other education authorities in China have encouraged the development of various distance education modes, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs), flipped classrooms, micro-lectures, and live webcast courses, because distance education has a number of advantages over traditional face-to-face instructions, such as accessibility at any time and space, large class capacity, repeatability of courses, and cost-effectiveness (Nguyen, 2015).

Among the different distance or online education modes in

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Fourth, studies on DIT in normal situations and in emergency cases should be strengthened so that its characteristics, advantages and disadvantages, coping tactics and the like are better known to individual teachers and education institutions to shift from offline to online or to the online and offline blended mode in the future.

This study, though small-scaled, has tried to compare interpreting teachers' use and perceptions of DIT right before and during the COVID-19 pandemic with follow-up interviews. Its significance lies in two aspects. First, it serves as a window to showcase the changes and development in DIT brought about by the pandemic. Second, it fills the lacuna of comparative studies of DIT from the perspective of interpreting teachers in China. It is hoped that this study can help draw more scholarly attention to DIT in particular and interpreting education in general.

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Appendix: Interview questions

1. How long have you been teaching interpreting?
2. What interpreting course(s) have you taught?
3. What kinds of course(s) do you think are suitable for DIT?
4. Have you been engaged in any form of DIT? If yes, what are they?
5. Compared with traditional offline teaching, what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of DIT?
6. What kinds of knowledge and competences are suitable for DIT?
7. Have you ever used any domestic and international online teaching resources in your interpreting teaching process? If yes, what are they?
8. Have you heard of any domestic or international online course management systems? If yes, what are they?
9. Have you used any online course management systems? If yes, what are they?
10. If you are engaged in DIT, what forms will you adopt?
11. What kind of DIT do you think the most effective?
12. How do you comment on existing domestic and international DIT resources?
13. Will you be willing to engage in DIT? What factors will boost or prevent you from doing so?
14. How do you predict the future development of DIT?
*15. How are you going to answer the above questions after your online education experience during the COVID-19 pandemic？
*16. What do you think are the reasons for such changes and how will they impact future interpreting education?

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