Emergency Remote Teaching During COVID19: The Role of Teachers' Online Community of Practice (CoP) in Times of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

While previous studies in the literature may have used the concept of a community of practice (CoP) to investigate its role for teachers' professional development, this study identifies the role of a teachers' CoP in navigating the challenges in online/remote teaching faced by six teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in a university in Thailand during the COVID19 pandemic. This study employed a purposive-convenience sampling method with an individual online interview to gather qualitative data. Findings revealed that although teacher-participants pointed out the lack of students' interaction, lack of time to do assessment and feedback, and the lack of students' concentration in online teaching, they greatly acknowledged the role of the teachers' CoP in navigating the demands and challenges of online teaching during the pandemic. Some of the ascribed roles of the teachers' CoP in online teaching include; a support group, a source of solutions to online teaching issues, and a learning community. Implications are discussed and suggestions for future studies are offered.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid transmission of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in late 2019, which negatively affected all aspects of society, including education, has brought a massive transformation in the teaching and learning process. Many schools worldwide have had to temporarily close their physical classrooms and request teachers and students to migrate online and work remotely. Furthermore, schools and universities have also tried to find alternative options by exploring possible online teaching platforms and online teaching strategies so as not to deter students' learning while ensuring the safety of both teachers and students. Although a number of schools and universities may have been used to, and prepared for, online teaching, other university classes in Thailand were not necessarily ready and prepared for the sudden need to move classes from residential or face-to-face to online, especially in the middle of the semester. Such a move to online teaching and learning was likely to create apprehension and concern among teachers in universities since classes are usually held in a lecture-based classroom (Boonmak, Tesaputa & Duangpaeng 2015; Ulla 2018) and there are clearly both teachers and students who are unfamiliar with online pedagogy. The study by Barbour and Harrison (2016) acknowledged that although K-12 online learning is popular in the United States, there is still a scarcity of teacher development programs that support teachers to deliver the lessons online. Thus, teachers may be unprepared for and may lack the skills to do online teaching. Similarly, Mehran et al. (2017) also admitted that despite having technological tools for online learning, university undergraduate students at Osaka University in Japan lacked the interest and motivation to take English classes online. Students felt that they were not yet ready for such a learning set-up.

In most Southeast Asian classrooms, teachers may not only face difficulty moving to online and remote teaching due to their lack of experience in online pedagogy, but they may also face other technical issues. The lack of stable internet connectivity and other issues that come with online teaching and learning (Farley & Song 2015; Nhu, Keong & Wah 2019; Ulla & Perales 2020; Ulla, Perales & Tarrayo 2020) may pose a challenge. For example, Farley and Song (2015) noted that the poor internet connectivity among Southeast Asia countries is often attributed to the region's poor internet infrastructure and electricity. Thus, doing online classes is almost impossible. Additionally, the lack of electronic devices, lack of knowledge on internet use, and the question of affordability of internet-enabled devices also contribute to the problem. A study conducted by Nhu, Keong and Wah (2019) with 20 primary school teachers in Vietnam, revealed that teachers lacked the necessary skills to integrate technology into their teaching as there has been a lack of ICT training conducted. It was also reported that ICT facilities were not available in the classroom and that teachers sometimes had to use their own computers for teaching.

The issues that continue to confront teachers in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world may also impact the decision of some education institutions on whether to move their classes online, especially in times of crisis like the COVID19 pandemic. Since such issues are prevalent and recurring, and may not be addressed instantly, they may influence and become a deciding factor as regards the question of whether to shift classes online. In a recent study conducted by Simamora (2020) in Indonesia during the COVID19 pandemic, Simamora reported that while some schools in the country managed to migrate their classes from face-to-face classroom teaching to online teaching, other schools suspended their classes indefinitely due to the lack of ICT devices among teachers and students. This reflects the nuances and structural inequality in education where only some schools within the region could continue their classes online. Such issues reflect the need for pedagogical reconsideration and imply additional tasks for teachers in terms of lesson preparation, assessment, and provision of feedback. Additionally, although some teachers may feel positive about the new teaching practice, others may feel unqualified to teach and deliver the lessons online given factors such as a lack of online teaching knowledge, poor internet connectivity, and a lack of appropriate online teaching tools.

Thus, navigating through online teaching and learning may be daunting and challenging for both teachers and students, especially if it is done without support from family, peers, or community. Given this concern, providing teachers with professional development programs and building a community of practice (CoP), where teachers are afforded not only quality training but also a community where they can freely express, share their ideas, and learn from each other, are vital for the effectiveness of their classroom teaching. CoP plays a vital role in teachers' professional "development of the practices, repertoires, and professional identities" (Kirby, Walsh & Keary 2018: 264).

This article explores the role of teachers' community of practice as regards online pedagogy from the perspectives of six teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Thailand during the COVID19 pandemic. We apply the concept of community of practice (CoP) by Wenger and Snyder (2000) to explore how this is relevant for teachers in online pedagogy, especially in the middle of the semester and in times of crisis. It is expected that the result of this study will not only contribute to the existing knowledge of CoP but will also shed new insights, especially in the context of teacher education and in online pedagogy during an emergency health crisis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ONLINE DISTANCE/REMOTE TEACHING

In this article, while we acknowledge that much delivery and teaching online or at a distance does not involve social media as the main method, we contend that online teaching or distance education can also be done through a social media platform. Bandalaria (2018) noted that online distance education is "characterized by the geographical separation of learners from the teachers and the university. The geographical separation is bridged by using technology in the delivery of instructional services as well as learner support" (2018: 120). Moreover, the delivery of the lesson in online teaching can be done either synchronously or asynchronously, where students can learn independently and or collaboratively depending on the availability and accessibility of an online platform (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter 2018). As such, online teaching may no longer be a new practice that exemplifies teaching methodology as this has been employed and has become popular since the 1990s due to the information and communication technology revolution (Kentor 2015). However, it may be considered a new teaching practice, especially in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) classrooms, since for most schools delivery is mostly done in the classroom. There may be higher learning institutions that offer online education but this is initiated only by some open and distance eLearning universities (Bandalaria 2018). These open universities may be equipped with well-trained faculty members, and they may have sophisticated equipment and platforms for online teaching. Therefore, online teaching may not be an issue for these open universities as compared with other schools that are used to traditional classroom-based teaching.

Although we note that teaching online can also be done through social media platforms, especially when a learning management system (LMS) is not available, it can still be taxing for some teachers, especially those who do not have online pedagogy skills. Apart from making the teaching materials suitable for online teaching and learning, teachers may also face the dilemma of teaching methodology and strategy to employ online. More often than not, these issues can have a negative impact on the learners if left unresolved. Hence, providing teachers with professional development training to cope with online teaching demands is vital. Since teachers are the ones who perform the task of teaching, create an effective learning environment for students, and solve classroom problems for successful teaching and learning, continuous teacher development programs should be given importance (Boonmak et al. 2015). Such programs will prepare teachers, especially in times of emergency, to move their classes online.

In the current context, where conducting lessons online during the COVID19 pandemic may seem challenging for teachers as they may not have prior training in online pedagogy, the need for professional enhancement programs is a must. For example, in the study conducted by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), the lack of digital competence among teachers, and student assessment and supervision issues, were a few of the challenges teachers encountered when migrating to online teaching during the COVID19 pandemic. Blume (2020) also noted that during the first few days of online teaching, there were "numerous examples of poorly photographed worksheets" (p. 2) as a result of teachers' inability to prepare for the online teaching transition and their lack of skills for online pedagogy. For König, Jäger-Biela and Glutsch (2020), issues of teachers' self-efficacy, confidence in online teaching, and teachers' technological knowledge were evident during the pandemic. For teachers to be prepared to deliver their lessons online, schools should support them by providing workshops and training. By doing so, teachers would be equipped with the necessary skills making them confident and effective in doing online teaching. However, in the absence of professional development programs, teachers may also connect with their fellow teachers and form a community of practice where they can share

ideas to find solutions to their teaching problems. Teachers should reach out to other teachers and discuss teaching issues, best practices, and teaching experiences to learn from each other. The authors believe that when teachers gather together, whether online or face-to-face and exchange ideas about their classroom practices, this can enable them to obtain and apply new strategies to their classroom teaching.

TEACHERS AND THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Mojahan (2017) defined a community of practice (CoP) "as a group of people who share a passion, a concern or a set of problems regarding a particular topic, and who regularly interact in order to deepen their knowledge and expertise and to learn how to do things better" (2017: 1). In other words, shared interest, learning, knowledge, and practice are the basic characteristics of CoP. In the context of teacher education, for example, teachers in the same academic discipline can be considered a community of practice in that they share the same interest and passions. They may either meet regularly, whether formally or informally, or exchange emails and social media messages. Their regular meetings, which may enable them to share their experiences and knowledge, may also lead them to discuss and achieve solutions. Thus, "a community of practice can drive strategy, generate new lines of business, solve problems, promote the spread of best practices, develop people's professional skills, and help companies recruit and retain talent" (Wenger & Snyder 2000: 139).

However, it should be noted that not all communities are communities of practice (Wenger 2006). Wenger, who formed the term CoP, emphasized that for a community to be considered a community of practice, the three characteristics of CoP-*domain*, *community*, and *practice*, should be present. A *domain* in CoP refers to the common interest and passion shared by all members. In other words, members should commit to their domain by showing competence so that members can learn from each other. Likewise, a *community* in CoP means that "members [should] engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information [where] they build relationships that enable them to learn from each other" (Wenger 2006: 2). Wenger also reiterated that "having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together" (2006: 2). Additionally, it is important to consider that constant interaction from the members is crucial towards building a CoP since constant interaction may result in acquiring new knowledge and learning among the members. Lastly, a *practice* in CoP may refer to the daily routine exercised by all members of CoP as they are practitioners in their own common field. For example, a group of language teachers who meet each other in the school coffee shop during a coffee break and discuss and share their classroom teaching issues can be a good source of a solution to each one's classroom problems.

A number of recent studies that used the concept of CoP in the context of education have focused solely on teachers' professional development (Arthur 2016; Bond & Lockee 2018; Gauthier 2016; McLoughlin et al. 2018; Trabona et al. 2019). For example, the study conducted by Patton and Parker (2017) investigated how 36 teachers from nine physical teacher education CoP in North America, Europe, Scandinavia, and Southeast Asia understood their participation in CoP for their professional development. The findings revealed that through their constant involvement and participation in CoP, physical education teachers' professional development was supported. In other words, CoP allowed them to improve their teaching practices and research capabilities through collaboration and engagement. It was also discovered, through informal and formal interviews and focus group discussions, that CoP positively impacted them personally as it reduced isolation and promoted belongingness. Likewise, Bond and Lockee (2018) carried out a similar study focusing on faculty inquiry groups (FIGs) as a form of CoP. They argued that FIGs as CoP might "provide an effective avenue for faculty to enhance their awareness and implementation of technology-enhanced instructional strategies" (2018: 1). This study found that faculty participants identified FIGs as CoP important in their professional development. Most importantly, there was an increase in fluency among faculty participants with regard to the use of digital and instructional strategies.

Generally, a community of practice may make an important contribution to increasing the effects of knowledge sharing and increasing innovation in a business organization and in the context of education. CoP recognizes the role of knowledge as an important asset that resides in people and their social structure. Through CoP, people who share the same purpose and

vision for an organization can identify an organization's problems themselves and address those problems to see the organization's progress and development. Those who share practices and ideas in solving such problems can learn from each other's experience. A CoP plays a crucial role in the context of education, especially in addressing some pedagogical issues and how teachers address those issues for the improvement and development of their teaching pedagogy. This is especially relevant in the current context, where there is a sudden shift from residential teaching to online teaching brought about by COVID19. Teachers at this time of crisis may encounter a number of pedagogical issues that need to be addressed. A teacher's CoP may play a significant role in addressing these issues. Thus, the present study addresses the following questions.

1. How do language teachers perceive the sudden shift from residential face-to-face teaching to online teaching during COVID19?
2. What issues do language teachers face when teaching online?
3. What role does a community of practice (CoP) play in migrating to online teaching?

METHODOLOGY

The present study used qualitative research, in particular a descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, Giorgi & Morley 2017) to explore EFL teachers' lived experiences in Thailand regarding remote teaching during COVID19. It used a purposive-convenience sampling method since only those teachers teaching in a university in Thailand and who had direct contact with the researchers, were selected to participate in the study. A semi-structured individual interview either through an online survey questionnaire or Facebook chat (McIntosh & Morse 2015) was conducted to obtain the data for the study. The researchers believed that doing a semi-structured interview was an effective method for data collection because the current investigation dealt with qualitative and open-ended data, which explored the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the teacher-participants (DeJonckheere & Vaughn 2019) regarding the role of CoP in their remote teaching during the COVID19 pandemic. Likewise, conducting the study in the middle of a pandemic delimited the face-face interaction. Thus, an online survey questionnaire or Facebook chat was employed.

Participants

As this study was conducted in the middle of the pandemic, only six (2 females, 4 males) willingly participated in the online interview. They were teaching general courses in English as a foreign language (EFL) in the university. Furthermore, these teachers, whose ages ranged between 24 and 45, had teaching experience between 2 and 15 years. One participant possessed a PhD, three participants held an MA degree, and two obtained BA/BS degrees.

Before conducting the study, approval from the university ethics committee was sought. Once approved, the participants were sampled and identified. Furthermore, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and it was also made clear to them that their participation was voluntary; and that all the information they shared would be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Teachers' community of practice

All the participants were part of the online community in which all members were language teachers in the university. They used an online application, *Line*, to connect and share their teaching practices, teaching issues, and solutions. This online community was formed at the start of the school semester, before the COVID19 outbreak. The purpose of creating the *Line* teachers' community was simply for online socialization, sharing of teaching practices, and sharing of teaching problems and solutions. Usually, the course coordinators take the initial step of creating the online group, where they invite other teachers teaching the course to be members of the community. The course coordinator, who is also the group administrator, facilitates the online discussion and sharing and, if deemed necessary, a virtual meeting via Zoom, MS Teams, or Google meet can be arranged. As members, they can also post any topic at any time on any day of the week.

During the COVD19 outbreak, the university closed all of its classrooms and advised all teachers to move to online teaching. Since the outbreak was sudden, teachers had no training on

how to migrate to online teaching. Teachers were told to choose their own online platform where they could conduct their online classes. In other words, there was no standard learning management system in place.

Procedure and data analysis

The individual interview was carried out during the final week of the third term (May 2020). Since the class was moved online, the interview was also done through an online survey questionnaire (google form questionnaire) and Facebook chats. The online survey questionnaire was sent to the identified participants of the study after their permission was sought. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: part one asked for the participant's profiles; part two presented the interview questions; and part three asked for the participant's willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. The questionnaire was retrieved a week after its distribution.

The data from the online questionnaire were copied and transferred to an Excel sheet where manual coding was done following the grounded theory coding of Charmaz (2006). "The grounded theory coding consists of at least two main phases: 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data." (Charmaz 2006: 46).

To ensure validity and reliability, the data texts were sent back to each participant to check for correctness and completeness. The participants were allowed to modify and edit their transcribed statements for clarity and conciseness. The data were then analyzed by (a) dividing up the text into smaller, meaningful parts, (b) condensing these meaningful parts, (c) categorizing them (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009), and (d) presenting them based on the research questions posed for the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS MOVING CLASSES ONLINE

Although teachers had conflicting views with regards to moving classes online, they all agreed that remote teaching was a better option during the COVID19 pandemic. Moreover, being with their family and avoiding the virus were the reasons some teachers preferred to migrate to online teaching during the pandemic. This is evident in the following excerpts:

> Teaching from home made me safer because I am with my family. I don't want to catch the virus at school so moving classes online was a good decision at this time. (T1)

For some teachers, moving face-to-face classes to online remote teaching was perceived favorably since they believed that doing so would not disrupt their classes. Although the pandemic had already disrupted their face-to-face classes, the teachers felt they had to continue the teaching and learning process online to provide continuous learning for their students.

> I had to finish the lessons by doing my class online because I don't want to make up for the missed lessons. I have a syllabus to follow. (T3)

TEACHERS' PERCEIVED ISSUES IN ONLINE TEACHING

When it comes to perceived issues in online teaching during the pandemic, teachers revealed that lack of students' interaction, lack of time to do assessment and feedback, and students' lack of concentration were the common issues they faced. One teacher (T4) emphasized that the lack of student-to-student interaction in online learning made it difficult for him to do online teaching. He said:

> In online teaching, you can't trust students to work online since you never know if they are comfortable doing activities in front of a camera. I want to involve my students in the teaching and learning process. I want them to learn with their classmates. The lack of interaction among my students makes it difficult for online teaching. I like it when I can put my students in pairs and in groups to do classroom activities. They learn better this way.

For teacher 3, the reason why he found teaching online challenging was the fact that he could not do assessment and give feedback to his students. According to him, there were some topics that he needed to explain more to his students but he was worried that they might not get it considering the internet connection they had. As a result, students might not be able to understand the lesson and might have difficulty concentrating on the learning process. Such an issue was also evident in teacher (T1's) class, where his main concern was students' lack of concentration during their online class.

> During one of my online class sessions, one of my students was called by her mother to cook rice. Things like this cannot be avoided. So, how can we make our students put their focus in online learning when they are at their own houses. This can affect their academic performance too.

Generally, the lack of students' interaction, lack of time to do assessment and feedback, and students' lack of concentration may be considered common problems faced by teachers around the world during the pandemic. This is because teachers only have the computers in front of them and can hardly monitor their students. They cannot easily assign their students to group tasks since they are in different places virtually. They may not also provide time for assessment and feedback since they are online, where internet connectivity may sometimes be a problem. Although the internet may have provided them with some ways to effectively teach and learn, online teaching and learning is a new environment for both teachers and students. They may need some time to adjust to the new modalities of teaching and learning. The issues reported in the present study were also reported by Mukhtar et al. (2020) and Adnan and Anwar (2020). However, migrating to online teaching has also brought positive effects to teachers pedagogically. Teachers agreed that since shifting to online teaching was a new experience for them, they learned a lot from their experiences. They learned to make their lessons suitable for online teaching and learning. They became creative and resourceful teachers since they had to make sure that they could deliver the lessons effectively to their students.

TEACHERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Teacher-participants greatly acknowledged the role of a community of practice in navigating the demands and challenges of online teaching during the pandemic. Additionally, they mentioned that they were motivated to be in their CoP because they felt they were in a different world where education practitioners gather together to discuss "all sort of topics related to their profession". Some of the ascribed roles of CoP include; support group, source of a solution to online teaching issues, and a learning community.

As a support group, CoP was believed to provide the teachers with an opportunity to have a safe space to voice and share their sentiments, struggles, and experiences in online and remote teaching during the COVID19 pandemic.

> Luckily, I have a support group online where all the teachers teaching the same course this term are members. We always share our online teaching stories in that online group. It is good at least I know that I am not alone in my struggles in moving to online class this term. (T6)

Likewise, as a support community, CoP lessened teachers' anxieties and concerns about moving to online classes. This was especially important when teachers may not have prepared for the sudden shift from face-to-face teaching to online/remote teaching. Thus, teachers needed support and guidance not only for the courses they taught online but also on innovative online classroom pedagogy. One of the teacher-participants mentioned that teaching online makes him feel like a new teacher again. This suggests that since teaching online is something new for most of the teachers who are used to face-to-face classroom teaching, teachers need support to learn something new to inform their pedagogy. In other words, they need a community they can lean on in times of crisis. They need CoP to help them deal with issues, listen to their stories, and share their experiences and best practices in online teaching.

Undeniably, teachers considered CoP a venue where they could find a solution to their online teaching problems. In other words, CoP was a source of information and solutions to online teaching problems for the participants of the study. They also considered CoP their source of new methodologies in online pedagogy.

> My online group helps me how to address problem in my online teaching. They share with me their best practices, techniques, and other online teaching strategies. Like the use of Facebook for writing homework submission. They told me to use Facebook for my writing activities so I can monitor and check my students' writing if they plagiarized or not. (T4)

Teachers also perceived that CoP was a community where they could learn. In this time of crisis, teachers admitted that it became their source of information, a place where they could also hold online seminars/conferences, or just simply share best practices in teaching.

> Just last week, we had an online meeting where everyone shared how they dealt with some of the issues they encountered on their online teaching. Actually, it was not just an online meeting, it was more of a conference of best teaching practices. I am glad that we had this kind of online community. (T1)

Thus, having a CoP when migrating to online and remote teaching during the COVID19 pandemic was a big help for teachers.

> To have an online group, where everyone is doing the same thing as you do is a big help when transitioning to online teaching. You can learn so many things. When you have a problem with your students, they can offer and suggest some solutions. If you don't know how to use the online teaching platform, they are there to help. I mean, having a group where people have the same interest especially during the pandemic is a good thing. (T2)

For teachers in the investigation, CoP is a community where everybody can be understood and supported. It serves as their learning space where they can contribute knowledge and learn from each other. It affords them with knowledge and skills for professional development, especially in times of health crisis, like the COVID19 pandemic. These findings also concur with previous studies such as those of Abigail (2016), Arthur (2016), Gauthier (2016), McLoughlin et al. (2018), and Trabona et al. (2019) that reiterated CoP's contribution to professional development among teachers in higher education. However, while previous studies used the concept of CoP in exploring students' experiences in study abroad (Umino & Benson 2016); in improving interprofessional collaboration and education (McLoughlin et al. 2018); and in teachers' professional learning and development (Trabona et al. 2019), this study contributes to the existing literature in that it situates itself in online teaching and examines how teachers navigate the demands and challenges of online teaching during the COVID19 pandemic. For example, one of the most important teaching problems teachers encountered was making their lessons suitable for online teaching. This is reflected in the statement of teacher 5 (T5):

> I remember during the first two days of my online teaching, I was really upset because I felt that I was back to ten years ago when I still did my pre-service teacher training. I didn't know how to make my lesson work in online teaching.

However, T5 was thankful to her CoP because she was able to get support from her colleagues. According to her, her colleagues "shared other teaching materials related to the topic" she was teaching. "They also guided and helped" her how to make it interesting for her students. Such an experience proved that teachers' CoP during the COVID19 pandemic provided an opportunity for them to develop in their profession. Without CoP in times of health crisis, when classes have to be moved online, teachers may not be given an opportunity for continuous professional development, where creative solutions to teaching problems and active teaching collaboration are afforded (Inel Ekici 2018).

Thus, one important contribution of this study is that teacher-participants not only recognized the importance of CoP in their professional growth and development but also acknowledged the crucial roles of CoP as a source of solutions to online teaching issues and a learning community in the time of crisis. Such roles helped teachers to build a community where they could express themselves, their sentiments, and their online teaching issues freely without reservation.

However, it should be noted that forming and or becoming a member of a CoP in teacher education, especially in times of crisis like the COVID19 pandemic, requires commitment, time, and knowledge. It may not be easy to be in an online community and participate in knowledge creation and dissemination, especially when there may be a number of factors that may impede members from doing so. The spread of the virus, technological problems,

and pedagogical problems may affect teachers' participation in CoP. Nevertheless, teacher-participants were motivated to be in their respective CoP because they felt that they were in a different world, a world where only others like them who shared the same experiences and interests could understand each other.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study explores the role of the teachers' CoP in meeting the demands of and issues in online teaching that teachers in a university in Thailand faced during the COVID19 pandemic. Based on the findings, it was found that although teachers encountered a number of issues when shifting to online teaching, they still held a positive perception towards it as they had support from their CoP. They believed that migrating to online classes was the best decision to avoid contracting the virus and ensure both teachers' and students' safety. Findings also showed that different roles were ascribed to CoP; as a support group, as a source of solutions to online teaching issues, and as a learning community. Like other studies in the literature, the teacher-participants of this study valued their participation in their respective CoP as it provided them with professional development that impacted their classroom pedagogy. However, this study argues that, more than the professional development it affords to teachers, CoP serves as a support group where teachers can freely express themselves, share their experiences and problems, and seek support and help to online teaching issues they are facing, especially in times of crisis like the COVID19 pandemic.

Although previous studies may have already reported the benefits CoP provides to teachers, in the present investigation, CoP was contextualized in an online environment during the pandemic, where all classes migrated to online teaching. Such a unique context contributes to the existing discussion of CoP since it presents how CoP was adapted by university teachers in Thailand during the pandemic. Additionally, the different roles that were ascribed to CoP suggest that these teachers recognized the value of CoP in times of health crisis, not only for their professional development but also for their social and emotional support where every member was given a safe space to share their sentiments and problems. As Trust and Horrocks note, "while informal learning offers clear benefits, teachers can enrich their overall learning experiences by creating an ecosystem that blends formal and informal learning activities" (2017: 648).

Furthermore, the COVID19 pandemic has required education practitioners to consider online pedagogy as a new alternative to face-to-face classroom teaching, if not the new normal, especially in times of crisis. Therefore, it calls not only for clearer online teaching policies and guidelines and serious consideration and understanding that teaching and learning should not only be confined within the four corners of the classroom. It also reminds us of the importance of a community that can help us navigate the challenges and problems in times of crisis when a sudden move to online/remote teaching is necessary for students' continuous learning.

Finally, while the present study was conducted to investigate the role of teachers' CoP in the context of online teaching during the COVID19 pandemic, it has its own limitations. First, the context of the study only involved six teachers of EFL in a university in Thailand. Future research could explore a larger number of participants among different teachers' CoP for a wider understanding of the role of CoP in their teaching practices. Second, the study only employed a qualitative methodology to examine the role of CoP. Employing different research methodologies would yield different results that would contribute to the topic under study. The purpose of the present study was targeted at exploring the role of CoP in online teaching during the pandemic. Other studies concentrating on how CoP is formed and what motivates teachers to join them would be of interest.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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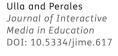
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