




Emergency remote teaching and learning in a language and intercultural communication program during the “new normal” in Thai higher education

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore how and the extent to which faculty staff and postgraduate students perceived and responded to the transformation from face-to-face to emergency remote teaching and learning during the “new normal” circumstances in higher education due to the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic globally. This case study focused on a group of ten faculty staff and fourteen postgraduate students in a Master of Arts Program in Language and Intercultural Communication at a research-based university in Thailand. Drawing upon the data from the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews conducted virtually, the findings, informed by Akabana et al.’s (2021) emergency remote teaching (ERT), revealed four key components, including faculty staff, postgraduate students, instructional practices, and institutional support. Faculty staff put efforts into adapting themselves to the “new normal” teaching environment without hesitation to upskill themselves in educational technology in order to meet the postgraduate students’ learning needs. Although these four components of ERT are interlinked and overlapped with one another, they play a crucial role not only in postgraduate studies, but also research in the fields of language and intercultural communication studies. The “next normal” future for higher education in a post-pandemic era is to consider the positive solutions of the “new normal” experience during the emergency response period as a basis for reimagining and redesigning curriculum and instructional practices, as well as institutional support in terms of academic, social, and psychological dimensions for faculty staff and students. This study benefits curriculum designers, policymakers, teacher educators, and educational researchers to navigate the current crisis and prepare for the “next normal” higher education at national and global levels in the post-pandemic future.

Keywords: COVID-19; emergency remote teaching and learning; higher education; new normal; next normal

1. Introduction

Online teaching and learning for both hybrid and blended learning has increasingly gained importance when compared against traditional face-to-face classroom instruction in postsecondary education as it is cost-effective and beneficial for students’ academic achievements, and practical for professional development (Nguyen, 2015). Higher education institutions should not only plan and improve curricula by providing online courses that can respond to students’ needs, but also develop

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faculty members' online teaching techniques that can yield desirable outcomes for students (Singh & Hurley, 2017).

However, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, its unprecedented impacts have forced higher education institutions to take immediate responses by social distancing and transforming from physical classroom instruction to emergency remote teaching and learning that can, to some extent, maintain the quality education and positive sociopsychological aspects for all students at various levels. According to Aristovnik et al. (2020), a global survey suggests that although university students were satisfied with faculty staff and their universities' support, they lacked computer skills, were burdened by an increasing workload, and experienced adverse emotional effects that constrained them from improving their academic performance in this educational transformation.

There have been an increasing number of studies regarding the pandemic-driven effects on higher education institutions in different aspects and on various scales. On a global scale, Aristovnik et al. (2020) explain that the pandemic affects various dimensions of higher education students' academic practices (e.g. online lectures, closed libraries, changed communication channels for teachers' and administrative support, new assessment methods, different workloads, and performance levels), socioeconomic status (e.g. graduate unemployment, financial anxiety, future education, and career prospects), psychological health (e.g. fears, frustrations, anxiety, anger, boredom), and personal lifestyles (e.g. returning home, staying indoors, no physical contacts with friends, and no traveling).

In Europe, based on Damşa et al.'s (2021) survey of university teachers in Norway in the first month of the COVID-19 lockdown, despite the struggles and resistance caused by insufficient digital competence and institutional support, teachers' agency sought to overcome the challenges through self-help and peer support by adopting online teaching practices under the constraining circumstances. Similarly, in the Middle East, Aziz Ansari et al. (2021) conducted a survey in the health sciences programs in Saudi higher education institutions and found that students were satisfied with the new normal e-learning process; and thus, the faculty staff had to utilize electronic resources and the development in educational technology that could actively engage students to facilitate effective teaching and learning during COVID-19.

In Asia, China for instance, the survey results of Sun et al. (2020) state that COVID-19 had transformed traditional classroom teaching into innovative course content, modern educational technology and efficient management by seeking international collaboration and sharing experiences, knowledge and resources to establish global online higher education network. ICT-enhanced solutions may help facilitate online and blended learning that has become a new normal during and beyond the pandemic (Wang, 2021). Although Southeast Asian higher education particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Thailand, did not suffer badly from the first waves in 2020 and in the first quarter of 2021, Thailand's Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI) has prohibited the re-opening of universities for the second year running (Yamin et al., 2021).

Since April 2021, Thailand, especially, has been severely affected by an escalating COVID-19 wave caused by the more highly transmissible Delta variant that has led to significantly increasing casualties (Biswas, 2021). Following months-long nationwide lockdowns demanded by MHESI, Thai higher educational institutions were forced to close temporarily and implement emergency online education to substitute traditional classroom instruction, which has resulted in an urgent shift in faculty staff's instructional approaches to the field of language studies, language teacher education, and intercultural communication. For example, Thumvichit (2021) investigates Thai university teachers whose agentic actions enabled them to substitute onsite classroom teaching to an interactive online environment by implementing social media platforms and developing appropriate pedagogical

practices to meet the new normal education for undergraduate students in English programs. Facebook, for instance, can be a useful online channel for promoting teacher-student interactions as Inpeng and Nomnian (2020) suggest the integration of educational technologies and online media in English language teacher education program during the COVID-19 global pandemic crisis.

These aforementioned studies drew on a quantitative or mixed-methods research design that aimed to represent a wider group of stakeholders, especially teachers and students at an undergraduate level, without much attention paid to gaining insights into these stakeholders' perceptions and responses to this "new normal" instruction at a postgraduate level. According to Bozkurt and Sharma (2020a), the term "normal" is a relative term with various interpretations and derivations depending on different contexts. As they put it:

"One's new normal can be someone else's normal, or one's normal could have hitherto been a new normal for someone else. Likewise, normal and new normal for some can be the next normal for others. These derivations of normal suggest that we are experiencing an unprecedented time, one marked by major shifts in the way we understand and interpret different areas of life, not least of all education, which has and will continue to undergo changes, particularly in the way we teach and learn" (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020a, p.i).

This study employs the notion of "new normal" as a way to address the key issues by undertaking immediate solutions available to overcome the current COVID-19 crisis. Emergency remote teaching or re-engineered distance education has emerged as it not only focuses on academic content delivery, but also emphasizes psychological support for learners through an empathetic approach (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020b). The "next normal", on the other hand, is not a destination, but a contextualized process consisting of a series of continuous actions and contingency plans to reimagine and redesign curriculum and instruction to meet the next demands of higher education institutions (Cahapy, 2020). In this study, the "new normal" addresses current educational crises, while the "next normal" requires collaboration and preparation from all educational stakeholders, particularly faculty staff and students, who are key agents of change in Thai higher education.

Examining perspectives of faculty staff and postgraduate students regarding pandemic-driven online teaching and learning has, therefore, become an emerging research topic among researchers in Thai higher education. There is, however, relatively less attention paid to it in language and intercultural communication programs. To narrow down this gap, this study employs a qualitative case study method by utilizing open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with faculty staff and postgraduate students in a Master of Arts Program in Language and Intercultural Communication at a Thai university. This study aims to learn about their "new normal" experiences and propose solutions for overcoming challenges in their emergency remote teaching and learning amid and beyond the pandemic waves. This study also hopes to offer some "next normal" practical recommendations to promote this transformation from emergency remote teaching and learning into blended-learning modes for both postgraduate students and faculty staff to anticipate and meet future educational needs. The implications of this study will benefit curriculum designers, policymakers, and teacher educators in developing appropriate pedagogical alternatives for current and future curricula and instructional solutions.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical framework of this study is mainly underpinned by Akbana et al.'s (2021) findings related to emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic, which were based on a qualitative document analysis of research publications on foreign/second language teaching and

learning at a tertiary level published in internationally-indexed journals in Web of Science (WoS) and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases between 1 January and 28 October 2020.

As an urgent response to a state of the COVID-19 crisis, ERT has been established to distinguish it from other planned practices of online teaching and learning. Prior to COVID-19, online teaching and learning, also known as distance or web-based education, was conducted over the Internet with the aim of transforming traditional face-to-face classes into fully online, web-based courses (Sadiku et al., 2018). Although online courses benefit students and staff by being easily accessible and offering opportunities to embrace new technologies that promote independent and self-regulated learning, potential barriers exist in the form of student disengagement, work-life imbalance, difficulties for students working full-time, and technological challenges (Roddy et al., 2017). In the context of COVID-19, ERT represents a sudden shift for teachers and students from physical to virtual by gaining temporary access to online instruction and education that is delivered in a prompt and reliable manner to address the disruptive challenges posed by this emergency (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020).

In this present study, ERT can thus be viewed as a contingency option that can immediately respond to the changing nature of instruction from one that is classroom-based and face-to-face to one in which the teaching and learning is undertaken remotely without much time for faculty staff and students to prepare due to social and physical distancing policies and the national lockdowns ordered by university authorities, provincial governor, and MHESI. Other regular forms of online teaching, on the other hand, can be properly planned, designed, and developed by faculty staff and educational technology experts to meet students' learning objectives. Akbana et al.'s (2021) ERT concept is relevant to this present study in terms of ontological and epistemological positions regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on Thai higher education transformation with reference to the key components, including faculty staff, postgraduate students, instructional practices, and institutional support in the MA Program in Language and Intercultural Communication.

It is important to note that both teachers and students can overcome instructional challenges when they receive sufficient support from governmental authorities, schools or peers and thereby earn further benefits from already acquired digital skills and a well-equipped technical infrastructure (Akbana et al., 2021). ERT practices are underpinned by social injustice, inequity and divergent access to digital resources and instructional skills as negative contributing factors, as well as the emerging educational roles of parents and the psychological effects exerted by ERT on various stakeholders. Thus, a pedagogy of care, affection and empathy is required via various assessment methods coupled with ethical and privacy considerations due to the risk of online surveillance (Akbana et al., 2021).

Drawing upon Akbana et al.'s (2021) study, four key components are identified and presented in Figure 1. Each component will be explained next.

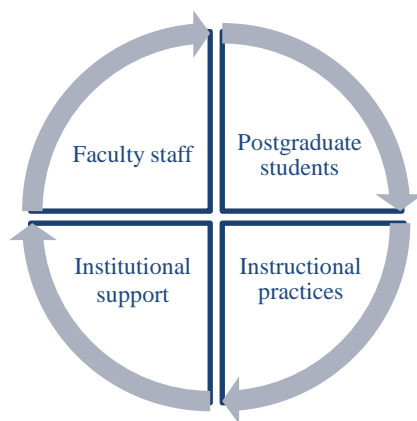


Figure 1. Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning during the “New Normal” (Adapted from Akbana et al., 2021)

First of all, faculty staff play an essential role in ERT that not only deals with teachers’ pedagogical practices, student assessment, and materials selection and development, but also concerns ERT-driven challenges that teachers are required to overcome by undertaking professional development in digital literacy skills, creativity, problem-solving skills, and autonomy, all of which can be accomplished through institutional support. It is, however, important to acknowledge that technical constraints and limited Internet accessibility can limit the use of ERT as teachers may not be fully equipped with sufficient knowledge and computer skills to deliver their lessons online as effectively as they would like to (Akbana et al., 2021). Through institutional support and professional development, faculty staff can become confident that their use of ERT will meet their instructional needs and help them deliver quality lessons online throughout the lockdown periods.

Secondly, postgraduate students are affected by faculty staff’s ERT directly and indirectly. Similar to teachers, effective use of ERT requires students to possess sufficient technical equipment and/or Internet connectivity for functionality, on top of an adequate level of digital literacy, creativity, autonomy, motivation, engagement, and problem-solving skills. Akabana et al. (2021) suggest that students not only find their teachers’ ERT positive and effective, but they also appreciate the safe and healthy learning environment that studying from home lends them as they do not need to travel. ERT remote instruction at home can benefit and empower disabled students as well. It is recommended that ERT be considered as an opportunity to improve study skills, develop digital literacy skills, create cultural awareness, and value instructional practices in ERT (Akabana et al., 2021).

Thirdly, instructional practices of ERT can be problematic as they serve the teaching of receptive skills, such as listening and reading, rather than productive skills, such as interpersonal communication and presentation. Instructional practices should incorporate digital tools and online platforms into lesson planning, actual practice, and assessment that can meet changing objectives and desired learning outcomes (Akabana et al., 2021). Creating interactive ERT can promote active learning for both teachers and students who will be reciprocally motivated and engaged in the lessons; and thus, both parties will find ERT positive and effective for learning language and intercultural communication.

Last but not least, institutional support can provide appropriate guidance, precautions, technical assistance, and Internet connectivity for both teachers and students who have become aware of the university policies with which they must comply. Recognized and supported by enlightened institutions, professional development has become increasingly important as it promotes quality teaching and effective learning (Akbana et al., 2021).

Although these four components are viewed as mutually exclusive, they are interrelated and interplayed with one another in the practices and challenges of ERT. For instance, concerning Thai higher education, although the majority of the university students still valued face-to-face classes and were not keen to learn online in the future, they strongly believed that their teachers made great efforts to give constructive advice and academic assistance despite the COVID-19 interruption (Im-saard, 2020). Cooperation between teachers and students can facilitate these changes becoming standard practice so as to attain optimal outcomes of learning during this COVID-19 disrupted adjustment in a Thai university (Satsin & Wongwiseskul, 2021). There is a significant correlation between familiarity with online learning tools and teachers' positive attitudes towards active online teaching, which can be promoted via teacher training and communication between teachers and information technology staff (Chandwani et al., 2021). According to Lei and So (2021), appropriate managerial, administrative, and pedagogical approaches taken by institutions are highly recommended to enhance the satisfaction of online teaching and learning among teachers and students. Perceptions of teachers and students towards ERT are, therefore, valuable as optimism and positive attitude can develop a mindset focused on growth, guide behaviors to seek opportunities to overcome the current crisis, and signal risks and uncertainties for the future.

3. Method

Drawing upon a case study qualitative research design, this study was conducted virtually as all participants were unable to meet each other face-to-face due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. Roberts et al. (2021) suggest that a virtual qualitative approach is appropriate during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis as it allows researchers and participants to overcome challenges in data collection whilst yielding a potentially high-quality, rigorous, ethical study through a virtual format. Although there were issues of methodological rigor in conducting this virtual study, the participants were willing to take part in data collection, fully understanding the constraints.

This present study draws upon a case study of a group of participants that included ten faculty staff and 14 postgraduate students in a Master of Arts Program in Language and Intercultural Communication at a leading research-based university located in Central Thailand. This 2-year MA program offered three majors – language teaching, translation, and intercultural communication for administration. It was aimed at producing graduates equipped not only with a foundation in language analysis, intercultural communication theories, communicative English, research design and practice, but also, depending on the chosen major, specialized in areas such as language teaching, translation, and intercultural communication for administration. They had to undertake either a thesis or a thematic paper to complete the program.

3.1. Participants

The participants were divided into two groups: faculty staff and postgraduate students. The faculty staff and students were from three different majors, namely intercultural communication for administration, translation, and language teaching (see Table 1).

Table 1. Faculty staff

Faculty staff	Academic position	Education background	Major
A	Program Chair Assistant Professor	PhD Business Administration	Intercultural Communication for Administration
B	Associate Professor	PhD Journalism Studies	Intercultural Communication for Administration
C	Assistant Professor	PhD Communication and Media	Intercultural Communication for

		Studies	Administration
D	Lecturer	PhD Interpersonal Communication	Intercultural Communication for Administration
E	Lecturer	PhD Interdisciplinary Studies	Intercultural Communication for Administration
F	Lecturer	MA Language and Culture for Communication and Development	Translation
G	Lecturer	PhD Translation Studies	Translation
H	Lecturer	PhD Translation Studies	Translation
I	Associate Professor	PhD Educational Technology	Language Teaching
J	Assistant Professor	PhD English Language Teaching	Language Teaching

There were 14 postgraduate students participating in this study, 11 of whom were majoring in intercultural communication for administration, two in translation, and one in language teaching. They were all in their first year. Most of them were recent graduates aged between 23-26 years old from various disciplines, including religious studies, language and culture, and music education.

According to the research ethics, the participants in this study were given the informed consent form prior to the data collection and their identities were kept highly confidential. The data collection and analysis will be elaborated in the next section.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Following approval by the Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University (IPSR-IRB COA. No. 2021/04-069), the data collection was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2020 from May-August 2021. Qualitative data collection face-to-face at an online venue by means of videoconferencing services can be convenient, cost-saving, efficient, and effective for both researchers and participants (Lobe et al., 2020).

This study employed an open-ended questionnaire (OEQ) and semi-structured interviews (SSI). Each tool will be explained in turn. The use of open-ended questionnaire aimed to explore the participants' satisfaction and dissatisfaction of emergency remote teaching and learning. According to Züll (2016), open-ended questions require participants to answer in their own words freely, orally or in writing so that their responses are authentic and reliable for analysis. The questionnaire topics were directed at their reactions to ERT in the MA program, including faculty staff, students, course content, learning materials and resources, learning management process, communication system, and information and communication technology network systems. They were delivered the questionnaire via email. All completed questionnaires were then returned to the researcher for further analysis.

Following completion of the open-ended questionnaire, each participant was contacted to arrange an individual online interview. An online semi-structured interview is flexible and interactive in nature, although it can lose visual and non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, body language, which normally would help facilitate the interview in a face-to-face context (Balushi, 2018).

The interview questions were as follows:

- 1) What were the advantages and disadvantages of emergency remote teaching and learning?
- 2) What impact did emergency remote teaching and learning have on your teaching and learning? Why?
- 3) How did emergency remote teaching and learning affect your interactions with other colleagues and other students and why?
- 4) How did emergency remote teaching and learning affect your research? Why?

5) How has emergency remote teaching and learning influenced/affected your identity as a faculty member, staff member, or postgraduate student? Why?

6) What are your views on the university's support and promotion of emergency remote teaching and learning courses?

7) In the next academic year, if there is no ongoing COVID-19 situation, will you opt to teach/learn via an online platform? Why?

8) Would you recommend others to apply for this program if online teaching and learning is still available?

9) What advice do you have regarding online teaching and learning in the “new normal” era?

The interviews were conducted via Cisco Webex online meeting platform. Online interviewing via videoconferencing platforms, such as Zoom and Webex, is valuable as it facilitates qualitative data collection that overcomes social distancing challenges (Lobe et al., 2020). The Thai language was used in the interview, which lasted between 30-45 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded and translated into English for transcription and analysis purposes. Thematic analysis was employed for both the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview in this study. Nowell et al. (2017) suggest that thematic analysis is a highly flexible approach that can be modified not only for providing a rich, detailed, and complex account of data, but also for examining the different perspectives of the participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating emerging insights. Using a qualitative methodology in this way, the researcher could employ a well-structured approach to manage a large data set to offer a summary of key findings.

4. Results and Discussion

Drawing upon Akbana et al.'s (2021) ERT components, this section presents and discusses the findings in terms of faculty staff, postgraduate students, instructional practices, and institutional support through qualitative data based on open-ended questionnaire (OEQ) written texts and semi-structured interview (SSI) transcripts obtained from faculty staff and postgraduate students in the MA Program in Language and Intercultural Communication. This will be elaborated on next.

4.1. Faculty staff

Faculty staff found ERT to be a positive solution to overcoming the disruption to their postgraduate study caused by COVID-19.

I am satisfied with teaching online because it reduces the time spent traveling to teach in the classroom. It is convenient for the teacher and students during the epidemic. It is also a communication tool that helps reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 virus.

(Program chair, OEQ)

Learning materials and learning resources are diverse and interesting, especially web applications that are easy to use.

(Assoc. Prof. I, OEQ)

Faculty staff also valued how ERT could be convenient, time-saving, and pandemic-free. ERT not only promoted health safety, but also supported positive attitudes held by both faculty staff and postgraduate students, as expressed by a lecturer and program chair.

As a faculty staff, I assume that the learners have the same level of physical and mental comfort.

(Lecturer F, OEQ)

Students appreciate the flexibility, freedom, and convenience, which make them feel less stressed and free from the risks associated with COVID-19.

(Program chair, SSI)

It is, however, important for teachers to become active in offering this ERT effectively. Hopefully, well-planned distance education can be expected in the near future as one lecturer suggested:

Faculty staff must be active in adapting their teaching methods to full distance education.

(Asst. Prof. J, OEQ)

One lecturer felt that one-on-one consultation on a student's thesis was effective even via an online platform.

I taught independent study. It was one-on-one teaching via online learning, allowing students to concentrate on learning and stay focused on the screen.

(Lecturer D, OEQ)

Even though all faculty staff had to find quick-fix solutions to overcome ERT challenges, some could adapt quicker than others, depending on their level of familiarity with the use of educational technology and Internet connectivity.

I admit that in the beginning I had no confidence in teaching online at all. I am not proficient in using technology. Therefore, it may cause concerns to change my teaching style.

(Lecturer F, OEQ)

Most of the teachers have to allow more time in each lesson than usual. Because of the interaction between teachers and learners or even between the students themselves, they will not follow in real time, such as in the case of inconsistent Internet signal or delay of speech, causing the need to be say something repeatedly in the original issue or missing important messages.

(Lecturer F, SSI)

By giving assignments in an online teaching situation, I have time to thoroughly review each student's assignments and can understand the learning potential of each student better than the combined learning in the classroom.

(Lecturer D, SSI)

One faculty staff who was keen on using educational technology could adopt various assessment tools to serve the course objectives.

I facilitate the management of online teaching. For example, if you want to take a multiple-choice test and want students to know the results of the answers immediately, I can use Google Forms to do it without having to create in MS Word.

(Assoc. Prof. I, SSI)

Google Classroom allows me to communicate with my students, provide them with my feedback, and share documents and assignments.

(Assoc. Prof. B, SSI)

Nevertheless, this faculty staff was not satisfied with the loss of students' interactions as he could not observe their non-verbal acts that could facilitate a better understanding when teaching face-to-face.

Teachers tend to feel a lack of interaction from students, such as lack of eye contact from students. This causes teachers to sometimes be unsure whether students understand what is being taught or not, even if the learners asked and received an answer. But non-verbal cues are reliable because if the

learner doesn't understand what is being explained, they often make facial expressions unconsciously. But when teaching online, it may not be possible to check these things.

(Assoc. Prof. I, SSI)

I must work hard to keep the attention of the students to focus on the lesson. There must be a 10-minute break every hour to relax the learners and teachers themselves.

(Lecturer E, OEQ)

Despite the benefits of ERT during the “new normal” situation, distance education should be expected for the “next normal” one as it can be planned and delivered in a more appropriate manner.

Instead of waiting for the situation to return to normal, it is now emergency remote education by using video conferencing applications to manage learning to substitute classroom learning only. The distance learning community has not yet been established.

(Asst. Prof. J, SSI)

These faculty staff's effort of ERT was appreciated by their students who had a total understanding of how much difficulties these sudden shifts from physical classroom teaching to an online mode could be.

The lecturers have a strong intention to teach because it requires many skills to explain lessons to us.

(Language teaching student, OEQ)

The teachers adapted to the changing situation of COVID-19 by changing their teaching style from sitting in the classroom to online as well. They are able to provide knowledge to students clearly.

(Intercultural Communication for Administration student, OEQ)

Personally, quite satisfied. Each teacher tried to manage the teaching in accordance with the online learning style and also pay attention to the details of teaching so that students were enthusiastic in studying and understanding the content being taught. They periodically asked us to discuss during teaching or organizing activities

(Translation student, SSI)

In this study, faculty staff delivered their course content, comprising PowerPoint, texts, images, audios, videos, and other multimedia items, via Webex screen, emails, or Google Classroom, depending on their digital skills and preferences. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), influenced by effective learning experiences and supportive learning environments via digital technologies should integrate social, cognitive, and psychological aspects, and alternative assessment approaches to learning should be applied in the post-pandemic era (Rapanta et al., 2020). Post-pandemic curricula should consider content knowledge, the students' learning experience, and teachers' instruction so as to stimulate creativity, critical thinking and problem solving on the part of both students and teachers (Mishra et al., 2020).

4.2. Postgraduate students

Postgraduate students in the MA program were required to undertake coursework as part of a degree completion and this corresponded to the period when data for this study was being collected. The participants demonstrated that they were able to adjust to ERT despite issues arising related to course content, teaching style, and the use of videoconferencing platform.

Both teachers and students were satisfied with emergency remote teaching and learning. The students' punctuality logging in bore witness to this, especially given that they had no need to travel to class; nor did they appear to lack an understanding of the online knowledge content.

The knowledge gained is not different from learning in the classroom and teachers adjust the teaching style to suit the changing context of the learners.

(Language teaching student, SSI)

Online learning saves time and is more convenient because to avoid the risk of catching COVID-19, we do not have to travel to university.

(Intercultural Communication for Administration student, OEQ)

Students are punctual and are well-prepared to study.

(Assoc. Prof. I, OEQ)

Learners can learn with no restrictions of time and place. The obvious advantage of online teaching is that students are more punctual in online attendance than in the classroom.

(Lecturer E, OEQ)

The program chair also believed that students did not miss opportunities to take part in relevant academic activities. Take-home examinations and presentations became the “new normal” forms of assessment since they could spend time preparing and researching online, and this constituted a desirable approach to self-study.

Students can attend webinars, give presentations, take examinations at home, and make online appointments without having to travel to the Institute.

(Program chair, OEQ)

Personally, I like online learning as it makes me feel less pressured when answering questions or giving presentations.

(Translation student, OEQ)

Students quickly realized that online learning was the most suitable method during the pandemic, they knew that they had to become more independent and agentic if they were expected to do research on their own. Some faculty staff agreed that the students had to become more autonomous in their studies.

Students can find plenty of sources of knowledge online; yet, I have found that they are not motivated enough to do so.

(Lecturer G, OEQ)

Students need to adjust their learning attitude. They shouldn't wait to be spoon-fed. They need to become an autonomous and take responsibility for their own learning. There is no need to wait for the instructor to direct them in every subject.

(Asst. Prof. J, OEQ)

Switching off a camera, however, was a major issue for both students and faculty staff. One student noticed that some of their colleagues would switch off their camera, meaning the faculty staff would not know whether they were listening or not.

Some students didn't pay attention to study and turned off the camera. So, the atmosphere in the room was like a teacher doing a talk show.

(Intercultural Communication for Administration student, OEQ)

Faculty staff also found camera-off students disturbing as they were unsure whether the students were paying attention.

Some students turn off their cameras and may not be able to concentrate on studying all the time.

(Program chair, SSI)

Students sometimes turned off the camera. I could not see the reaction of the students or whether they were paying attention to their studies or not. I had to tell students to turn on the camera. Online learning sometimes introduced external interferences during teaching that caused students to lose concentration.

(Lecturer E, OEQ)

It is important to note that the students' home environment might not necessarily be conducive and motivating enough for some students to learn in. Students also felt that they did not want their private life and surroundings on display to others and opted for a virtual background to hide inappropriate home views.

Personally, I don't like online learning because it makes me feel less enthusiastic compared to normal learning. Classroom environment actually affects my enthusiasm for learning with classmates and teachers. When it comes to online learning at home in an environment where students are relaxed and less disciplined, they feel that they can act more casually, which is the reason why they lack enthusiasm.

(Translation student, OEQ)

Some teachers were worried about the loss of teacher-student communication that could widen gaps in the students' motivation and attention to learning.

There is a high chance that communication may fail. In a normal classroom, teachers are so familiar with their students that they can read their body language (look at their faces, look into their eyes and understand what they are thinking). Interpretation of body language can be inaccurate, which may affect understanding at all levels between learners and teachers.

(Lecturer F, OEQ)

Because learners do not meet their instructors in person in the course of the lesson, instructors should add a variety of contact channels such as social media applications.

(Asst. Prof. J, SSI)

The program urged the use of LINE to ease communication with students for keeping in touch and staying updated with program announcements.

There is no obstacle at all because we use LINE groups for interacting and talking with each other effectively.

(Program chair, OEQ)

All kinds of multimedia presented on websites, including still images, animations, audio, and video will stimulate learners' interests. Multimodality of various content via links to other sources of knowledge can broaden and deepen the scope of learning. To develop multimodal platforms to meet course content objectives for effective learning outcomes, an infrastructure of reliable communication tools, high quality digital software, and ICT-enhanced learning experiences must be ensured in order to bridge the interruption to education caused by COVID-19 (Mishra et al., 2020). The benefits of online teaching include improvement in teaching efficiency because it is not geographically restricted; and thus, distance education helps bridge the gap between traditional classroom teaching and remote online learning. Despite its high flexibility, online learning requires learner autonomy, responsibility, and discipline for self-study.

Postgraduate students were satisfied with emergency remote learning. Yet, they had to develop learner autonomy as they were postgraduate students who had to do research independently. In addition, some of them were not ready to switch on their cameras as they may have wanted to retain

their privacy while learning at home. Developing trust between faculty staff and students might be a way to ameliorate this issue. Faculty staff sought to secure their students' attention while the students would like to keep their homes free from prying eyes. Thus, both parties might need to discuss and share their viewpoints to form a consensus. Communication via other social apps such as LINE could help both parties to comply with social distancing ordinances and enable them to keep one another informed.

4.3. Instructional practices

Instructional practices were instrumental in ERT as teachers had to adopt various means to deal with the seriousness of the situation, and at first, some faculty staff took their time to respond to the urgency.

I was not ready and adaptable enough at the initial stage of this emergency remote teaching, especially assigning and submitting homework.

(Lecturer G, OEQ)

Teaching on certain topics, teachers may need more time to teach and modify the teaching and learning process. Some found it difficult to assess whether students understood or not during online teaching as many students turned off their cameras. Teachers could only communicate with one person at a time, which might limit some communicative activities.

(Program chair, SSI)

One translation lecturer had to become a multi-tasker who used various functions and skills to ensure that the lesson was well-delivered.

In online teaching, I find it extremely challenging to perform multiple tasks. At the same time, for example, I have to be careful not to forget to press recording. I not only share information on the screen and teaching, but also observe students and listen to them. Then I must answer them and prepare to share new information.

(Lecturer F, SSI)

Technical errors were, however, unavoidable, and that caused students to become disengaged from lessons. Possible solutions were considered through the use of other online platforms.

Often there are technical difficulties such as opening a video and the student cannot see the picture or hear the sound. Or the picture is not clear or the animation is slower than the sound causing the student's interest to decrease.

(Assoc. Prof. I, SSI)

Students are not active while studying through video conferencing application. Interaction between teachers and students is minimal compared to normal classroom learning, causing the students to be unaware of the problems.

(Asst. Prof. J, SSI)

When there is a problem with the Internet network, it is necessary to use other formats such as VDO call or LINE, whichever is preferable for all parties.

(Lecturer F, OEQ)

Although ERT was suitable for lectured courses in which faculty staff did not have to demonstrate any process, some practical courses or field trips were not able to be done remotely. The program chair raised this issue, giving statistics for postgraduate studies.

Some issues that require practice, such as the use of statistical programs, may not be able to do like in a face-to-face classroom.

(Program chair, OEQ)

Because of the need to adjust the practical content or self-learning, such as field trips, I have to find another learning format. It has a significant impact on subjects that require on-site study visits such as cinemas and museums.

(Lecturer F, SSI)

The program chair strongly believed that it was time for the program to consider distance education as the “next normal” approach to postgraduate studies, and that pre-planned courses and materials could be developed and delivered appropriately. Postgraduate students could be supervised on an individual basis via a one-on-one online supervision.

Learning materials and learning resources for self-study should be produced for students. Supervision and research consultation should aim for full distance teaching.

(Program chair, OEQ)

“New normal” instructional practices were well-adapted and well-received by the faculty staff, who had to utilize existing online tools to meet learning objectives during the crisis. Some hands-on courses and physical site visits were, however, impossible. Thus, distance education and online supervision can be considered for the “next normal” practices in this postgraduate program.

Instruction needs to be geared towards more interactive platforms to gain students’ attention and win their motivation for learning. For these reasons, an online mode of education has recently gained popularity worldwide as a result of the pandemic. ERT can provide an opportunity for faculty staff to reflect on their existing skills, improve, and adapt their pedagogical approach to meet the instructional needs of students by becoming more familiar with the latest educational technologies and integrating them into their online lesson plans (Nworie, 2021). In this study, online teaching and learning conducted via the Internet not only provided quick access without the need to travel, but also facilitated the creation of high-quality learner-centered interactive education. Postgraduate students could choose to study according to their own preferences. Lekhakula (2021) suggests that Thai university students are caught in a “VUCA” world, characterized by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. Institutional support is, therefore, vital in order to establish the “next normal” in higher education in Thailand.

4.4. Institutional support

Institutional support was needed by both postgraduate students and faculty staff for different reasons. First of all, the postgraduate students had to do research both online and onsite. Yet, the library was closed temporarily and they could not borrow books and spend time looking for theses in the library at the early stage of the lockdown. Later, the university arranged for the library to provide a book and thesis delivery and pick-up service so that postgraduate students could do the literature reviews and research required of their course.

The library has a system for borrowing and returning books without having to travel to the university.

(Language teaching student, OEQ)

I would normally assign students to research books, journals, and dissertations in the Institute’s library. But when it comes to online teaching, they have to adjust a lot by trying to find more resources

online. To make it easier for students, I have to contact the library to schedule an appointment to pick up books or let the library send them to students by post.

(Lecturer E, SSI)

There are restrictions on access to academic and research publications. For example, in the case of libraries of some educational institutions, there is no e-thesis system available for academic years prior to 1997 or no textbooks from abroad in the form of e-books. This has an impact on the provision of academic and research materials to learners. Because it takes special cases and human resources to solve such problems, the institute's library has to instead coordinate special arrangements for borrowing and delivering textbooks and theses to students by mail in order to solve immediate problems in time according to the teaching schedule.

(Lecturer F, SSI)

In addition, the library also provided online data bases that could be accessed by staff and students.

Because the university already has an online database system for students, it is not different from teaching in the classroom. Therefore, students can study and do research remotely.

(Program chair, SSI)

To facilitate ERT for both teachers and students, the university should provide a stable Internet package and more reliable online options besides Webex.

Educational institutions should consider supporting students with equipment used in online teaching and high-speed Internet network.

(Asst. Prof. J, OEQ)

The Institute's Internet connection was not stable; and that led to technical errors and noises.

(Translation student, OEQ)

Webex is not suitable for emergency remote teaching as its functions are for meeting rather than teaching.

(Lecturer G, OEQ)

Most of the learning process arrangements are not diverse because of the limitations of the Webex program. Therefore, I usually can only describe the content, ask questions, discuss and let students do exercises. I will not see much of the process of students' thinking and learning behaviors.

(Assoc. Prof. I, OEQ)

Apart from hardware and software, IT skills should be enhanced for faculty staff because they need to reskill and upskill with modern educational technology. Alternative pedagogical approaches to meet ERT practices not only benefit “new normal” circumstances, but also embrace “next normal” solutions. Professional development can assist faculty and staff in delivering effective courses as well as recognizing the future potential for distance education in the post-pandemic era.

Operations depend on each instructor's IT skills. If it is a serious model in the “new normal” era, there should be formal training on online teaching skills for teachers from planning online teaching to using different programs in communication system appropriately.

(Lecturer D, SSI)

Sometimes teachers are not proficient in educational technology, and that causes some problems when teaching. I have to change my teaching method to allow students to participate in teaching and learning throughout each period.

(Lecturer E, SSI)

There may be workshops to help strengthen online teaching and learning skills for faculty staff to be able to use new tools that will help make teaching more interesting.

(Lecturer H, SSI)

Institutional support for both academic and social challenges among faculty staff and postgraduate students is vital. As universities play an essential role in students' satisfaction, policymakers in higher education should develop policies and strategies to support students during their current and future academic struggles (Aristovnik et al., 2020). In responding to the urgent need for emergency remote teaching and learning during the pandemic, higher education worldwide has recognized that the integrative use of ICT has fundamentally affected the teaching and learning experiences during lockdowns (Chan et al., 2021). In addition, Almendingen et al. (2021) suggest that although onsite teaching was preferred by the students, a well-planned online course with ample interactions between teachers and students would potentially become more favorable. Social challenges of ERT among teachers and students mainly caused by the lack of physical interpersonal communication lead to adverse psychological effects on their motivation and interactivity (Ferri et al., 2020).

To summarize, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a crisis for all stakeholders in higher education. However, it opens up new educational alternatives by not only reimagining and redesigning courses that can promote accessibility, equity, and inclusivity for all, but also enabling individuals to exert personal agency, resilience, and self-directed learning skills to overcome current face-to-face constraints and embrace future blended-learning modes (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020a). The COVID-19 crisis has brought together researchers, faculty staff, educators, and policymakers whose interests lie within the development of online teaching and learning, curriculum design, and the digitalization of higher education (Chan et al., 2021; Nworie, 2021).

5. Conclusions

This qualitative case study responds to the global emergency brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and its unprecedented impacts on teaching and learning in higher education worldwide. Drawing upon faculty staff's and postgraduate students' experiences and perceptions of emergency remote teaching and learning in the MA program in Language and Intercultural Communication at one research-based university in Thailand, the results informed by Akbana et al. (2021) consisted of four key components, including faculty staff, postgraduate students, instructional practices, and institutional support. These elements were interrelated and instrumental for transforming the "new normal" into the "next normal" higher education.

This study is relevant for not only researchers interested in exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on different aspects of faculty staff and postgraduate students in language and intercultural communication, but also program administrators and policymakers in recommending possible solutions for policy and pedagogical implications that can effectively support faculty staff and students during and beyond the pandemic. It highlights unexpected challenges and the lessons learned by postgraduate students and faculty staff to overcome the potential difficulties involved in developing effective instructional practices and institutional support.

Although this case study does not aim for generalization, the recommendations of ERT built on their insights and experiences hope to address issues of academic, social, and psychological connections between faculty staff and postgraduate students, which can vary from one context to another. Through the use of a virtual qualitative research method, future studies on the impact of COVID-19 on stakeholders should offer further development of "next normal," which is a means to an end, not an end in itself. "New normal" educational policies, processes, practices, and perspectives of all stakeholders in higher education worldwide can help successfully navigate the crisis, actively

empower students and faculty staff for 21st century skills and digital literacy, and gradually prepare for the “next normal” in the post-pandemic era.

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