



Classroom management in the online environment: A case study of Thai TESOL staff in Thai university context

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Abstract

The present pandemic has presented seriously affected not only the daily life but also teaching and learning and it has been seen a long battle for educators including TESOL teachers in Thailand. Working in the field of TESOL, the author experiences the new changing environment where an actual classroom turns into a virtual classroom. All documents and teaching tools prepared (before the pandemic) have been changed into online documents. Undeniably, online teaching can be seen as demanding as teaching staff moving from a space in which they have years of experience to the unknown world of online, remote, and socially distanced teaching. This study aims to identify Thai TESOL staff's perception towards teaching and learning management affected by COVID-19. It The study revealed that the effectiveness of teaching in the changing context depends on the teachers' readiness to a new learning technology like online meeting, at the same time, they must be open-minded and concerned that they must adjust their role to fit properly in the context. Even though participants found the significant change in the use of teaching technology in an online environment, interestingly their teaching and learning management remained as it used to be in the normal (onsite) classroom. In addition, the study provides implications for those who would like to create positive learning environment in online situation.

Keywords: COVID-19, Higher education, Online environment, Online learning, TESOL, Traditional learning.

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Contents

1. Introduction	28
2. Literature Review	28
3. Methodology	29
4. Findings/Results	29
5. Discussion	30
6. Conclusion	31
7. Recommendations	31
8. Limitations	31
References	31

Contribution of this paper to the literature

This research provides significant perspectives of teaching presence and highlights the challenges and support that are inherent in online teaching. The study, in addition, could be a practical guide to organise and design distinctive post-Covid learning environment.

1. Introduction

Although digital transformation is not new, it is concerned as a challenging task in any educational level. In Thai higher education, the lack of understanding about the use of technology, online teaching and learning tools, and online evaluation and assessment is seen as a major issue affecting Thai educators across the country; meanwhile, changing teaching style from face-to-face to online is seen challenging. In some courses, it is found struggling like in a writing course where the feedback given to students was totally changed to online. According to the study by Tian and Zhou (2020) it revealed that teacher feedback plays an important role in improving student's English proficiency in an online writing course. While feedback could have unanticipated effects on students, online feedback could create even more effects to them.

During the pandemic, the instructional technology is serving as the only platform, a uniform online learning including instructional design, delivery and assessment platforms is required to ensure the quality of learning. However, it was found that there are the limitations in promoting suitable planning and design as well as instructional programs at the university level (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). This situation appears to be common in Thai higher education where lecturers were not well prepared while teacher training and teaching methodology for online learning were concerned as serious issues (Sanjaiprom, 2021). This paper discussed the impacts of COVID-19 towards teaching and learning management in a digital environment of Thai TESOL staff in the Thai tertiary level.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Online Context in Higher Education

Online learning (known as distance learning) has started more than decades and it is greatly employed by many universities and colleges. The course materials used to be predominantly text-based in the past, but they have since evolved to include a variety of technologies. By the use of technology, students and teachers are not physically in the same room and they can be at great distance which allow flexibility in teaching and learning including time management while student engagement is the key for success (Gudea, 2008; Paulsen & McCormick, 2020).

Online teaching and learning have now played a major role in higher education. Due to the situation of the pandemic COVID-19, universities must adopt and change their teaching and learning and provide an online environment to students. This leads to a rapid change of pedagogy in accordance with technology. According to Kim and Bonk (2006) there is an increasing trend of online learning over the past decades where universities try to integrate the use of online tools and online instructional strategies that encourage inquiry of learners. They mentioned that quality of online education is the key issue to ensure that universities can provide all necessities to meet the demands of learners including pedagogical aspect.

Not only face-to-face learning environment does reveal a supportive environment whether between teachers and students, as well as between teachers, but also online learning encourages collaborative learning, and faculty interaction (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020; Salas-Pilco, Yang, & Zhang, 2022). This is in accordance with the study by Kiattkheeree (2018) mentioning that interaction especially between teachers and students promotes well supportive learning environment. Additionally, it is seen that using technology in higher education allows face-to-face teaching approaches to virtual teaching which can be categorized into four aspects: 1) same time, same place, 2) different time, same place, 3) same time, different place, and 4) different time, different place (Coldeway, 1995). Redmond (2011) explained each aspect as followed:

1. Same time, same place – This employs many aspects from the traditional approach where the teachers and learners are in the same geographical location at the same time accessing to the same resources or having a discussion at the same time.
2. Different time, same place – This type allows more flexibility in which teachers and learners are in the same geographical location but choose the time to study.
3. Same time, different place – This aspect is seen suitable for students working independently so they have a class at the same time but it is allowed to be physically at any places.
4. Different time, different place – This aspect is seen as a complete move from traditional face-to-face approach where technology is fully used so teachers and students can decide to choose their own time and location to interact. This has changed the roles of both teachers and students to have flexible teaching and learning spaces.

2.2. Online Tools in Language Teaching

In order to deliver an online course, the use of various technologies is crucial. Online teaching platforms have been developed to facilitate the learning over the Internet. The emergency in remote learning caused by COVID-19 is occurred while universities worldwide have already adopted the online learning mode as part of their blended learning system. Learning Management Systems (LMS), also known as Course Management Systems are used widely in online courses. Teachers can manage the courses on the Web and it is considered to be safe and secure tools that universities have adopted in offering online courses (Singh, Mangalaraj, & Taneja, 2010). Also, technology such as online videos, Rich Site Summary/Really Simple Syndication (RSS), and Podcasts, Screen Capture, Blogs, Web Conference or Zoom are employed to facilitate teachers' teaching and enhance students' learning (Chaka, 2020; Singh et al., 2010; Son, 2011).

In the field of language teaching, there are many online tools used in any level. According to Son (2011) online tools for language learning activities can be classified into 12 categories as followed:

- 1) Learning/content management systems also known as component content management system (LMSs/CMSs): This is a platform that allows users to create, store and search libraries of content all in one location (Xyleme, 2023).
- 2) Communication (such as Windows Live, Messenger, Gmail).

- 3) Live and virtual worlds (Such as Elluminate, Livestream, ActiveWorlds).
- 4) Social networking and bookmarking (Such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter).
- 5) Blogs and wikis (Such as Edmodo, blogger, LiveJournal).
- 6) Presentation (Such as Prezi, Animoto, Empresser).
- 7) Resource sharing (Such as Dropbox, Flickr, MyPodcast).
- 8) Website creation (Such as Google sites).
- 9) Web exercise creation (Such as Hot Potatoes).
- 10) Web search engines (Such as Google, Yahoo, Bing).
- 11) Dictionaries and concordancers (Such as Howjsay, Merriam Webster Online).
- 12) Utilities useful for language learning (Such as Storybird, SurveyMonkey).

The literatures review the increasing use of technology in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of other languages while digital technologies have been used in the field of second or foreign language teaching for so long. [Hall and Knox \(2009\)](#) indicate that technologies, the globalization of English, and the marketisation of education allow TESOL teachers to various ways of teaching and learning. It has been seen that online video clips are used in a classroom to enhance the effectiveness of teaching English and promote students' engagement ([Muniandy & Veloo, 2011](#)). [Hafner, Chik, and Jones \(2013\)](#) assert the importance of technologies in teaching and learning English where social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube are applied in the TESOL. According to [Shin \(2017\)](#) online education in TESOL has also brought some changes whether it be pedagogical context, teacher's role, and interaction between teachers and learners which increase active participation along with diverse pedagogical interests and different perceptions of collaborative work.

2.3. Teachers' Roles in Online Teaching

However, the COVID-19 has raised an urgent issue for universities to move online unexpectedly and immediately that has caused many problems for those who involved. The literature found that university staff were struggling to balance their work and life especially their lack of the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) necessary for online teaching ([Ching, Hsu, & Baldwin, 2018](#); [Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2006](#); [Kali, Goodyear, & Markauskaite, 2011](#); [Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia, & Koole, 2020](#); [Shulman, 1987](#)).

Additionally, it is appeared that teaching staff struggle to adjust their role changing from face-to-face to online and that brings misalignment of their expectations towards online teaching and learning management ([Bork & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2013](#)). In addition, empowering teachers to teach online, including promoting their critical reflection along with applying technology into teaching are seen as crucial factors to effective teaching ([Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011](#); [Yao, Rao, Jiang, & Xiong, 2020](#)). Therefore, the study of online education in the higher education is an important and emerging issue.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study employs qualitative case study as the major method to obtain the data to provide useful insights on this newly emerging topic, teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

The participants were university lecturers who were selected according to their experience in the field of both traditional and online teaching and learning. Three main criteria were applied regarding their academic status, educational background, and teaching experience. These criteria aimed to ensure that each participant could provide useful insights based on their own educational and teaching experiences so the researcher could obtain significant data relevant to the research questions.

Data analysis together with semi-structured interviews were employed as the major investigating tools to allow the several voices to emerge. Each participant will be interviewed one time. To obtain the in-depth data in accordance with the research study and its purposes, the interviews were based on the two research questions as followed:

1. What are teachers' perceptions towards traditional learning and online learning?
2. What makes online teaching and learning successful?

3.3. Analyzing of Data

Data obtained from interviews was analyzed using cross-case analysis regarding [Miles and Huberman \(1994\)](#). This cross-case analysis will allow the researcher to consider cases (lecturers teaching English) to see similarities, differences, and unique themes that cut across cases.

4. Findings/Results

4.1. Traditional vs. Online Teaching

The first researched question was addressed here by presenting the participating lecturers' perception towards both traditional and online teaching. It is interesting to note that participating lecturers indicated their perception towards traditional and online learning differently.

It is appeared that participants viewed traditional learning as the way teachers taking a main role to manage the learning and deliver contents in a form of lecture. One participant commented, "It [teaching] is a kind of lecture and rote-learning". Another asserted, "Teaching is lecture-based and drill is a technique teachers apply in class". However, one participant seemed to discuss teachers' role in traditional learning differently. It is said that, "teachers can be a facilitator who provides help and support especially when students practice the lesson within the classroom".

When compared their perceptions towards online learning, all participants revealed online learning as a new significant way to deliver the lesson. It is somewhat surprising that participants did not see their role changed, they identified their role as 'to give lecture via online platforms'. Generally, participants viewed online learning as a normal classroom where students and teachers can meet and exchange information. One participant cited that "online learning is good because we can still teach our students even though we cannot go to the classroom". Another

informed that online learning allows teachers to manage time of learning flexibly with various tools, saying that “online learning falls into two categories which are synchronous learning and asynchronous learning so students can learn in real time or anytime”.

One unanticipated finding was that participating lecturers tend to worry about the assessment when learning thorough online system. Despite the favor of using online tools and receiving students’ attention, participants stated that they could not evaluate students’ performances effectively. One participant mentioned, “it is difficult to evaluate the students’ as we don’t really know that tasks were done by them [students] or someone else... there are so many factors that teachers cannot fully assess and evaluate students’ works”.

However, their perception towards teaching role seems diverse. While some of participants mentioned their roles as a facilitator in a traditional learning, some concerned their key role as only giving a lecture in online learning. One stated that “I could not observe or give consultation to the class like in the normal classroom, even though there are many platforms to engage students like Facebook but it is hard to manage the class in terms of facilitating students”. On the other hand, another found that teaching online enables teaching staff to create more materials, apply further teaching techniques and strategies. For example, one participant identified, “I have been focusing more on creating materials including audio and some webpages”. At the same time, talks and online feedbacks were given to enhance students’ proficiency. Undeniably, changing a normal classroom to online, all the process has a great impact on learning management, particularly roles of teachers.

4.2. Challenges with Online Learning

The second research question in relation to promoting online learning was addressed here. When participants were asked about factors influencing successful online learning, they indicated a list of possible factors to the successful online learning as follows.

Surprisingly, online learning seems to be successful for own sake. Comparing to a traditional classroom, the attendance of students increased significantly as online learning suits their learning style, one saying “Students attended the class 100% because it is appropriate to their lifestyle to use technology in every day of life”. Not only online learning itself encourages students to attend the class, its function also facilitates learning effectively. One participant commented “Google, email, Facebook ... there are many platforms to ease learning, then it’s up to us (lecturers) whether we know how to use it properly or not”.

In terms of teaching, the use of online materials is crucial in promoting effective online learning. In some classes, especially non-English major students, lecturers are required to motivate students to engage in the lesson, especially in speaking. One participant said “They (non-English major students) avoided speaking English via online, not only about the lesson but also interaction with the class, I have to motivate them with more tools and materials”. Although participants mentioned a variety of online tools were used like Google form or YouTube, one argued that they need more reliable tools and resources, saying that “We need more valid tools to help out our students, right now we use what we have like in a traditional classroom and turn them to online with a question in mind whether they [materials] are appropriate or not”.

One important factor to a successful online learning that all participants indicated is giving feedback. Both group feedback and individual feedback were mentioned as a key to enhance students’ learning while participants believed that feedbacks should be given regularly to meet the learning outcomes. One participant emphasized “When students present given tasks, real time feedbacks are important to help students improve their learning”, another asserted “positive feedbacks should be used throughout the lesson with both individual and group in online learning”.

5. Discussion

The present study revealed significant data in which traditional classrooms and online classrooms are overlapped in some aspects. It seems clear that participating lecturers defined traditional learning as a learning in a real classroom where methods of teaching can be slightly different, but generally, they are lecture-based. However, the findings indicated positioning of teachers’ role in two major roles: a lecturer and a facilitator. Under the traditional learning, participating lecturers maintained their role by giving lecture as the circumstances in traditional learning enable them to have authority to control the classroom including teaching contents, teaching materials, or the right of speech; and be the center of knowledge (Wang, 2019). At the same time, the participants viewed themselves to be the facilitator of knowledge in traditional learning.

Even though the participants did not identify themselves as a facilitator in online learning, they employed facilitation strategies, for example online discussion, online feedback, teaching materials which requires them to act as a facilitator. The present findings seem to be consistent with the previous literature that instructors teaching online should be actively engaged as a facilitator by employing facilitation strategies like online discussion or multimedia content (Muir, Douglas, & Trimble, 2020; Paulsen & McCormick, 2020).

However, the participating lecturers showed positive attitude towards traditional learning. This is in accordance with the study by Shambour and Abu-Hashem (2022) it has shown that there were numbers of university lecturers from many countries who favored in-class teaching over online teaching. According to the participating lecturers, online learning was unlikely to be pleasant. Due to the COVID-19 disruption, participants had to adopt online learning to continue the learning process. This rapid change had been seen as a problem to participants in which they found it was hard to teach and employ tools, and they mentioned their concern over the quality of their lesson including assessment in online classes. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Nambiar (2020) who suggested that face-to-face classroom enables teachers to observe and adjust their teaching immediately because teachers can see the whole classroom including student’s body language and some non-verbal cues.

While participants viewed online learning challenging, they believed online learning is a powerful tool to deliver effective lessons. The findings revealed the level of students’ attendance was high due to their familiarity in the use of online tools. This finding is in agreement with Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Eteokleous, and Stylianou-Georgiou (2022) findings which showed that university students viewed online platforms and the remote learning as easy to use. Online learning, therefore, can promote the engagement of students.

In addition to the usability of online platforms, teaching online requires online materials as an opportunity to promote successful learning. However, participants questioned the validity of teaching tools, and there are some possible explanations for this result. First, IT literacy and skills affect the success of online learning. Regarding Xiong and Mok (2020) it is important to assess whether or not online learning meets the expectation of students where IT literacy and skills of both instructors and students play an important role to effectiveness of online learning. By this it means that the more lecturers possess IT skills, the more they make use of the advantages of online platforms and online materials.

Apart from IT literacy and skills needed, support from institutions could affect the lecturers to employ appropriate tools especially for evaluation. Education institutions, therefore, should involve technological transformation to virtual education in order to provide digital methodologies that engage students more actively in digital learning contexts, tools, and assessment methods (García-Morales, Garrido-Moreno, & Martín-Rojas, 2021; Krishnamurthy, 2020). In the current context, there are variety of online tools available for free, at the same time, there are many good assessment tools for sale. As the time constraint during the pandemic, creating own tools would be less possible in terms of validity and reliability, the use of available tools is a good alternative. Ultimately, limited access to prepaid assessment tools should be sorted out by the institutions.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed significant factors that online classes can be better than traditional classes. Although participating lecturers seemed to perceive the face-to-face or traditional classes are manageable, they mentioned their positive attitude towards online teaching. Lecturers' roles and readiness are the main key role in promoting positive learning environment. Traditional classrooms to their perception, is referred to the setting where everyone meets in person within a fixed time and place and its image is familiar to lecturers in the current context. Online classroom, on the other hand, is perceived to require a radical change regarding communication style, summative assessments, and content delivery; lesson plans, teaching materials, and relevant technology are mandatory for running an online course. Lecturers must adjust their roles to fit properly in the contexts. In addition, readiness of the lecturers is important to promote effective learning when the learning environment has changed, in this case, into online learning. And this consequently has affected the effectiveness of online learning.

7. Recommendations

The change of teaching and learning circumstances has brought many concerns among educators and they are required to adjust themselves to fit in the changing context. The lecturers, in this case, need to acquire and open for changing concept of the classroom from face-to-face to online learning. Further, IT literacy and skills should be part of their teaching capacity as online learning is mentioned as a very effective method to carry on their teaching. The institution, therefore, should support the learning process and facilitate the lecturers whether the tools or the course to prepare their staff for online teaching.

Further research is also required to explore more on the application of online learning in order to create more strategies to facilitate the instructions both in different situations (not only during the pandemic) and different contexts where practices differ in each country.

8. Limitations

This study has some limitations, and its findings should be interpreted with caution. Due to a small sample size, the findings may not accurately represent the voice of lecturers teaching English in Thailand. Moreover, the findings are specific to the Thai higher education context and cannot be applied to higher education globally. Also, this study only presents lecturers' experiences and perspectives, leaving out students' experiences and challenges in both traditional learning and online learning.

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