



Leading and Teaching During Pandemic Uncertainties: Voices and Experience of Thai Liberal Arts Administrators-Instructors

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 necessitated an abrupt and unplanned transition from regular face-to-face classrooms to online platforms, creating unique advantages and constraints for liberal arts instruction in the Thai undergraduate context. While various studies (Kawinkoonlasate, 2020; Vanpetch & Sattayathamrongthian, 2020; Watson Todd, 2020) have explored the impact of pandemic disruption on teachers and learners, only a few have examined the issue from the viewpoints of Thai university administrators. This study investigates liberal arts administrators-instructors' experiences, perceptions, and challenges during the sudden shift to online learning and to report their thoughts on policy planning and potential possibilities for expanding foreign language instruction through affordances of online technology. The author interviewed ten administrators-instructors in a faculty of liberal arts of a Thai public research university: administrators (the dean, two associate deans, one assistant dean), four department chairs, and two curriculum committee members. Results showed that participants encountered a novel management experience, as they had to implement and continually revise contingency plans to handle three main challenges: the lack of infrastructure for online teaching, abrupt change in language teaching pedagogy, and dealing with students' concerns over mental health, study abroad, and internship. Moreover, the study results indicate that while administrators-instructors perceived emergency remote teaching (ERT) as a kairotic moment to integrate technology into their language classrooms, some also saw technology as a threat to job security. These findings suggest a need for administrators and instructors of liberal arts to develop faculty-wide critically innovative principles, policy, and approach to teaching that moves beyond the on-campus VS. off-campus dichotomy of course delivery toward a more fused course model and paradigm, regardless of the status or outcome of the pandemic.

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Introduction

Since March 2020, unprecedented and continual changes brought on by COVID-19 forced universities to migrate to emergency remote teaching (ERT), replacing the traditional face-to-face classroom with an on screen one. This rapid shift affected not only instructors and learners in terms of teaching and learning, but also in their wellbeing and personal lives. Instructors with limited technological competence and digital literacy were forced to immediately learn new IT skills and modify their instructional approaches, syllabi, and assessment practices to suit the virtual environment—without much prior planning or, in some instances, any training. Students had to evacuate from university premises and “enter class” through their mobile phones, tablets, or computer, leading some to struggle as a result of technological difficulties and limitations. Furthermore, some students had to adjust to the challenges of learning from home, which, for some, led to concerns about self-discipline, sense of isolation, and stress from competing household responsibilities (Bao, 2020). As a whole, problems instructors and students experienced varied from planning, focus, finance, technological difficulties, to pedagogical effectiveness and satisfaction. These challenges became a central concern of administrators of a faculty of liberal arts at a Thai public university, the focus of this study.¹ Leaders at the faculty and departmental levels were tasked with making fast decisions; acting quickly to manage educational communities; addressing the needs of students, teachers, staff, and society; communicating decisions and scenarios to the community; listening to issues; and solving problems based on feedback received from stakeholders (Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021). According to Gigliotti (2021), during the pandemic, leaders in higher education encountered more tension than usual because of dissatisfaction and uncertainties brought on by the pandemic; these tensions arose on top of challenges in higher education that pre-existed the outbreak. The pandemic has challenged administrators to exercise crisis leadership, apply strategic decisions making, develop ERT, and communicate their vision and plan clearly to shape short- and long-term strategies and, in turn, survival of their institution.

¹ In the Thai context, faculty refers to a college, not the academic staff.

In this article, I examine experiences, perceptions, and challenges of faculty of liberal arts' administrators of a Thai public research university during the first two waves of COVID-19 (March 2020 to March 2021)—the dean, vice deans, department heads, and curriculum committee members—to understand their policy implementation, pedagogical practices, and management of Emergency Remote Teaching (henceforth, ERT). As all participants are also foreign language instructors at their university, I also capture their outlook on the potential affordances and impact of online teaching on foreign language instruction in the Thai context. I demonstrate that during the first wave of the pandemic in March 2020, administrators-instructors encountered a novel management experience, as they had to continually implement and revise contingency plans to deal with three main challenges: the lack of infrastructure for online teaching, abrupt change in language teaching pedagogy as a result of migrating courses online, and handling concerns over student mental health, study abroad, and internship. Additionally, I show that while administrators-instructors were able to transition to ERT, and although they perceived online teaching as a kairotic moment to integrate technology into their foreign language classroom, some saw technology as a threat to job security. These findings, I contend, suggest the need for leaders and professors of faculty of liberal arts to develop critical and innovative vision, principles, and approach to language teaching that moves away from the on-campus VS. off-campus dichotomy of course delivery and traditional course expectation toward a more flexible blended/hybrid/flipped paradigm during the pandemic and beyond.

Understanding and capturing perspectives of administrators-instructors during COVID-19 is significant for four reasons. First, insights provided from this research can potentially help administrators navigate institutional challenges more strategically during uncertain times and capitalize on opportunities that emerged through the pandemic to redesign the future landscape of liberal arts education and foreign language pedagogy in the new normal and post-COVID-19 world. Second, examining administrators' experiences and viewpoints can offer examples of praxis for implementing future contingency plans, as new waves of COVID-19 and new pandemics might erupt unexpectedly. Third, investigating administrators' actions and perspectives provide a historical account about a major moment of disruption in higher education, which might be useful for scholars

seeking to examine institutional and administrative history. Finally, insights provided by this study may help teachers of the English language, as well as other foreign languages, make pedagogical adjustments and plans during and after the pandemic.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at a faculty of liberal arts of a large public research university which offers a total of 240 curricula across disparate disciplines: medicine; engineering, science, and technology; social sciences; innovation design; business; and arts and humanities. In particular, the faculty is responsible for managing and offering a wide range of language studies courses for graduate and undergraduate students across two campuses. The languages the faculty offers include English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Bahasa Malay, and Bahasa Indonesia. Altogether, there are approximately 4,500–5,500 students who are majoring in these languages or studying them as non-majors each semester. Foreign language instructional approaches and methodologies at the university vary across language programmes, ranging widely from communicative, to content-based, to task-based, to project-based, to grammar translation. Nevertheless, language classes are generally smaller with a maximum of 25 students in each section. Before the pandemic, language courses were taught onsite, and, in some instances, instructors incorporated learning management systems such as Moodle or Google Classroom for posting handouts and offering online quizzes and assignments, thus indicating some elements of blended teaching. What's more, prior to the pandemic, access to campus learning resources and facilities were not a major concern for students because most undergraduates lived on campus.

The first pandemic outbreak in Thailand in March of 2020, however, led to an abrupt closure of university premises, preventing students from being able to attend classes on-site or use on-campus facilities for the rest of the semester (March to May 2020). Nonetheless, all residential students were allowed to either be on campus or move back home to complete the semester online. In subsequent semesters of the 2021 academic year, policy for onsite instruction fluctuated, depending on the severity of the pandemic. Some courses met on campus; some were hybrid; and some were solely

online. In implementing their decision about teaching format and COVID-related matters, faculty of liberal arts' administrators I interviewed had to improvise quick solutions, develop multiple forms of support for students and instructors, and clearly communicate their policies to the academic community. At the same time, in keeping with the culture of their institution, they wanted colleagues and students to be able to freely express concerns, problems, and suggestions. Stakeholders' voices and needs became important considerations in decision-making and planning.

What We Know About Online Language Teaching and Administrators' Challenges During the Pandemic from Existing Research

Before examining administrators-instructors' COVID-19 challenges and experiences, however, it is important to first elucidate the differences between online teaching and ERT, strengths and limitations of ERT, and experiences, perceptions, and challenges of administrators during the pandemic from existing studies.

Differences Between Online Instruction vs. ERT

Singh and Thurman (2019) defined online learning as learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access and interactions between instructors to ensure that learning can take place anywhere and anytime. Furthermore, Means et al. (2014) suggested that to design effective online teaching practice, nine dimensions should be taken into account and adapted: modality (fully online, blended, or web-enabled face-to-face teaching), pacing (self-paced, class-paced, or both), student–instructor ratio (the number of students and instructors in class), pedagogy (teaching methods), instructor's role online (teacher's presence and whether they have a passive/active role), students' role online (the role of students in class), online communication synchrony (synchronous vs. asynchronous), role of online assessments (evaluation of students' learning state, success or failure), and source of feedback.

Considering Singh & Thurman's and Means et al.'s point, moving classes to an online learning environment in a rushed situation and with limited resources and preparation—such as what happened at the institution I studied—calls into question whether the transition online by the faculty of liberal arts constitutes online learning in

strict sense of the term. It is more accurate to call it ERT: a quick transition from traditional to distance learning to solve an emergency problem such as COVID-19 (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). According to Hodges et al. (2020, p. 6), ERT aims “to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional support in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency crisis”. When designing classes in an ERT context, Rapanta et al. (2020) argued that instructors should think outside the box and plan lessons creatively to assist students to make the most from class experience during the pandemic. Instructors should also choose a suitable pedagogy, such as distributed pedagogy (shared ownership), engaging pedagogy (students actively participate in the learning and they produce content for the public), agile pedagogy (lessons should be flexible and customised), or situated pedagogy to foster effective planning and enhanced interaction (Rapanta et al., 2020). Moreover, ideally, the learning environment should promote student-centered and active learning by including opportunities for engagement and peer collaboration (Bao, 2020; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021; Rapanta et al, 2020). Lastly, instructors may implement some changes to assessment methods and also consider improvising them based on the learning environment and pedagogical situations (Zhang et al., 2021). Alternative assessments such as replacing close-book exams with open-book ones or shifting the focus to students’ quality of contribution, interaction and engagement are recommended (Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). It is also useful to employ learner analytics to monitor students’ learning experiences and progress (Prinsloo et al., 2021).

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges in Teaching and Administration During COVID-19

While ERT seems to be one of the most viable options to solve teaching/learning problems during the pandemic, little has been known about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges in administering ERT in assorted contexts. Dhawan (2020, p. 14), for example, argued that in terms of strength, through ERT, learners can have the freedom to access lessons from ‘anywhere and anytime’ with little environmental impact, and they can study at their own pace and employ available resources online such as dictionaries, other platforms, and social media applications. Besides, technology

allows instructors to use a combination of available online tools to continue their lessons during emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic and others, no matter if it is a natural or manmade disaster. On the other hand, instructors and learners can have technical difficulties and a limited ability to concentrate on the lessons and struggle to cope with personal and emotional issues (Jiang et al., 2021). Nonetheless, ERT also allows for several opportunities. As Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) pointed out, the pandemic provided opportunities for experimentation as students and teachers have been able to step outside their comfort zone and explore new teaching possibilities, try out various activities, and learn more about new technologies and innovations. Dhawan (2021) also added that the market demand for e-learning is a timely opportunity for EdTech start-ups to integrate technology into the education sector, leading to potential radical transformations in various aspects: teaching, learning, evaluation, and formation of new certificates or degrees. Yet, ERT also brought three major challenges to administrators, instructors, and learners: technological, pedagogical and administrative (Dhawan, 2020; Hazaea et al., 2021)

First, technological challenges are deemed a priority and a determinant of the success of ERT. As noted in several studies (Altavilla, 2021; Dhawan, 2020; Hazaea et al., 2021; Moralista & Oducado, 2020; Sayer & Braun, 2020), the lack of technological infrastructure, limited access to the internet, the absence of technical support, and instructors' poor digital skills impeded the successfulness of online learning (Eltahir, 2019; Ghavifekr et al., 2016). Second, instructors encountered pedagogical challenges in terms of time management (time spent checking assignments, time spent communicating with students), classroom activities (suitability of activities, students understanding content, and preparation of stimulating activities), and student learning (Watson Todd, 2020). Thus, as Somsathan and Sanjaiprom (2021) argued, offering teacher training, ensuring student preparedness for online instruction, and using effective pedagogy and activities to match students' learning styles are necessary for ERT to be successful and sustainable. From the students' point of view, Imsa-ard (2020) found that learners faced language communication difficulties, technical problems, demotivation, and distraction during online learning, and overall, they preferred face-to-face learning in class. Finally, regarding administrative challenges during COVID-19, Hartshorn and McMurry (2020)

stated that administrators had to deal with colleagues' and students' wellbeing more than before, but whereas students were concerned about schoolwork, finances, family, and social and mental health, instructors were worried about the wellbeing of their students and family, effects of the pandemic on social and mental health, and the transition from traditional to online classes. In sum, the pandemic, which necessitated ERT, brought on challenges and opportunities for administrators, teachers, and students.

Thus far, research enables us to understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of ERT in general. Yet, little has been known about administrators-instructors' holistic experiences of migration to online platforms and their perspectives towards such changes, especially in the contexts of liberal arts faculties that offer foreign languages. Among a few existing studies are Ross and DiSalvo (2020), which studied practices at Harvard Language Center, and U. N. T. Nguyen & Nguyen (2021), which studied a foreign language institution in Vietnam. Some common observations about administration and pedagogy can be found in both of their studies.

First of all, both institutions prioritized implementing a contingency plan for remote instruction and communicating with students about how to migrate to an online environment. Second, in both contexts, administrators encouraged instructors to employ both synchronous and asynchronous modes of instruction to lessen technology fatigue. Third, technological constraints and abrupt pedagogical changes constituted the main challenges; both studies mentioned the limited availability of infrastructure at students' homes and concerns about digital divide among learners. Pedagogy-wise, both studies acknowledge that in online teaching during the pandemic, the role of teachers and assessment methods changed. As U. N. T. Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) pointed out, instructors – having changed their roles to facilitators, motivators or orchestrators – revealed that they were careful in designing lessons to provide continued support for students, and they coped with challenges proactively. Similarly, at Harvard, Ross and DiSalvo (2020) implied that in addition to teaching, instructors should pay attention to students' different conditions and well-being and try to create a sense of presence to assist students. Regarding assessment, at Harvard, assessment categories were changed to satisfactory or unsatisfactory, which were awarded based on students' involvement, continuity, engagement, and learning behaviour.

In sum, previous studies seemed to suggest that despite various challenges, the pandemic has accelerated the integration of ERT and technology into foreign language instruction, and instructors and learners have started to adapt themselves to the new virtual teaching environment, but not without challenges in terms of pedagogy, technological divide, preparedness, motivation, and preparation. More significantly, as suggested by Watermeyer et al. (2021), we are still at “the earliest of beginnings of recognising and understanding these impacts on the role of academics and the future of global higher education” (p. 639). At the same time, little has been observed about administrators’ experience, perceptions, challenges and future policies, especially in Thai settings. While there have been studies exploring instructors’ and students’ perspectives on pandemic teaching in mostly Western contexts (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Bozavh, 2021; Cutri et al., 2020; Davies et al., 2020; Kawinkoonlasate, 2020; Lukas & Yunus, 2021), few studies, to my knowledge, have examined the perspective of administrators-instructors in the Thai liberal arts context. My research aims to close this gap to diversify what we understand and know about administrative challenges, responses, and practices beyond Euroamerican-centric practices and the context of Western institutions.

Methodology

Seeking to add Thai administrators’ voices to existing scholarly conversation about ERT and pandemic administration, I conducted a case study with ten academic leaders of a faculty of liberal arts at three different levels: faculty’s administrators (1 dean, 2 associate deans, 1 assistant dean), department leaders (4 department chairs) and curriculum committee members (2 participants). I used purposive sampling methods (Creswell, 2015) and semi-structured, open-ended interviews to understand their experiences, perceptions, and challenges about responding to the pandemic and ERT. All interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour, were conducted privately via Zoom and recorded and stored in a secure place. Afterward, interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). As a whole, interviewing three groups of participants—deans and associate deans, department chairs, and curriculum committee members—allows for data triangulation: The integration of their perspectives

enables a more nuanced understanding at the macro, departmental and individual instruction levels. Multidimensional insight and perspectives are gained as a result.

Findings

Because administrators who participated in the interviews all had a dual role of administrator and instructor, what they related reflects the experience, perceptions, and challenges they encountered as leaders and teachers. Four themes emerged from the interviews:

1) A novel administration experience amidst changes and uncertainties:

The administrators encountered a novel management experience as they had to implement and revise contingency and preparation plans to deal with unexpected, uncertain, abrupt and evolving changes. In response to top-down policies from the university, administrators also incorporated a bottom-up approach to management, in which instructors' and students' voices were taken into consideration when issuing policies.

2) Opportunity for trials and errors: Most administrators viewed ERT as a great opportunity to explore the possibility of technology-integrated foreign language instruction and a temporary trial platform for blended or hybrid teaching.

3) Overcoming challenges: Administrators-instructors had to overcome three main challenges: technological, pedagogical and administrative. These difficulties require developing faculty-wide strategy and planning for online and offline teaching in the future.

4) Potential for expanding the faculty's teaching and reaching new learners:

All administrators agreed that after the pandemic, the main medium of instruction will be onsite, and only a few thought that 100% online teaching will be possible. Some mentioned blended or hybrid learning as a way to broaden instruction to reach more disparate student groups, but this issue was not set as a priority. At the same time, some participants feared developing online teaching may threaten their job security.

In the rest of the article, I analyze the four findings and their implications.

A Novel Administration Experience Amidst Changes and Uncertainties

Following the university's official announcement of campus closure after the midterm exam of the second semester of the 2019-2020 academic year, the dean and associate deans handled the situation by implementing contingency and preparation plans for ERT by following the university's broad guidelines and listening to the voices and concerns of the academic community via meetings with instructors and administrative staff. To ensure students' perspectives were not ignored and to foster a bottom-up design of faculty-wide policies and guidelines, administrators-instructors I interviewed distributed a survey to students. This survey of five questions asked students about their problems with online learning. In addition, participants also charged department chairs and curriculum committee members with the responsibilities for monitoring teaching quality, redesigning extra-curricular activities to be suitable for online participation, and assessing students' mental and physical health. Several initial guidelines and various forms of assistance for the second semester of the 2019-2020 academic year were created and announced.

First, instructors were encouraged to use their work emails as an initial point of contact with students because in this transition period, students were evacuated immediately from physical classrooms to virtual platforms within a short notice. Second, administrators advocated for modifying course content, classroom activities, and assessment methods to suit the online teaching environment. Resilience, flexibility, and sympathy were principles stressed to instructors. Third, administrators allowed instructors to employ synchronous and/or asynchronous modes of instruction—without any platform restriction, as they understood the abrupt change to online teaching meant some instructors may not have ever had training in video conferencing technology or virtual teaching nor did they have formal technical support. If an instructor adopted synchronous instruction, the administration encouraged them to also record videos of their lessons and to make those available for students to watch at a later time, as well as to be open to editing and revising their recorded clips. Following the faculty of liberal arts' policies and guidelines, each academic department could also issue their own specific guidelines for course administration, as long as what was developed was agreed upon by instructors.

Additionally, administrators I interviewed developed various forms of assistance to guarantee that instructors and students had basic facilities and equipment for ERT. The administrative team offered a grant of 1,500 baht for equipment purchase to each instructor and 150 baht to students. Administrators also moved to make equipment borrowing available for instructors and learners, and they distributed free mobile phone SIM cards to provide internet access to those who needed one. In terms of technical assistance, the faculty of liberal arts provided a Zoom video conferencing license and a training session for employees and also set up a virtual LINE group, where lecturers who encountered difficulties or technical problems or who needed real-time support could send questions and requests.

In subsequent semesters, teaching plans were revised based on the severity of the pandemic; however, administrators-instructors I interviewed organized a faculty wide meeting and administered another student survey to listen to stakeholder's voices before making an important decision, especially when it came to re-opening or closing campus.² Based on stakeholders' feedback, instruction shifted back and forth between onsite and online instruction or onsite with parallel live broadcasting for those who did not want to come to campus during these three semesters: 2/2019, 1/2020 and 2/2020, and in some cases, teaching site policies changed within the same semester. As Participant 1 commented: "the Faculty meeting was organized to discuss resuming onsite classes after the midterm of 2/2020, but [after] considering the situation and listening to the voices of all concerned parties, we decided to maintain online learning for almost 100% to ensure health safety and plan for a more inclusive re-opening afterwards. ... But the third wave of the pandemic outbreak suddenly occurred and all classes had to inevitably remain online." Evidently, administrators aimed to employ a flexible and more inclusive approach to decision making and adjustment.

² In Thailand, depending on the severity of the pandemic, the decision could be made at the faculty level.

Opportunity for Trials and Errors

Yet, while all administrators agreed that ERT was the most effective temporary problem-solving strategy to ensure the continuation of teaching and learning during the pandemic, their perception regarding online instruction was quite diverse. On the one hand, two-thirds of the participants thought that the spread of COVID-19 was a great opportunity for adaptation to the ever changing teaching environment, which is often brought on by incorporating new technology into the language classroom. Online teaching, from some participants' viewpoints, served as a stepping stone to exploring a new mode of instruction and potentially expand tertiary education to a larger group of people from more disparate areas; geographical distance no longer needed to be a hindrance for attendance when courses are online. As Participant 1 reiterated, "I thought that the emergency situation brought us more opportunities to expand liberal arts education at the undergraduate, postgraduate, and life-long learning [levels]. Despite previous attempts, we had not been able to establish online classes before, but the pandemic accelerated all the processes." Similarly, Participant 5 reflected that "I knew that online teaching would continue, and we had to live with it. I think flexibility is the key term to survive in the new environment, and we have to rethink how to teach, manage class, or assess students' ability. We have to adapt our teaching methods." Likewise, Participant 9 indicated: "I realised technology is increasingly important for the future and all of us, especially those who have not reached their retirement age, have to keep up with the new technologies and adapt ourselves to the ongoing changes. We have to change our perception and adapt ourselves to the changes." All in all, participants saw the abrupt shift to online teaching as a kairotic potential, one that opens up new avenues to expand their faculties and their own teaching methods, student reach, and program growth.

On the other hand, some administrators perceived ERT as a temporary problem-solving situation, and they favored the onsite mode of teaching. Participant 2 asserted: "the only positive aspect of online education is that we could have video clips available for revision. [...] But in the long term, I think the quality of the graduates would decline with online teaching. We have to monitor students' learning outcomes. [...] This is just a temporary solution to the pandemic. Onsite teaching works better for language

teaching.” This perception was also observed by Participant 4, who mentioned: “Even though I could adapt to the new teaching environment, I still think the onsite environment suits my courses as I can interact personally, academically and intellectually with my students and monitor their progress. The online mode does not fully allow us to do that. [...] I think the best policy is to stick to onsite teaching.” Evidently, Participants 2 and 4 saw onsite teaching as more effective and preferable to online teaching. Both participants showed skepticism toward the quality of instruction and learners’ intellectual and academic experience. Being more moderate, Participant 10 made an interesting remark that “online instruction may be a fancy idea but to implement policies for online instruction, the administrators need to rethink and rebuild the infrastructure, provide intensive teacher training, and keep updated with teaching trends. By this, I mean changes should be on a large scale. [...] I still want to return onsite at the end [of the pandemic].” Thus, similar to the two other administrators, Participant 10 also prefers and favors on-site, face-to-face instruction.

Overcoming Challenges

One reason why administrator-instructors prefer on-site, face-to-face classes was because online teaching created a set of challenges that had to be addressed within a short time. Interview results showed that participants encountered three main complications with ERT: technological (unreadiness of institutional infrastructure, instructors’ unfamiliarity with technology and tools, and the lack of language software or applications for foreign language instruction), pedagogical (syllabus design, classroom management, assessment, and interaction between students and instructors) and administrative (students’ mental health, extracurricular activities, internship, and student exchange programmes). Yet, administrators I interviewed quickly implemented policies to deal with all of these challenges.

Technological Challenges

The technological challenges participants experienced were threefold. First, there was a limited availability of internet and computer equipment for instructors and students. Although the faculty of liberal arts I studied made internet access, computers,

and other forms of digital media equipment (e.g., camera) available for students, staff and instructors, some problems still existed. Participant 10, who lived in a dormitory for professors, explained: “during the work-from-home period, the internet signal in the university dormitory was rather limited. Everyone used it at the same time. I had to buy a new wireless router to avoid disconnection while teaching. [...] Sometimes I had to turn off my camera to avoid the slowdown of bandwidth.” To solve the technological equipment problem, Participant 6 noted that “on top of the Faculty’s grant and facilities provision, the department also allocated an additional budget for equipment purchase.” This provided a quick solution for equipment shortage, so instruction would be minimally inconvenienced.

The second challenge was instructors’ unfamiliarity with online teaching and the use of technology. Despite the availability of LMS systems at the university, most instructors and students in the faculty of liberal arts I studied had not formally or fully adopted a blended or online learning approach in their foreign language courses. What’s more, the level of instructors’ technological literacy differed significantly. As Participant 9 recounted: “I admitted that I was technologically illiterate and had to start learning to use all the platforms from scratch in a very short period of time. [...] I could not attend the training sessions provided by the Faculty as I was at risk of being infected, so I asked for help remotely from my colleagues and also my PhD students. At first, one of my colleagues taught me how to use Google Meet as the platform was easy to use. Then, my PhD student taught me how to use Zoom; then, another colleague taught me how to use the breakout rooms feature on Zoom and I learned how to use Google Drive with my co-researchers.” This shows that for instructors unfamiliar with technology, formal training sessions may not be sufficient in implementing ERT, but with assistance of other community members and ‘learning-by-doing’ method, instructors can successfully overcome this challenge. Thus, administrators should move beyond providing support to teachers through mere training; a model of reiterative communal assistance may be more efficacious, as Participant 9 revealed.

Third, in their interviews, participants mentioned the limited availability of software or applications specifically designed for foreign language instruction and assessment. As Participant 7 explains: “I was not sure if the students could write scripts

correctly, whether they could write in the right direction [...] not every student could have access to the blackboard feature on Zoom.” In addition, Participant 6 also mentioned that “we did not really have a remote invigilation or online proctoring software. I asked students to bring two devices during the exam: one for writing answers and one for recording and broadcasting themselves during the exam. There should be a more effective programme to monitor students or detect cheating.” A similar point was further elaborated by Participant 5: “I used the Turnitin program to detect plagiarism. But in some cases, it’s not a clear-cut case of plagiarism; students’ answers in the exam are more or less similar but we could not label them as cheating or plagiarism. [...] There’s no technology to help us with that.” Collectively, participants’ responses seem to suggest the needs of technology that fully assists in preventing and assuring academic integrity. Relatedly, educating students to raise their awareness of academic dishonesty during online learning and more importantly, providing faculty-wide statements of assessment guidelines and developing assignments and tests that motivate deep learning curiosity and that move beyond the traditional right or wrong answer testing paradigm are important practices and considerations for administrators and teachers.

Pedagogical Challenges

Besides technological challenges, administrators in the faculty of liberal arts I studied also experienced several pedagogical issues in their own foreign language courses. They explained that their difficulties emerged from the lack of professional development training regarding ERT pedagogy and class management in ERT context. Thus, from their perspective, issues that require addressing at the administration level include training on ERT and syllabi modification, adjusting classroom praxis, and improving student interaction.

Regarding the first challenge, some participants indicated that administrators should provide a professional training session, especially on ERT pedagogy, and make it obligatory for instructors to attend. This could help professors better understand the nature of online teaching in an emergency situation and find suitable approaches to instruction. As suggested by Participant 10, “the Faculty or the department should organize a workshop, talk, training sessions, whatever it is, that instructors could attend... a kind of professional development. [...] We should learn new techniques and

approaches about classroom management.” In a similar vein, Participant 1 also proposed that “in the future, more pedagogical training or sharing sessions should be organized in order that instructors would learn more about others’ techniques and methods.” The participants viewed that online teaching is a challenge for everyone and the faculty and also the department may provide both formal training sessions and informal sharing sessions to cover topics like new applications for language teaching, managing virtual classrooms effectively, enhancing students’ interaction or redesigning effective assessment methods.

The second challenge participants experienced is concerned with classroom praxis: redesigning activities, ensuring engaged interaction, and assigning appropriate workload. First, in terms of classroom activities, administrators who taught online believed that virtual classrooms may have some limitations for courses that require hands-on experience or physical presence such as speaking, presentation, or culture classes. As Participant 6 related, “some hands-on experiences have been totally eliminated, e.g., culinary culture. We used to allow students to cook some food, but it cannot be done online.” Consequently, students missed out on a cultural dimension that is an important flavor of foreign language learning and experience enrichment. What’s more, some participants viewed that for content-based courses like literature, the reading list, which originally included more novels, was replaced by short stories to allow students to finish reading on a weekly basis and contribute to online class discussions. Shortening the reading load and assignments, the administrator-instructor thought, reduced learning stress and ensured workload manageability.

Third, participants felt that student-student interaction was reduced considerably in the online environment. Participant 8 explained: “I had a problem when asking students to do group work with assigned group members. I tried to form a group of students with mixed abilities, as I wanted them to learn from each other and develop their teamwork skills. I also checked each student’s language competence level prior to the start of the semester, but the students wanted to work with their close friends.” In this particular class, their preference became an obstacle for online interaction. Depending on what teaching application an instructor used for live class meeting, grouping students into conversation or activity groups online may or may not be possible

or convenient. Like Participant 8, Participant 7 reiterated that “group work caused some problems, as some students did not want to work with people they did not know. [...] Some students asked to do the task individually as they did not want to work with strangers.” Along the same lines, instructor-student interactions also changed as students responded less frequently in class discussions. Thus, instructors had to compensate by having some other activities to get to know students. Overall, administrators who taught during the pandemic appear to think that interaction in their online courses during the pandemic were a pedagogical concern, and strategies for dealing with it is a pedagogical need that requires resolution.

Administrative Challenges

In addition to pedagogical challenges, interview results also revealed that administrators-instructors faced a threefold administrative challenge: students' mental health problems, inability to participate in traditional internship, and suspension of student exchange programs. This section examines how participants handled these three issues.

Given an increasing number of students with mental health problems during the pandemic, administrators-instructors I interviewed established a protocol to assist students. They asked department chairs to report cases of mental health problems to the counseling center so students can be offered support and assistance and so records can be kept, and follow up can be done. Furthermore, when students could not participate in the study abroad program because immigration rules prohibited travelling, some students viewed this as a loss of a once-in-a-life-time opportunity. To address their concern, the university, in collaboration with partner universities abroad, allowed students to enroll in online courses by institutions in other countries, and students would be given “exchange students' status in the process, but not many pursued this opportunity. They wanted to travel and study in person instead. Another concern involved how to manage an internship, a graduation requirement for some liberal arts majors. This became a major concern for students and administration. Participant 2 explains: “Many organisations suspended recruiting interns, due to the aggressive effort to control the spread of the virus, which raised concerns among students about their graduation and their opportunities for future jobs. Those whose internships had been cancelled felt insecure and frustrated. Students

asked for a clear policy and procedure from the university about management and assessment of internship. It was very difficult to manage this year.” To deal with this internship problem, the Faculty contacted companies and asked them to allow an online internship; students could work from home and submit an assigned task by the deadline. Alternatively, following the university’s general guidelines, students could submit a capstone project or a final report instead of an internship with an approval of the topic by a supervisor.

Potential for Expanding the Faculty’s Teaching and Learning

Evidently, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced administrators to readjust their policies, practices and expectations in their administrative action, planning, and instruction. Drawing upon their own experiences as administrators-teachers during the pandemic, interviewees raised two additional points of considerations about teaching and administration, as we move into new phases of the pandemic and prepare for a post-pandemic future: developing an opportunity for blended, hybrid and online learning and creating a clear vision, a long-term goal for ERT. Yet, such optimism also raises concerns over job security.

Administrators-instructors recognize that to make the future of blended or online learning viable, their faculty needs to develop and communicate a vision and policy, create an infrastructure, offer teacher training, and form support systems first. As Participant 1 suggested: “We need to prepare many things: how to design the right learning outcomes suitable for the blended or online environment, how to design the syllabus and curriculum etc. We also need some workshops, case studies, knowledge management, and a series of training sessions for our instructors. [...] Other forms of support are also essential e.g., physical infrastructure, communication channels within the organisation. [...] We need to implement concrete short-term and long-term plans.” These significant issues are a major undertaking. They are all crucial steps toward building a robust online education and new opportunities for growing the faculty.

Although administrators at the faculty and department levels thought that after the pandemic, the classroom instruction will still be the main medium of instruction, they recognized that an opportunity for blended, hybrid or full-scaled online instruction should

be cultivated to grow the faculty. As Participant 1 related: “For undergraduate courses, we could offer some online courses to students from other faculties who would like to take foreign languages as their minor subjects. Making these courses available online will solve the problem of clashing schedules. Also, we could provide 100% online courses at the Master’s level and short courses for lifelong learners.” In this sense, offering online courses in the future provides a way to expand enrollment and resolve course conflict. Participant 5, in particular, saw online learning as a way to promote flexibility and even learning interest, relating: “In the future, our department may consider having blended courses. Some content-based courses can have pre-recorded sessions and in class, we can discuss several issues and exchange our ideas more. Exercises can be assigned and submitted via the LMS system. In that case, students will have more autonomy and focus on issues/topics that interest them.” What’s more, some administrators-instructors viewed ERT as a good starting point for expanding tertiary education through international partnership: “It’s a good opportunity for students to attend courses of partner universities and we could also offer some lectures to the students there. It’s a good opportunity to connect internationally.” Collectively, these comments point to administrators’ recognition of the need for serious commitment to rethink teaching options and format to reach wider populations in the future: undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education—locally and abroad. A more diversified delivery option or “package” might now be developed as explored to offer a more flexible or customizable opportunity and praxis.

Even though several participants viewed the integration of technology as an opportunity to expand tertiary education for their faculty, some viewed the move as a threat to job security. For instance, Participant 9 asserted: “With the intrusion of technology, I anticipate a structural change and lean organisation management in tertiary education. Lecturer jobs are at risk, in my opinion: the online system allows us to invite scholars from abroad to teach via a video conferencing system and they are big names. We may not need a huge number of ordinary instructors anymore if we can hire an expert to teach.” The word “intrusion” in Participant 9’s response is particularly striking. It suggests they see technology not as kairotic—but as a disturbance that creates instability. What’s more, in Thailand, population growth is expected to decline, and this factor, Participant

9 thinks, will further affect the number of hires and positions their faculty and university at large: “Considering other confounding factors such as the changing demographic structure, a declining birth rate, fiercer competition among universities, budget cuts [...], I am quite positive that the number of students and the need for instructors will decrease eventually. [...] As instructors, we have to update ourselves with new technologies and the best pedagogical practices. We will face a lot of challenges and pressure in the near future.” This comment, and the previous one, points to ambivalence about the future of online teaching and education among administrators-instructors. Thus, while online instruction brings excitement and chances for growth, it also creates anxiety about sustainability and security of employment, issues that can potentially significantly affect morale, loyalty, and support for building a liberal arts online education program in the future.

Discussion

Overall, the fourfold findings of this study align with findings in previous studies about administrators’ experience and roles during the pandemic. Academic leaders had to deal with unique urgent, unpredictable tasks, exercise virtual leadership, and protect stakeholders’ physical and mental wellbeing (Gigliotti, 2021; Kruse, 2020). Their adaptability and responsible nature, ability to balance institutional guidelines and the faculty’s autonomy, capacity to work as a team, and distributed leadership style were important descriptors in the management of and transition to remote teaching during the pandemic (Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021; Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021; U. N. T. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Furthermore, the way the Thai faculty of liberal arts participants approached ERT was consistent with what U. N. T. Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) found in the Vietnamese context: They reported that managing ERT challenges included providing support in ICT applications, developing thoughtful lesson designs, and being proactive about challenge management.

Additionally, despite experiencing challenges in online teaching, many participants also recognized that technology is an affordance in foreign language instruction; they realized the advantages of integrating specific technological tools not merely to compensate for the loss of face-to-face interaction and other onsite classroom activities

but for language practice and retention of concepts. As Participant 10 suggested: “the Microsoft Team has a function, which allows students to practice real-time interpreting and it works well for my class [...] There is also an application that helps students practice pronunciation and they can do it on their own.” In this sense, the application allows students additional opportunities for language practice which did not exist before the pandemic because MS Teams or a similar app was not used as a standard part of the course; the course and conferencing app for a platform were discrete. In addition to useful applications, a few participants also viewed that using a mixture of asynchronous vs. synchronous modes of teaching for different purposes leads to a more effective classroom management. As Participant 5 related: “I employed pre-recorded lessons to explain concepts but synchronous modes for discussion [...] This way, students can watch the pre-recorded lessons and take some time to understand some concepts at their own pace and they can contribute to class discussion later on.” Participant 5’s comment, in particular, points to an opportunity for driving deeper engagement and potentially richer interaction among students through technology. Digital videos hereby become both a self-paced medium for learning and a “preparation tool” for more effective future dialogue among the classroom community.

Thus, going forward, administrators and language instructors might consider the advantages of conceptualizing language classes as a hybrid, integrating synchronous and asynchronous modes of instruction as complementary and necessary. This conceptualization necessitates two key considerations: 1) the need to question the binary between traditional and online courses in curriculum design, course format and instructional praxis and 2) the need for administrators to seriously consider to what extent technology will be integrated into the language classroom and what mindset and attitude must be cultivated to foster integration. I examine these issues in detail in the next section.

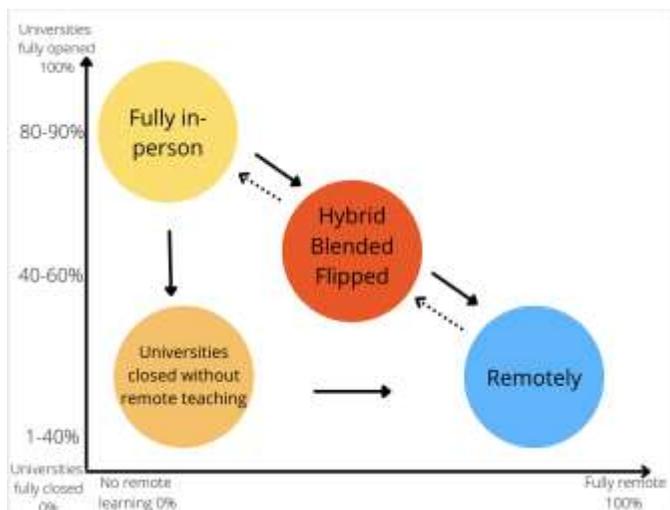
A Move Away from the Dichotomous Mindset of Online VS. Offline

Due to the fluctuating levels of virus infection, administrators faced a challenging decision about when to close or reopen the campus and how to maintain the balance between the health and safety protocols and the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Teaching scenarios that have happened in Thailand so far can be synthesized in the following diagram:

Diagram 1

Adapted from UNESCO's COVID-19 Response- Hybrid Learning



Instruction could start from a (1) fully in-person model, involve a hybrid, blended or flipped model, and shift to a fully remote model in the same semester. In the case of the university I studied, in the first semester of the 2020-2021 academic year, the university allowed instructors to opt either for (1) a fully in-person model, or (2) a fully remote model, depending on the opinion of each Faculty's policy. Then in the second semester, the university declared a policy of remote online teaching because infection increased, but given the improved pandemic situation at the middle of the semester, instructors were allowed to opt for either (1) onsite teaching, (2) a hybrid model, or (3) online teaching.

The ever-changing shifts necessitate the need to call into question the adequacy of the traditional taxonomy of how universities conceptualize, structure, and deliver classes and scheduling. In light of the pandemic, during which instruction shifted between onsite and online, it is crucial to foster a new paradigm of teaching that can accommodate the fluctuating nature of the situation. Thus, instead of seeing fully in-person or fully

remote models teaching in bifurcated terms, administrators and instructors may move toward re-conceptualizing their teaching and courses as a mixture of modes and their advantages, particularly considering that online platforms offer affordances for learning and building robust class discussions. At the very least, they might approach teaching as a continuum of online and offline modes. This call resonates with Lockee's (2021) observation that multi-mode teaching has become a new norm, and the boundary between onsite and online education has become blurred during the pandemic. By moving away from a binary mindset of online vs. offline and toward a fused practice and, when appropriate, a continuum of online and offline practice, we will also be more prepared for adjustments should a new pandemic strike, and classes may need to be moved from on-site to online again.³ Administrators thus must work to articulate an institutional framework and infrastructure that promote a set of resilient, learner-focused pedagogical practices and course models that are more fused. In short, a re-mixed approach to teaching is desirable. Yet, because a technological divide remains a significant concern in Thailand—and technology is never disinterested, articulating a clear faculty-wide vision, infrastructure, and plan toward that possibility will require critical sensibility. Exploring how technology can be critically and effectively integrated into the language classroom without obscuring the essence of humanities and foreign language instruction is imperative. Developing a set of informed principles to guide online teaching as a *critical practice* and investigating the pros and cons of a blended, hybrid, and flipped, approach via professional training, discussion, and workshops are imperative as we

³ To illustrate, *blended learning* is the closest to a traditional face-to-face teaching situation with additional materials, exercises, and assignments posted online via LMS for students' revision or interaction with outside class time, when students can revise at their own pace. *Hybrid teaching* suits a situation where online teaching is a replacement of face-to-face classes, and learner–instructor interaction can be either synchronous (via video conferencing sessions) or asynchronous (via LMS features). *Flipped classrooms* are basically conducted via online platforms but focus more on active learning: students are assigned to study some fundamental concepts before class via assorted types of materials available on LMS, and in-class activities aim to enhance learners' understanding and application of the concepts through discussion and peer collaboration.

move forward into the next phase of the pandemic and unknowns of the post-COVID-19 world.

Moreover, classroom activities should also change to engage students' participation and allow them to study at their own learning pace (Loo, 2020; Macnaught & Yates, 2020). Relatedly, an alternative method for assessment must also be taken into consideration, especially since students' and instructors' complaints about excessive workload and the difficulty of administering tests with academic integrity have become a concern during the pandemic. Administrators should encourage instructors to vary alternative approaches to assessment. Instead of only measuring knowledge through "objective tests," instructors could change the expected outcomes to measure interactions, self-directed/self-paced study, and students' methods of inquiries. The traditional format of an in-class examination should be challenged (Forrester, 2020; Ockey, 2021).

Ultimately, all of these changes necessitate a change in attitude, as some administrators-instructors and students still implicitly adhere to the same standard of face-to-face teaching, and use what can be done in the traditional classroom as a benchmark for quality teaching. Despite a gradual modification to suit the online platform, some administrators-instructors still feel obliged and responsible to cover all the content, and deliver the number of teaching hours specified in the traditional classroom syllabus. This inevitably leads to students' and instructor's 'Zoom fatigue'. In addition, the assignment issue also causes dilemmas for both instructors and students. Finding the balance between the right number of tasks and the effectiveness of teaching and learning is one of the issues for consideration. Thus, administrators should issue guidance about these matters: namely how to move beyond the confines of normative classroom practices built on affordances and assumptions of face-to-face instruction. Then they should widely communicate a persuasive message as communal guidelines and principles, ones that become generative and transformative as they fluctuate in and out of the pandemic.

Conclusion

The pandemic outbreak forced Thai tertiary education providers to migrate to the online platform, which created affordances and afflictions for administrators-instructors.

While various forms of knowledge sharing become more widespread at the local and international level due to a widespread use of videoconferencing programs and asynchronous online resources, a major challenge that administrators-instructors encountered is how to adapt themselves and their faculty and students to the new mode of instruction and realities of the pandemic. It is thus the administrators' priority to implement a more robust and productive vision, guidelines, and policies that allow their faculty to adapt to and meet nascent challenges and uncertainties to come. Going forward, further research can be conducted to explore students', upper administrators', the government's and the public's perceptions about the faculty's administrators-instructors' responses to the pandemic. Their voices can generate nuanced perspectives to complicate how we need to rethink the infrastructure, paradigms, and praxis of liberal arts administration and instruction during and after the pandemic. More studies can also be conducted beyond the purview of liberal arts departments to include disparate stakeholders' perspectives about the effectiveness of moving foreign language teaching courses beyond an online/offline dichotomy paradigm to ultimately generate a more comprehensive framework and direction for administrative and pedagogical decision making and innovations. As the pandemic continues to ravage Thailand and the global community, universities and their stakeholders will need to continually interrogate their habituated practices, trained incapacities, and institutionalized normalcies. Refusal and failure to do so is not merely regressive—but ultimately, a loss and detriment to the future and potential of liberal arts leadership and education.

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