

SELF-ORGANISED FORUM AS HORIZONTALIZED PEDAGOGY PRACTICE FOR PHD STUDENTS: THE PEER-LEARNING, MENTAL SUPPORT, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING OF “CHINESE TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING PHD FORUM”

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ABSTRACT:

Purpose – This paper theorises how international PhD student community of certain language group in the UK use self-organised activity as a way of horizontalized pedagogy to enhance their study and well-being during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic. It introduces the “Chinese Translation and Interpreting PhD Forum” as one such activity and explores its impact on participants.

Methodology – The paper is a case study of the Forum. The case is analysed by two major ways: The former theoretically constructs the case in concern, which not only highlights the importance of peer-learning as a pedagogy in PhD learning experience, but compares and signifies how the practice concerned in this paper is different from other activities, especially peer-mentor schemes and reading groups. The latter part of the paper is a qualitative analysis based on the feedback from participants. It reveals how participants actually think peer-learning, mental support, and community-building functions of the activity.

Findings – The result shows that while the effort in community building and online organisation is a success, PhD students are not necessarily interested in involving in a broad range of topics, especially those different from their area of expertise, even within the same discipline. Meanwhile, despite the initial intention of mental support, participants seem to be less impressed by this particular function. Finally, the use of their native language is considered to be less significant, compared with the original hypothesis.

Originality – The paper provides an alternative model for PhD training, especially on top of the traditional supervisor-PhD power hierarchy. The model also provides solutions for low-quality and less-motivated peer-learning activities like peer-mentor scheme and too-demanding activities like reading group.

Keywords: community building; mental health; peer learning; horizontalized pedagogy; translation and interpreting studies

1. Introduction

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. Among those who are influenced are PhD students. Efforts are seen where universities carry out a range of policies catering for their students’ pedagogical and mental needs. Against this backdrop, I reformed and reorganised the long-abandoned Chinese Translation and Interpretation Forum at Queen’s University Belfast (referred to as “the Forum” hereinafter). The Forum was established in 2018 when some PhD candidates at the Centre of Translation and Interpreting of Queen’s University Belfast (“The Centre”) decided they would want to gather to practice interpreting. The interpreting practice had not lasted long before the gathering turned to more academic discussion, exploring topics in translation studies and beyond. It was that time that I joined the Centre and learned a lot from the gathering. However, the gathering ceased after the senior candidates started writing their thesis and eventually graduated. I always felt pity about the “sudden death” of the gathering and wanted to restart the scheme. COVID-19 gave me a good excuse. Reflecting on the failure of the previous gathering, when I restarted the scheme, I decided to reduce the used-to-be frequency to once every week. I held the gathering, now rebranded as Forum, monthly. In the meantime, as I advertise the Forum on social media (e.g. Twitter, WeChat, and Weibo) every time it runs, some PhD candidates outside the Centre’s community contact me and ask if they can participate. Their participation enlarged the range of topics that the Forum covers.

In short, there used to be a range of problems for PhD candidates. For example, they lack peer learning support and chances to reach the broader research area in translation studies. The Centre provides us with the Monday Seminars, inviting renowned scholars for a one-hour presentation each week. However, from personal contacts, many PhDs would like a more open discussion rather than lectures. After COVID-19 broke out, the more disconnected environment may lead to mental issues. By restarting the Forum, I wish to address these problems by allowing peer candidates to meet each other every month, have formal and informal discussions over various topics, and open the Forum to a broader community. After more than two years of running, I hope to systematically explore what is achieved by holding such a Forum as a peer-learning practice.

The topics of the Forum are not solely academic. As it is a PhD forum, in most cases, the discussions are academic and about translation studies. However, there is a vast space to explore under the tag of translation studies: the discipline is, as argued by Gabriela Saldanha and Sharon O’Brien (2014, 1), “interdisciplinary in nature.” This is

one of the reasons the Forum opens to the broader community: there is a lack of variety in topics researched at our Centre alone. However, academic topics cannot address every problem COVID-19 has brought and those that PhD candidates have been dealing with in a larger context. The Forum, therefore, is also a space for PhD candidates to either share their experience in career development or ask questions whenever in doubt.

Now that the Forum has run for 3 years, the rather longevity nature of it requires close examination, as its success may have potential implications for an overall PhD pedagogy. As I am the organiser of this Forum, the paper is, on the one hand, self-reflective; but on the other hand, it relies on theories developed in studies of higher education pedagogy and beyond to formulate its own theoretical foundation. Meanwhile, the paper reflects on the feedback collected from participants. Due to the number of respondents, the paper approaches the feedback qualitatively rather than quantitatively.

2. Theoretical discussion: Forum Compared with other Pedagogical Practices

Reviewing the literature on different forms of pedagogy for PhD candidates helps formulate the theoretical foundations for this Forum. The literature review also points out how the Forum differs from other pedagogical practices and the similarities. The paper mainly reviews three practices: supervisor-PhD candidate teaching and learning, peer-mentor scheme, and reading groups. On top of comparing the Forum to these practices, the review section discusses another distinctive feature of the Forum: it uses Chinese in an English-teaching and researching environment.

2.1 Forum and vertical pedagogy from supervisory

Study to the success of a PhD research is seen as primarily an individual effort that aims at training fellow PhD candidates to be researchers of “independence and autonomy” (Johnson, Lee and Green 2000, 136). In the making of a successful researcher, supervisors play a considerable teaching role that is different from all other teaching roles in, for instance, undergraduate or high school. Scholars (for instance, Lee and McKenzie 2011, 69) identify the difficulty in supervising PhD candidates where “supervision is neither simply ‘teaching’ nor ‘research’ but an uneasy bridge between both”, asking for a balanced pedagogy that can enlighten supervisory relationship between supervisors and their PhD candidates. Some principles are pointed out. For instance, Sara Cotterall (2011, 529–531) argues that “good pedagogy” involves the practices of “respect and concern”, “structure and support”, “engagement in scholarly practices”, and “reflection”. Other research focuses more on PhD candidates’ learning under supervision. Mary-Helen Ward and Sandra Helen West (2008) follow the definition of pedagogy as “a concept draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced” (Lusted 1986, 3), and they focus on how PhD candidates can use blogging as effective pedagogy practice. They argue that “blogging is a text-based social practice that can be useful to both candidates and supervisors in the co-production of knowledge within PhD candidacy” (Ward and West 2008, 61). While exploring supervisor-PhD candidate pedagogy from different approaches, the above literature directly labels the teaching and learning relationship between the two parties as “doctoral pedagogy”, demonstrating the dominant discourse of supervisory in PhD pedagogy research.

The most significant difference the PhD Forum in concern of this paper differs from the supervisory pedagogy is that it lays more emphasis on peer learning instead of learning from supervisors. The efforts of the peers should be no less important than supervisory. David Boud and Alison Lee (2005 502) argue that the supervisor-PhD candidate relationship is only one kind of pedagogy, the “vertical pedagogy”, while peer learning should be introduced to PhD pedagogy discourse. As they argue (ibid.), peers construct the invaluable environment for “horizontalised” pedagogy. Reconceptualising pedagogy this way “allows a particular kind of investigation of the research ‘environment’ as an explicitly pedagogical space” (ibid., 504). Building on this foundation, Elke Stracke (2010, 6–7), even though engaging the PhD candidates as a supervisor, identifies peer learning as “a successful and enjoyable PhD experience”. He argues that peer learning among PhD candidates facilitates “exchange”, provides “insight into the PhD process”, “feedback” from peers is appreciated, and “moral support in [...] a friendly, supportive environment” is gained. These research outputs highlight the importance of the peer learning nature of the Forum.

There are, however, some peer learning activities that are theorised as PhD pedagogy. The paper reviews these activities in the following two sections, highlighting mainly two activities, namely the peer-mentor scheme and reading groups. This review is to gain insights from these activities while distinguishing the Forum from them.

2.2 Forum and peer-mentor scheme as peer support

An increasing number of universities in the UK and worldwide take up the peer-mentor scheme to support the new PhD students and candidates. Mentor scheme as peer support follows the emphasis on peer learning as environmental construction (see Boud and Lee 2005 discussed above), and Amanda Mason and Jarmila Hickman (2017) look into how the scheme benefits mentees and mentors, what are the expectations regarding the mentors’

role, and how to make the scheme successful. They theorise the mentor scheme as a mutually beneficial pedagogical practice where mentors and mentees identify problems like lack of training for mentors and ambiguity in the role of mentors. Similarly, Justin Fam and Jessica C. Lee (2019) see peer mentor schemes as an opportunity to address inequalities. They identify the different resources PhD students have access to in different programmes. They argue that, while PhD programmes are “largely unstructured”, PhD students can benefit from having “access to structured programs that are dedicated to creating opportunities for social support and mentoring.”

Therefore, the emphasis on peer support becomes the core for both groups of researchers talking about the peer mentor schemes. Peer support is used widely beyond pedagogy discourse, highlighting a non-professional helper-helpee relationship that features non-hierarchy and flexibility (Mead and MacNeil 2004). In researching PhD candidates’ well-being, peer support is believed to address the “invisible” feelings and isolation of these candidates (McAlpine and Norton 2006). Daniel Jolley et al. (2015) reflect on peer support in an autoethnographic manner, demonstrating the importance of peer support during the writing-up phase of a PhD candidate, coping with a range of pressures ranging from facing feedback from supervisors to the delay of data collection.

The Forum is similar to the peer-mentor scheme in many ways. First, the peer-mentor scheme is usually carried out by the institutions or the departments. It is therefore structured not by PhD candidates themselves but rather by another top-down, i.e. vertical, approach, although the approach is different from that of the supervisory. The Forum, however, is even more horizontalised, as it is organised, participated in, and reformed by PhD candidates. There is no, so to speak, authority ruling over the running and management of the Forum. More specifically, from the feedback¹ I heard from Forum participants, we can have a glimpse into what the differences are. Some participants complain about the effectiveness of their peer mentor scheme: “Our peer-mentor scheme is rubbish... As for the Forum, I meet with many friends”, says one of the participants (P17). Some highlight the importance of academic topics in the Forum and regard it not only as a supportive event: “There is a much larger amount of knowledge” (P9). Others maintain that the Forum provides an opportunity for getting to know and communicate with more peers: “I can communicate with more peers and expand my horizon” (P13). In short, the Forum mainly differs from the traditional peer-mentor schemes in its focus on autonomy, effectiveness, knowledge transfer, and a larger community of peers.

2.3 Forum and reading groups

Another similar pedagogical practice is reading groups. The practice of reading groups is not limited to PhD candidates’ learning and researching careers. Reading groups are organised in different forms. Some of these groups can be a teaching activity that aims at cultivating students for active learning (Railton and Watson 2005), while others are (self-)organised outside higher educational settings, where the groups conflict and corroborate HE (Hansen and prince 2019). Claudia Firth (2021) comprehensively reviews history’s different reading groups. She sees these groups on the peripheries of the institutions and organisations, emphasising the political significance of these groups against the social and political context. The loose formations of these “mainly leisure-based friendship groups” play “a valuable role in social movements as a form of informal organisation” (Firth 2021, 113). Others reveal that reading is a social activity (for example, Allington and Swann 2009). David Peplow (2011) explores how reading groups generate and negotiate their interpretations of texts as a social practice, revealing how a reading group “talks about texts” (310, original emphasis).

The Forum differs from the reading groups in how activities are organised. The Forum does not see interpreting texts as its primary responsibility. While, in reading groups, “all members (should) have read” the books before discussion (Peplow 2011, 295), the Forum requires fewer reading tasks and preparation, at least for most participants. This is due to the consideration of the motivations of the participants. As discussed in the introduction, the Forum ceased for more than one year because those who constantly contributed to organising and presenting on the Forum stopped for various reasons. Besides, while many reading groups, especially those online, are not institutional-based, Forum started as primarily a practice within our institution community. It is only recently that the Forum tried to expand more widely. On the one hand, this differs the Forum from the political-movement-oriented reading groups and less emphasises the friend-making function. Most, if not all, Chinese PhD in translation and interpreting got to know each other well before the Forum came into place.

2.4 Doing research in a second language

The Forum, therefore, is a distinctive, horizontalised pedagogical practice that shares some of the features of the peer-mentor scheme and the reading groups. One more feature that distinguishes it from other peer support and peer learning practices in the UK is the use of language. In UK institutions like ours, Chinese PhD candidates

¹ As will explain later, I collect 21 feedback questionnaires. When referring to answers from specific participants, I will use P1-P21 respectively according to the sequence of them finishing the questionnaire.

research in a second-language environment, and to do research in a non-native language is complex. Ana Ramírez-Adrados et al. (2020) show how native language users perform better in dissertation writing and defence, even though there is no significant difference between the pressures students are under either defending in the native or non-native languages. Meanwhile, especially for early-stage PhD candidates, being situated in a second-language environment may lead to a sense of periphery linguistically, culturally, and psychologically (Samimy, Kim, Ah Lee, and Kasai, 2011). Further, Yu Ren Dong (1998) surveys non-native graduate students, reporting that a lack of social networks leads to disadvantages for these students in writing scientific papers. However, the language – in this case, English – these students research with tends to become their “working language or science language”, which means that “they were either not aware of any differences at all or they considered it easier to do scientific writing in English than in their native languages anyway” (385).

3. Research questions and hypothesis

Based on the existing pedagogical practices that emphasise peer learning, peer support, and community construction, and considering the differences between the Forum and these practices, the research questions can be categorised into three types, namely motivation, ways of support, and community construction.

3.1 Motivations

First, one should suppose that not everyone comes to the Forum every time. Instead, judging by the experience of running the Forum, even without rigorous roll calling every time, my observation is that most participants come once every two or three times. Due to the more loosely requirement for participation, there should be a number of participants who participate in the Forum for an extended period. Second, there should be a high level of motivation to meet face-to-face once the pandemic is over, as, like Jolley et al. (2015, 36) report, the online support can be limited as “you are unable to be there physically and so unable to offer support in this way, such as a hug”.

3.2 Ways of support

According to the topics, the Forum mainly offers peer support in three aspects: academic research, mental health, and career development. As the organiser, I hypothesise that participants may find it most useful as mental support, followed by helping their research projects, and finally in career development. As the Forum was restarted at the beginning of the pandemic, I got to know some peer PhD candidates complaining about the pressure and the sense of isolation, especially when locking down. As for career development, students have different career plans and, therefore, may not relate to each others’ experiences to a great extent. Meanwhile, I expect participants to find the wide range of topics covered in the Forum more helpful than the topics of their own expertise. As PhDs can discuss with supervisors who can even point to extra reading materials, I suppose that the chance to be exposed to topics outside any of the research from the supervisors of our Centre is a good chance for PhD candidates to open up to the interdisciplinarity of translation studies.

3.3 Community construction

Initially, the Forum was inclusive to PhD candidates of our Centre only. As it gradually opens up, I would expect some reluctance in accepting the involvement of external members. For external participants, in turn, I suspect they have only limited, if any, contact with participants from our Centre. Should the Forum work as a community building practice, the link between internal and external participants are crucial? Another hypothesis in this category points to the use of language. The hypothesis is that using Chinese instead of English is important to participants, as language reinforces the identity of being a more extensive research community and could be easier to convey specific ideas more clearly.

These hypotheses are not only proposed for the research purpose alone, but more importantly, they are the basis on which I organise the Forum in the first place. Therefore, examining the validity of these hypotheses is essential both in illuminating similar practices that other researchers wish to carry out, and in providing a more successful Forum that is sustainable in the long run.

3.4 Research questions

To examine the hypotheses above, the paper investigates how participants reflect on the Forum in the following questions:

1. How motivated are participants to participate in the Forum, online and offline?
2. What themes do participants find most useful for their PhD development?
3. How well are internal participants linked with external ones?
4. Is the discussion in the native language seen as helpful among the participants?

4. The survey: Results and analysis

A questionnaire of 17 questions (Q1-Q17) is designed to examine the hypotheses and address these questions. Q1 asks about the expertise of each participant; Q2–5 concern the motivations of participants; Q6–10 inquire about the usefulness of different topics and themes; Q11, Q12, and Q17 compare the Forum with other PhD pedagogies (peer-mentor scheme and supervisory), and Q13–16 are about community building. The questionnaire is designed in Chinese, and the original questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1 after the paper with English translation attached as Appendix 2. The questionnaire is sent via email to the mail list of all the participants of the Forum. After one week, 21 responses are collected.

4.1 The background of the respondents

The respondents are asked about their backgrounds regarding their PhD research topics and if they are from our Centre. 20 Participants responded to the first question. The answers demonstrate the variety of topics for PhDs in translation and interpreting. At least ten different topics are seen in the response: 2 participants have expertise in the interpreting process, 2 in the translation process, 2 in literature translation, 2 in audio-visual translation (AVT), and 1 in translators’ training, contemporary translation theories, travel translation, opera translation, translation and metaphor, and computer-aided interpreting each. Others respond with more general terms like translation studies. Most noticeably, 1 participant identifies themselves as doing research in “neurosurgery”, extending the disciplinary boundary of the Forum even further. Despite the vast spread of interests, researchers in process research, either in translation or interpreting, are the most in numbers (5 out of 20) among the participants responding to this question. Regarding respondents’ institutions, 7 are from other institutions, and 14 are PhDs from our Centre.

4.2 Motivations

Q2 asks how long since the first time the participant has participated in the Forum. The options range from “less than one month” to “over one year” as the Q3 asks the frequency of them turning up. Respondents are expected to choose from “never”, “occasionally”, “often”, and “every time”, but the question does not specify the detailed definition of each option. The tables below show the number of responses, and the figures give an impression of the percentage of each response.

Answers for Q2 (Table 1 and Figure 1) show that over 57.14% of the respondents (12 of them) have participated in the Forum for over one year, while there is a newcomer who only participated in the Forum very recently, under one month. The result shows consistency of participation while the Forum is constantly growing, slowly but surely. Responds to Q3, on the other hand, show how often participants are motivated to participate in the event. Most participants will not participate in the Forum every time, with scarce exceptions – only 1 person says they participate every time). More respondents believe they come to the Forum occasionally than those who often come – although, without description, the frequency difference between occasional showing up and often is unclear.

Options	Response count
<1 month	1
1 month – 6 months	4
6 months – 1 year	4
>1 year	12

Table 1: Q2 Participation Period

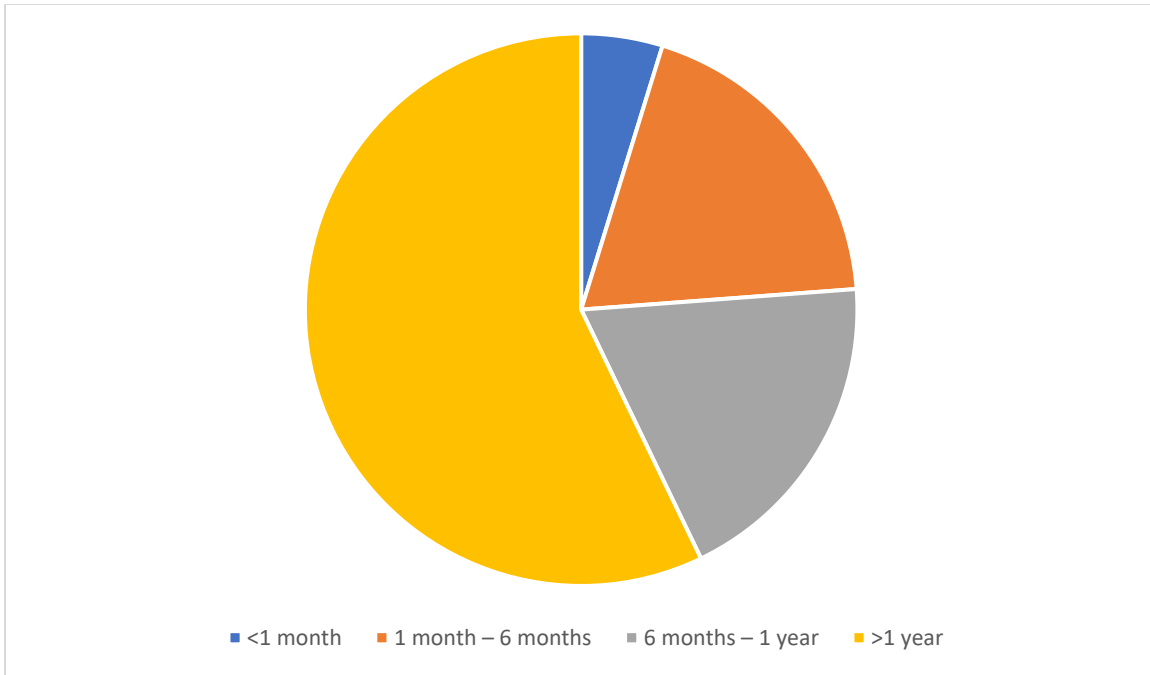


Figure 1: Q2 Participation period

Options	Response count
Never	0
Occasionally	11
Often	9
Every time	1

Table 2: Q3 Participation Frequency

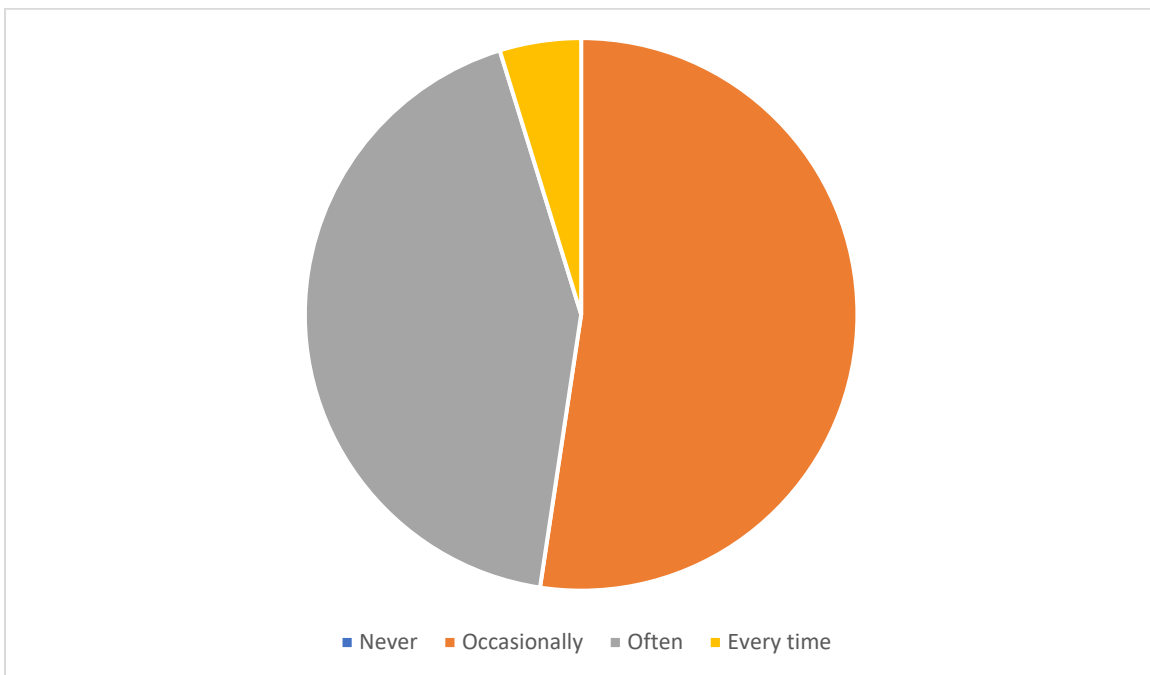


Figure 2: Q3 Participation Frequency

The questionnaire also asks about respondents' willingness to participate online and offline in Q4 and Q5. The result shows that, as demonstrated in Table 3 and Figure 3, even long after the COVID-19 lockdown, there is a clear contrast between the likelihood of online and offline participation. Respondents are generally more likely to participate in the forum online, with most indicating they are likely or very likely to do so. On the other hand, offline participation is less popular, with the majority of respondents saying they are unlikely or very unlikely to participate offline. Specifically, most participants (12) say they are very unlikely to come to the face-to-face Forum, and only 1 person is very likely to come to an offline event. By contrast, 9 out of all 21 people would love to participate in an online Forum, and the other 10 are less definite but show a high likelihood of participating. Even after considering external members who cannot meet face-to-face, among all 14 respondents from the Centre, 6 say they are very unlikely to show up at face-to-face events.

Options	1 Very unlikely	2	3	4	5 Very likely
Online participation	0	0	2	10	9
Offline participation	12	3	5	0	1

Table 3: Q4 and Q5 Online and offline participation

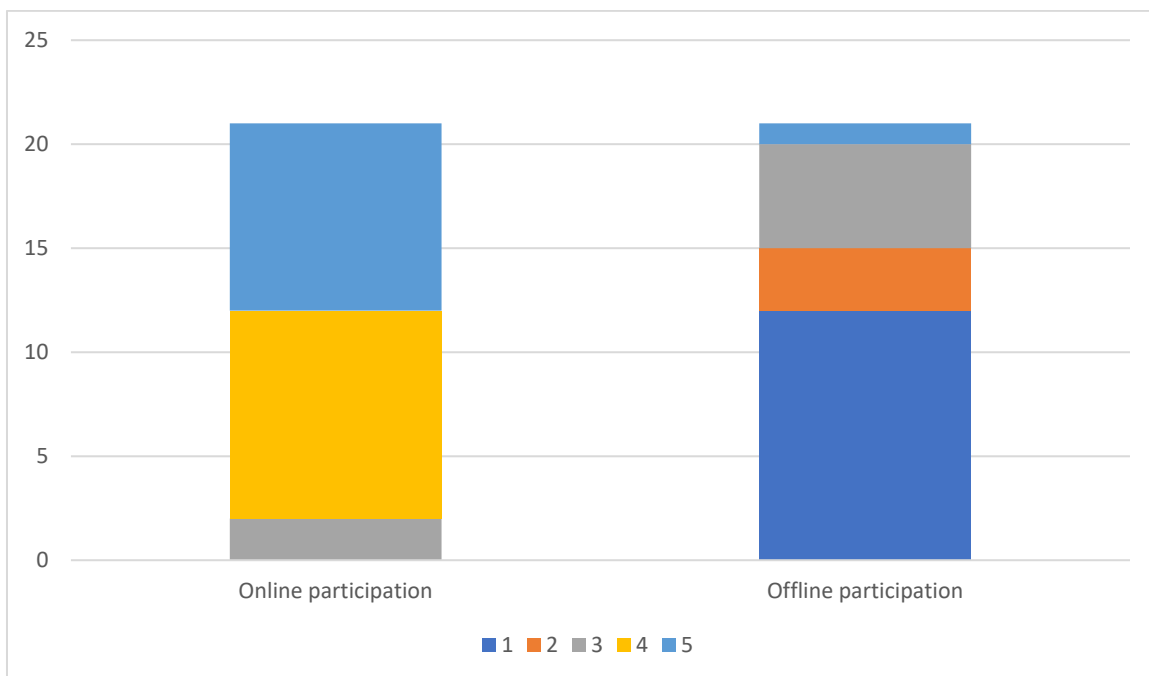


Figure 3: Q4 and Q5 Online and offline participation

4.3 Importance of different ways of support and themes

The following section explores what kinds of support and themes participants feel are most useful. Q6–Q8 ask how important the different ways of support are. Three types of support are identified: mental, academic, and career planning. The first two ways of support come from the literature on other peer learning and support projects (for mental support, see McAlpine and Norton 2006; for academic support, see Peplow 2011). The career planning support comes from one of the reoccurring themes of the Forum, where PhD graduates share their experience of job-hunting. Respondents are asked to select the importance of mental, academic, and career planning support by giving scores 1–5. 1 point means the support is unimportant, while 5 points mean it is very important.

The result shows that the respondents see the Forum as most important for career planning, followed by academic support, and then mental support. However, the differences are not stark and all three aspects hold some importance to the respondents. To be more specific, most people believe career planning matters the most to them, with 8 people thinking it is very important. However, the importance of mental support seems very scattered among respondents. 3 people believe it is not important, but 6 people think it is very important. Academic support occupies the middle group. While no one thinks it is not important, the least people (5) see it as very important among all the three types.

Options	1 Not important	2	3	4	5 Very important
Mental support	3	1	7	4	6
Academic support	0	0	6	10	5
Career planning	0	4	4	5	8

Table 4: Importance scores of different types of support

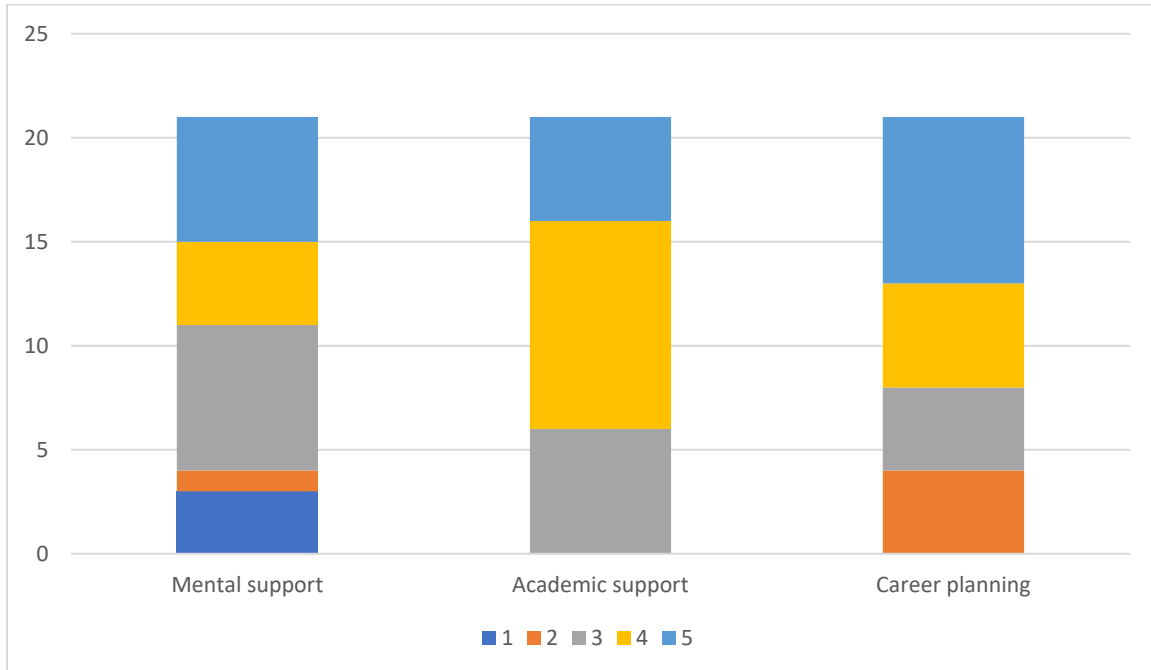


Figure 4: Importance scores of different types of support

Besides, the respondents are asked to rank the themes of the Forum from the most important to the least according to their experience and needs. The themes listed come from the topics of each Forum from the day it restarted until the one most recently. Three themes of the Forum are identified: PhD experience sharing, discussion with scholars within participants' expertise and discussion with scholars outside participants' expertise.

The results show that most people think discussing with scholars within their own expertise the most important, listening to others' experiences sharing the second, and opening up to more expansive disciplinary knowledge the least. However, a similar number of people (6) choose to rank the latter two themes the first.

Options	1st	2nd	3rd	Average rank
PhD experience sharing	6	10	5	1.95
discussion with scholars within my expertise	9	7	5	1.81
discussion with scholars outside my expertise	6	4	11	2.24

Table 5: The Rank of the importance of different Forum themes

4.4 Community building and the Forum

Finally, the questionnaire reveals how effective a community is built with the carrying out of the Forum. Participants from our Centre are asked about their willingness to accept external PhDs to participate. In contrast, external PhDs are asked whether they keep in contact with students from our Centre after the Forum. Meanwhile, they are also asked how they feel about using Chinese throughout the Forum.

In terms of the use of language, participants are asked to give scores on the importance of Chinese discussion. The result, as shown in Table 6, is again scattered. Half of the respondents think it is rather important, giving it 4 points,

but a similar number of respondents (6) think it is not important. Only 3 people think discussing in their native language is very important.

Importance	1 Not important	2	3	4	5 Very important
Response count	6	0	5	7	3

Table 6: Importance score of using Chinese

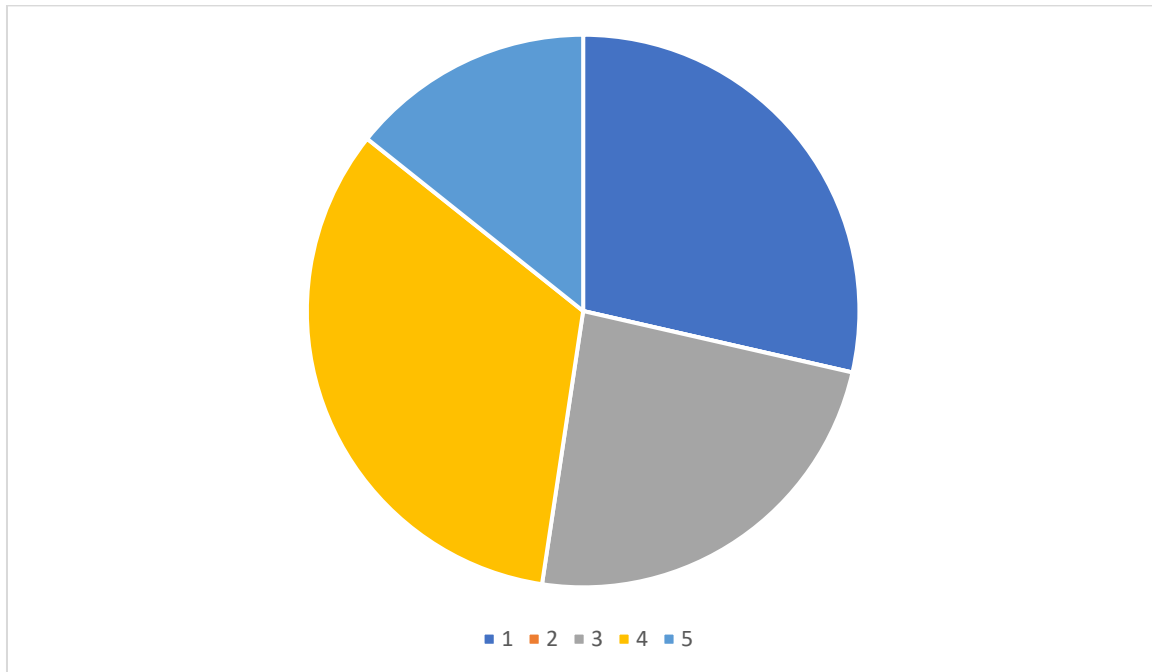


Figure 5: Importance score of using Chinese

As for networking between PhDs from the Centre and those from other institutions, those from our Centre are asked if they want external participants to join us. 13 out of 14 people say yes, and the one who does not respond positively says they “do not care”. On the other hand, when asked if they keep in contact with students from the Centre, 5 out of 7 external participants say they do.

Opinions	Yes	No	Others
Response count	13	0	1

Table 7: Willingness to take external participants

Opinions	Yes	No
Response count	5	2

Table 8: Continual contact with PhDs from the Centre

4.5 Discussion: What works and what does not?

Some of the results come as expected, but others are surprising. They serve as significant evidence for revealing what part of the Forum works so far and what does not work and needs further improvement in the following organising of the event.

4.5.1 What works?

The questionnaire results reassure some of the hypotheses – simultaneously, the initial intentions of organising the Forum. The Forum serves distinctive pedagogical functions compared with supervising and other peer-learning activities. Participants are willing to participate in the Forum continuously, while the rather loose style of the Forum gives them the freedom to choose to show up or not according to their own pace. Most participants find it helpful to listen to senior candidates’ personal experiences living through the PhD and job hunting, demonstrating that the Forum works as a peer support event. At the same time, many believe the Forum helps the most when the theme is about their PhD topic, showcasing the peer learning function of the Forum. Meanwhile, the Forum successfully perform a role in networking and community building among Chinese PhD candidates. Not only do

internal participants content with connecting with more peers than peer-mentor schemes carried out by our institution, but, more importantly, they are connected with external participants and the wider academia.

Besides, online Forum works surprisingly well. Initially as the only solution to coping with the pandemic and lockdown, the online running of the Forum now becomes the “new normal” for both the organiser and the participants. With the high motivation of participating online, it becomes possible to maintain the running of the Forum even after core organisers graduate. Online Forum also makes it much easier, or possible at all, to expand the number and variety of participants.

4.5.2 *What does not work?*

Other intentions when initiating the Forum do not work very well among participants. The most significant is the lack of interest in topics outside participants’ expertise. Even with the efforts made by the organiser in increasing the variety of topics in translation studies, especially in finding and inviting scholars on topics beyond participants’ PhD projects,² participants are keener on discussing what concerns their PhD projects the most.

Meanwhile, as PhD students are often believed to work in “solo study” (Johnson, Lee, Green 2000), the necessity for mental support from their peers is often identified ((Pyhältö, Stubb, and Lonka 2009, Fokkens-Bruinsma and Jansen 2021). However, even if participants think highly of peer support in terms of exchanging experience during and after their PhD career, many do not think it serves as mental support. Similarly, the use of the native language, in this case, Chinese, does not seem to play a vital role in improving participants’ mental and academic performance. Some participants even think using one language over another in the Forum is unimportant.

Finally, while the online Forum is a success, an attempt to recover the face-to-face Forum as a hybrid mode does not work well. Participants, living near the campus or not, are more willing to join the Forum online. In personal contact, some participants indicate they feel more comfortable hiding behind the camera than sitting next to each other.

5. Conclusion

The article explores the Forum as a distinctive way of carrying out horizontalised pedagogy practice. The participants’ feedback and relevant discussion may offer theoretical and practical implications to pedagogical research for PhD students in translation and interpreting.

Theoretically, the Forum proves that it is possible and essential to emphasise PhD candidates’ peer learning experience and explore different ways of doing so. While many peer learning practices, like peer mentor schemes, are organised by the institution with a top-down approach, the self-organising events may cater better for candidates’ needs. The growth of the Forum indicates the need for such events across the discipline of translation and interpreting. However, most PhD candidates care more about their PhD research and career development than extending their disciplinary knowledge. This proposes a challenge to theorise how self-organised peer-learning groups help with individual academic progress. Finally, as the participants of the Forum do not see the importance of discussing in their native language, it is necessary to investigate further how native language and second language influence self-organised learning activities.

Practically, the experience from the Forum may enlighten the organisation of other similar events. Based on the feedback illustrated above, future events may need to weigh more on catering for the expertise and specialities of individual participants than expanding the topics. Meanwhile, there can be a more explicit agenda for mental support besides experience sharing.

² For example, the Forum hosted neuroscientists, machine translation experts from computer science, and computer-aided tools developers.

Appendix 1. Original Questionnaire in Chinese

Q1：你的研究领域是？

Q2：你加入沙龙多久了？

<1个月

1个月-6个月

6个月-1年

1年以上

Q3：你参与沙龙的频率是？

从不参加

偶尔参加

经常参加

每次参加

Q4：你有多少可能参与线上沙龙？

1	2	3	4	5
非常不可能				非常可能

Q5：你有多可能到图书馆参与线下沙龙？

1	2	3	4	5
非常不可能				非常可能

Q6：沙龙对你心理健康是否重要

1	2	3	4	5
非常不重要				非常重要

Q7：沙龙对你的学习是否重要

1	2	3	4	5
非常不重要				非常重要

Q8：沙龙对你博士和就业规划是否重要？

1	2	3	4	5
非常不重要				非常重要

Q9：沙龙使用中文对你是否重要

1	2	3	4	5
非常不重要				非常重要

Q10：对于你来说，沙龙对你帮助最大的主题是？

- 博士生活经验交流
- 自己研究领域内的学者研究分享
- 自己研究领域外的学者研究分享

Q11：你是否参与过学校的 peer-mentor 项目？

是
否

Q12：沙龙与 peer-mentor 项目对你的帮助有何不同？

Q13 : 你是否是女王大学的学生？

是
否

Q14 : 你是否希望外校同学参加沙龙？

是
否
其他

Q15 : 沙龙后你是否与女王大学其他博士保持联系？

是
否

Q16 : 你是否愿意在沙龙中进行发言？

是
否

Q17 : (如果你是博士生) 沙龙和导师会面相比提供了哪些额外帮助？

Appendix 2. English Translation of the Questionnaire

Q1: What is your area of expertise?

Q2: How long have you been participating in the Forum?

<1 month

1 month – 6 months

6 months – 1 year

>1 year

Q3: How often do you participate in the Forum?

Never

Occasionally

Often

Every time

Q4: How likely will you participate in the Forum online?

1

2

3

4

5

Very unlikely

Very likely

Q5: How likely will you participate in the Forum at the library (face-to-face)?

1

2

3

4

5

Very unlikely

Very likely

Q6: How important is the Forum to your mental health?

1

2

3

4

5

Not important

Very important

Q7: How important is the Forum to your research?

1

2

3

4

5

Not important

Very important

Q8: How important is the Forum to your research career planning?

1

2

3

4

5

Not important

Very important

Q9: How important is using Chinese in the Forum to you?

1

2

3

4

5

Not important

Very important

Q10: Please rank the following themes according to how important they are to you:

- Communicating PhD life experience
- Discussions with scholars of my expertise
- Discussions with scholars outside my expertise

Q11: Have you participated in any peer-mentor scheme?

Yes

No

Q12: What is the difference between the Forum and the peer-mentor scheme?

Q13: Are you a PhD candidate at Q University?

Yes

No

Q14: Do you want external PhDs to participate in the Forum?

Yes

No

Others

Q15: If you are not from Q University, do you keep in touch with Q University students after the Forum?

Yes

No

Q16: Are you willing to give a talk on the Forum?

Yes

No

Q17: (If you are a PhD candidate) How does the Forum help in addition to supervisory meetings?

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