Exploring the New Normal Practices in Thai University EFL Classrooms: Voices of the Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT

This investigation, through a mixed-methods approach, explored the practices of university teachers and students under the new normal. Framed within Anderson's (2004) Theory of Online Learning, this study was aimed at answering two research questions: (a) What do the teachers and students see as challenges in terms of teaching and learning English in the university classrooms? (b) What are the proposed ways of effective teaching and learning in the new normal classroom situation? About 342 students and 25 teachers participated in the survey and a number of them, purposively chosen, took part in the interview. The Yamane formula was adopted to determine the sample size and that the participants for the survey were randomly selected. The findings revealed that teaching and learning had challenges in common – issues on participation, risks of cheating, internet, and disruption. The study also proposes a few ways on how to teach and learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) effectively in the new normal. These include: having fast and stable internet, enabling of cameras, using laptop computers over smaller devices, having an online group for the class, among other suggestions. These challenges and proposed ways, however, can also be observed and applied in other non-EFL courses.

Keywords: EFL classrooms; mixed methods; new normal practices; teaching challenges; online learning

INTRODUCTION

As the world slowly recovers from the impact of Covid-19 crisis, schools and universities now gradually impose limited operations onsite. The pandemic, according to Sukman and Mhunkongdee (2021), has revived the significance of online or distance learning, as most of these educational institutions globally have transformed their mode of instruction from face-to-face to remote or online platforms. Shifting to an online mode, however, comes with challenges. Krishnapatria (2020), for example, issued a warning on this, saying that for many educators and learners, getting used to online learning from conventional one may pose some challenges and concerns. Naciri et al. (2020) also admit that the educational institutions are presented with surmounting challenges in its education system, adding that the pandemic will have an impact on the educational provision. Alolaywi (2021) also lamented how technical issues associated with inefficient internet service have become one of the major challenges in teaching online. Her study showed that while students were easily able to handle educational platforms and manage their online studies, the majority of the participants appeared to prefer the traditional over the recent online shift. Soni's (2020) investigation confirms this preference by students, citing lack of online teaching skills among educators, time-consuming lesson plan preparation, lack of appropriate support from the technical teams, and traffic overload in online educational platforms.

Famularsih (2020), on the other hand, initially considers the utilization of online applications in learning English in Indonesia to be effective and efficient in this emergency situation - but specifically enumerated the obstacles these online apps bring: slow-speed internet connection, the volume of work to be covered, the material covered online, and the lack of interaction between lecturers and students. These challenges also mirror the dilemma the first author's students face at an autonomous university in Southern Thailand. "Teacher, I cannot turn on my speaker and camera because my internet connection is poor," says an Engineering student during his English online class. His colleague also failed to log-in to zoom class on time due to technical problems. The university tried its best to address the complaints of the students and teachers as it formally opened its first trimester, virtually, in June 2021. These challenges must have prompted Sukman and Mhunkongdee (2021) to investigate Thai EFL Learners' voices on learning English online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their study revealed that while the students expressed positive attitudes towards online learning as it was seen as suitable during the current pandemic, the same participants expressed preference for learning English in face-to-face classrooms over the online mode, citing unstable internet connection, lack of interaction and teachers' explanation, as well as potential distractions.

Teaching EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in universities, as a result, has become more challenging as teachers and students "teach and learn" remotely in recent months. Usak et al. (2020) concede that this critical situation brings to light many concerns such as deterioration of the quality of education and the future of the students. Alolaywi (2021) suggests that educational institutions ought to be flexible and professional enough to handle emergency challenges, saying, the current crisis clearly demonstrates the value of modern technology and stresses the need to adequately plan education schemes and prepare valid alternatives. These changes in the delivery of the lessons from face-to-face to online mode have compelled scholars to look into the emergence of the "new normal," the term associated with the shift to remote teaching and learning.

THE TEACHING MODES IN THE "NEW NORMAL"

This investigation is viewed through the lens of Anderson's (2004) Theory of Online Learning where learners know no time zones, and location and distance are not issues (p.17). In this mode, however, there is a difference between asynchronous and synchronous online learning. The former allows students to access the online materials anytime, while the latter allows for real-time interaction between students and instructors. Naciri et al. (2020), for instance, highlight the role of online learning in remote teaching strategies as "sustaining" and student-centered. According to them, although online learning is an unavoidable alternative during COVID-19, its use allows learning anytime, anyplace, anywhere. Aljuaid's (2021) work supports this position as she investigated the challenges and difficulties encountered in online learning of English language courses via Blackboard at Saudi universities in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Her findings revealed that the use of Blackboard application in online learning of English courses had some potential advantages including improved interactivity, communication, enhanced language proficiency, discussion forums, improved writing quality, learning flexibility, and enhanced grammar and vocabulary acquisition.

The concepts of e-learning and blended learning are also discussed below as both are closely related to the current shift to remote learning. For e-learning, Kumar and Sharma (2021) explain that learners have the flexibility to perform their tasks at their own pace, saying, it can also

"support a mechanism to achieve the personal learning objectives of learners through a self-tailored approach." For his part, Soni (2020) notes that while there are few challenges related to e-learning, it has actually emerged as a benefit to learners and educators around the world. He further explains that the global crisis has especially manifested the immense importance of e-learning in today's modern world. Krishnapatria's (2020) investigation also appeared to support the use of e-learning. His investigation apparently revealed that the majority of the research participants expressed satisfaction with the implementation of e-learning during the pandemic, saying, the students view e-learning as being somewhat advantageous.

For blended learning, Budiningsih et al. (2019) consider this mode as capable of enhancing the teaching-learning process with the combined face-to-face meeting and online learning components. In an attempt to see how effective this is, Kintu et al. (2017) investigated its effectiveness by analyzing the relationship between student characteristics/background, design features and learning outcomes. Their investigation revealed that some of the student characteristics/backgrounds and design features are significant predictors for student learning outcomes in blended learning. Khalil et al.'s (2018) study found blended learning strategies to have improved students' academic performance, motivation, attitude, and satisfaction, and to provide convenient and flexible learning.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THAILAND AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

The current health crisis has placed English language teaching in Thailand in a challenging position, especially with the sudden shift in the mode of teaching among schools and other higher education institutions. The Thai government supports online learning to be held in areas affected by COVID-19 in order to promote physical distancing and reduce virus spread (Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021). With this, Thai scholars have looked into the approaches employed by educational institutions and their impact on learning. Somsathan and Sanjaiprom (2021), for instance, investigated the approaches used by the school management with regards to training, perceived barriers, and resistance to change in the transition of Thai schools to blending learning. Their findings revealed that during the pandemic there was some progress in the areas of teacher collaboration, exploratory lesson design, the use of active learning, and sensitivity to student learning styles. However, there remain significant issues regarding the delivery of teacher training, teaching methodology and needs analysis, they point out.

Scholars have also investigated the behavior of the learners during the pandemic, especially the university students. Thomas' (2020) study, for example, sought to provide understanding of the relationships between e-learning activity and the independent variables of gender, maturity, study major, region of origin, and class level. Thomas employed multiple and logistic regressions to understand the relationship between the dependent variable of e-learning activity with other variables considered in the study. The results revealed that freshmen students were more active online than other class levels while Education majors demonstrated the highest online activity. Thomas adds that Freshmen and Information Technology majors were statistically much more active online when compared with enrollees in other majors or with those who came from other class levels.

Thumvichit's (2021) study, on the other hand, involved 162 surveyed participants and a number of them interviewed, investigated how tertiary English teachers in Thailand practice their agency in response to the abrupt conversion to online teaching amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It

is interesting to note that despite the sudden shift of the mode of teaching, learning appears to take place. Thumvichit's investigation suggests that teachers' positioning as being professionally responsible for students' learning outcomes remains intact, even though the situation restricted them from going beyond their fundamental responsibilities. From a pedagogical standpoint, according to Thumvichit, teachers' agentic actions identified were endeavoring to create an interactive learning environment; implementing social media platforms to compensate for the loss of face-to-face communication; working with students to adjust their teaching practices; promoting autonomous learning; and incorporating formative assessment approaches.

A Thai university echoes Thumvichit's (2021) study, saying its president had expressed satisfaction over how online teaching runs during the pandemic. Walailak University, one of the leading universities in the South of Thailand, expressed optimism over the shift to online teaching. According to the article posted on its website (wu.ac.th) on April 3 2020, the president lauded his university's online teaching performance as the classes resumed virtually after the two-week suspension due to the rise of the covid19 infections in the country.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

About two years into the pandemic, university teachers remain engaged in online or hybrid teaching, allowing students to learn English remotely in recent months. This mode of teaching has given rise to a number of challenges that could potentially affect, not only the quality of education, but also the EFL teachers and students. This investigation, through a mixed-methods design, hopes to bring us closer to understanding these challenges and finding new ways on how to teach and learn EFL better in the new normal.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This mixed qualitative and quantitative study aims to investigate the practices of both the teachers and students in the new normal. Therefore, this research undertaking will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What do the teachers and students see as the challenges in terms of teaching and learning English in the university classrooms?
2. What are the proposed ways of effective teaching and learning in the new normal classroom situation?

This study could benefit the stakeholders of educational institutions - teachers, students, administrators, and policymakers - to better prepare their teaching instructions when a future pandemic comes.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN & CONTEXT

The researchers found it necessary to employ a mixed methods approach to collaborate the findings from the survey and qualitative data sources. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) define mixed methods as a "research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single

study or a program of inquiry" (p.4). Mixed methods design is suitable for this investigation because this combines both qualitative and quantitative research components, thereby strengthening and expanding its conclusion, and contribute to the published literature (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

This study took place in Thailand, through an autonomous university in the south. The university has about 10,000 students with a number coming from overseas, and about 350 teachers. This research university offers 3 main academic areas – Health Sciences, Science and Technology, and Social Sciences – with 42 programs across 14 schools, and 3 international colleges, plus a number of international courses. General English courses are offered in the first two years.

PARTICIPANTS

TEACHERS

Around 25 of the 26 (96%) English teachers from the Languages Department, aged 27 – 48 years old, from 8 countries, participated in the survey. Fifty-two percent (52%) of them were between 27–35 years old, the rest were 36 years old and above. Sixty percent (60%) of these participants were male, while 40% were female teachers. For the length of service, 72% of those surveyed had between 2-5 years of teaching experience, 16% had between 6-10 years, while the remaining 12% had only 1 year of teaching experience in the university.

STUDENTS

About 342 second-year students, aged 18-24 years old, participated in the survey. Around 67% of them were 20 years old, the rest were either 19 years old or above 20. Seventy-six (76%) of them were female and the rest were male students. For learning English, 82% of them had 10 or more years of experience, while the rest only had 9 years and below. The university has a total 2,315 second-year students.

The Yamane Formula was adopted in determining the sample size of this study (Adam, 2020, p. 92). This means that simple random sampling was employed where all second-year students from each school had an equal probability of selection (Singh, 2003). The teachers, however, were all asked to participate in the survey due to their smaller number. All the participants for the interview, on the other hand, were purposively selected based on the following criteria: willingness and currently teaching (teachers) / studying (students) at the research site.

THE INSTRUMENTS AND THE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The instruments used include: (a) two sets of survey questionnaires (for teachers and students); and (b) online interviews for the selected teachers and the students. Before the data gathering, the Research Ethics committee of the university approved the request of the first author to collect the data through surveys and interviews.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

As this investigation involved 342 university students and 25 teachers, the authors found it compelling to use survey questionnaires as one of the research instruments. The questionnaires contained scaled questions, Likert Scale in particular. For each item, the response consisted of a set of equally spaced numbers accompanied by approximately equally spaced anchors (Harpe, 2015). The survey questionnaires were structured into 5 parts, composed of around 30 items: participants' background, online learning practices, challenges brought by online learning, suggestions on how to learn English online effectively, and an open-ended question at the end.

In this investigation, two sets of survey questionnaires – for teachers and students - were developed, both in English. As part of the development of the questionnaires, the latter were sent to three experts in the field for review and validation. The purpose of the review was to check the validity of the questionnaires and to avoid repetition and bias to a particular kind of analysis or interpretation (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). The experts' review was also focused on other issues such as simplification, error free in construction, and grammatic errors (p.6). After the experts' review, all the necessary suggestions were taken into consideration. The questionnaire for the students was later on translated into Thai language as the student participants' native language is Thai. The questionnaire was translated by an accredited translation company. After the translation was done, the Thai-translated questionnaire was sent to two English professors, who were Thai nationals teaching in separate universities, for validation purposes. The questionnaires were then converted into Google Forms, and the link was used for pilot testing. The same test was administered on another day for the same group of participants (from another class) and it produced the same results and responses. The tests were conducted to check the reliability and effectiveness of the questionnaire before conducting the full-pledged data gathering. With the informed consent from all the English teachers, the latter administered the data collection through their respective classes' online groups. All research participants (teacher and students) voluntarily signed the online written permission.

INTERVIEWS

After the conduct of survey data gathering, 8 willing teachers and 12 students were selected for interview. Prior to the interview, a written request was sent to the participants to ask for their permission. With the participants' permission, the interviews online were recorded to capture the whole conversation. Zoom interviews online allowed the participants to be interviewed wherever they were, at their convenience. Each interview, which ran for about 20 minutes, was conducted on zoom online due to the continued rising cases of Covid-19 infections in the locality where the participants' university is situated. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and the questions were prepared ahead, about 3-5 open-ended questions, to allow the participants to talk freely about the topic under discussion. Questions asked focused on practices and challenges during online classes, and proposed ways on how to teach/learn English effectively in the new normal. Follow up questions were also asked in support of the previous ones.

DATA ANALYSIS

After data gathering, the responses from the survey questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. Getting the percentage of the collected data played a vital role in determining the results of the surveys. The two sets of questionnaires were analyzed separately through descriptive statistics.

The latter was employed to allow the researchers to quantify and describe the basic characteristics of a data set. As such, according to Allen (2017), descriptive statistics serves as a "starting point for data analysis, allowing researchers to organize, simplify, and summarize data."

On the other hand, the data from the interviews and open-ended question were analyzed qualitatively through content analysis. This means that the researchers had to "make sense" out of what was just uncovered and compile the data into sections or groups of information (Turner, 2010). To reduce the volume of the data, coding was employed. Two steps of coding as widely discussed in social science research were adopted. These steps included: a) generating meaningful data units; and b) classifying and ordering these units. Such a process is expected to deliberately reduce the amount of data collected (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The themes that surfaced from the analysis were then reviewed and compared with the results of the survey items and responses from the open-ended question as part of the triangulation process.

CHALLENGES BROUGHT BY THE NEW NORMAL PRACTICES

The discussion below highlights the issues the teachers and students face in the "new normal". These issues answer the first research question of this study "What do the teachers and students see as challenges in terms of teaching and learning English in the university classrooms?" A descriptive analysis of each survey item result, that supports each theme, is presented.

TABLE 1. The challenges experienced by both the teachers and students in the new normal

TEACHERS	STUDENTS
1) Getting the students to participate	1) Losing interest towards learning
2) Risks of cheating	2) Risks of cheating
3) Internet & technical problems	3) Internet & technical problems
4) Teaching & learning disruptions	4) Learning disruptions
5) Risks of 'comfortable' home learning	5) Impact on health
6) Difficulty in recognizing students' face	6) Groupwork a "challenge"

THE TEACHERS' VOICE

Teachers believe that challenges include the following:

GETTING THE STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE

One of the challenges that university teachers experience during the "new normal" is how to get the students to actively participate in the virtual classroom, survey data shows.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I find it hard to get the students to participate in class discussions.	15	2	8	60	6.51

[Teacher-D] "*Maybe how you can encourage the students to participate, to focus on what you are teaching. When I ask students to answer me something like that they .. no one answers me so I get like angry, [saying], why don't they answer me? I still get angry sometimes when I ask a question it's just a Yes-No question and no one answers me.*"

[Student-K] "*So, about [online] class, students in the class when the class starts and like teaching for some time, they can leave Zoom and teacher won't know. I don't know what they think but I don't care. The teacher is teaching but others [are] like sleeping.*"

RISKS OF CHEATING

Another challenge for the teachers is the risks of cheating among students. They, however, concede that it is difficult to monitor students' work online. In fact, [Teacher-D] agrees, "*There are people who cheat. They didn't copy and paste from the website but when they submit it seems like it's not their line.*"

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
The chances of cheating among students during the test online are high.	20	4	1	80	10.2

[Teacher-E] "*When we talk of writing, we follow the rubrics [set] by the course coordinator but I think the students tend to copy sometimes. I think they copy from some sources just like especially google translate. I always encourage them not to copy so I can give feedback so I always remind them being a student your focus should learn not to copy and show yourself as you are not perfect. So, some students listen but some students copy and they just post whatever they have translated on our Facebook group.*"

INTERNET & TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

Just like many students, some teachers also encounter internet and technical problems at times. This is true if power outage occurs, or lack of internet connection at home.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I experience technical problems that distract my online teaching.	9	5	11	36	3.06

[Teacher-A] says, "*I created many [things] like Kahoot games right from the textbooks. I print them in the "Kahoot" [website] so we can play games especially online. I think that would be engaging right? And because [of] my [poor] internet [signal], I cannot do that because it takes long time to open the website.*"

TEACHING & LEARNING DISRUPTIONS

Another challenge faced by the teachers during the "new normal" teaching was the "unnecessary interference". According to the teachers, it was the noise created at home where teaching was done.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Interference due to the presence of noise created by other people or family members in the same room while teaching.	16	7	2	64	7.09

[Teacher-D] "*I found that… the environment at the students' house [maybe] is not suitable for learning, like that, so they choose to turn off their microphones and some of them even when they sit on not so good places - very messy stuff, like that. They're at home and some students in that area - there are bathing sounds, chicken sounds, families are cheering boxing, you know. They cannot concentrate, you know.*"

Another statement supports this. In the survey item "*Interference due to distractions caused by proximity to TV and ready access to social media*," about 48% of the participants responded in the positive, 28% disagreed, while 24% were neutral about the issue.

RISKS OF 'LEARNING COMFORTABLY' AT HOME

"Mobility" may be considered as an advantage but in the case of this study, students tend to abuse such a feature of online learning. [Teacher-D], for example, says, "*During discussion, they lack interest, they lack motivation to learn online because of the environment and feeling like they are at home so the feeling is "relaxing' not much concentration.*"

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Students learn anywhere – some learn in places not conducive for learning (i.e in the car, outside the room, in the mall, etc).	13	6	6	52	4.04

DIFFICULTY IN RECOGNIZING STUDENTS' FACE

All teachers turned on their respective cameras so their students would be able to see them clearly. Unfortunately, this was not reciprocated by the students. "*It's hard to engage with the students because we can't really see them so that's the first challenge,*" [Teacher-H] claims.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
It is difficult to recognize my students' faces because they always turn their cameras off.	19	6	0	76	9.71

THE STUDENTS' VOICE

Students believe that these challenges include the following:

LOSING INTEREST TOWARDS LEARNING

One of the major problems students faced during the shift to online learning was losing interest towards learning. "*Sometimes when teacher lectures in the class in a long time, I am going to feel bored and sleepy,*" says [Student-220].

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I lose my learning interest when I spend so much time sitting, facing my computer.	185	116	41	54.1	72

"*It's easy to come late [in class]. If I wake up near class, I will not take a shower. For me teacher, if I [do] not take a shower it makes me [feel] hot so learning in a class makes me feel sleepy.*" [Student-I]

RISKS OF CHEATING

Another serious challenge this online learning brings, at least to some students, is the tendency of cheating among them. This happens usually during tests. These numbers simply imply that cheating exists. According to [Student-133], "*If we have a lot of work, many people like to copy on the internet. And in my opinion, I think sometimes [it is] good to help but sometimes it makes something bad for someone.*"

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I share answers with my friends during the online tests.	71	69	202	20.8	76.2

[Student-K] "*I want to say about cheating. I experience about cheating once [among] my classmates, not in my group. They are cheating in class and my friends in [a] group find the answers from them so I decided to take a photo and send [it] to the teacher.*"

INTERNET & TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

Some problems, according to students, were caused by technical problems. [Student-166] says, "*Overall learning is good. But there are some obstacles that cause problems in learning, study power outages [and] bad internet.*"

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I experience technical problems that distract my online learning.	173	120	49	50.6	62.2

[Student-D] "*I have [a] problem learning online [on] listening because sometimes "bad internet" makes the sound really bad, like, what they are saying? So I have to learn before class or sometimes after class I have to repeat it again because I don't understand what actually it is.*"

LEARNING DISRUPTIONS

Another challenge most students faced were the unnecessary distractions during their learning time. [Student-D] admits, "*Sometimes delivery service riders call me for my orders [online] just in time for my English online class.*"

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Interference due to the presence of noise created by other people or family members in the same room while learning.	148	106	88	43.3	30.8

"*If you sit for a long time and study together for hours, there are many things around that can easily be distracting,*" Student 109 admits. "*Put in headphones to reduce the surrounding noise. Exchange knowledge with friends after class,*" [Student-85] suggests.

IMPACT ON HEALTH

On top of the many challenges students face during the online learning, many of them complained about the health impact of the latter to them. "*Online learning has lowered my eyesight and caused headaches easily. Therefore, there should be time for students to take a break to relax,*" [Student-148] laments.

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Personal issues, such as mental health concerns exacerbated by prolonged isolation.	119	76	147	34.8	35.8

GROUPWORK "A CHALLENGE"

Another concern of the students was the problem that group work brought to them. In response to the open-ended question in the survey, students had something to say about working with others online. *"[I] want less group work because it is an online study. It makes it inconvenient to work in groups with friends,*" shares Student-190. Student-198 agrees, saying, "*But in the matter of groupwork, there will be some friends who don't cooperate at all. This is what I want teachers to understand.*" This must have prompted some students to communicate with their classmates through other channels so they could concentrate working on their assigned task.

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I meet my classmates separately online to plan for our pair or group presentations and other course activities.	250	77	15	73.1	122

PROPOSED WAYS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH

The discussion below reveals a few suggestions on how to effectively teach/learn English courses during the new normal given the challenges raised above. These suggested ideas answer the second research question "What are the proposed ways of effective teaching and learning in the new normal classroom situation?" A descriptive analysis of each survey item result is presented.

TABLE 2. Proposed ways on how to teach and learn English in the new normal

TEACHERS	STUDENTS
1) Have a stable and fast internet.	1) Have a stable and fast internet.
2) Ask students to turn their cameras on.	2) Turn your camera on.
3) Use a laptop computer.	3) Use a laptop computer.
4) Create an online group.	4) Communicate with your class on online group.
5) Integrate technology & online tools into teaching.	5) Find a suitable place.
6) Get proper and technical trainings.	6) Arrange consultation hours with your teacher.

THE TEACHERS' VOICE

Teachers believe that the effective ways to teach English include the following:

HAVE A STABLE AND FAST INTERNET

The pandemic has obviously kept educational institutions mostly unprepared for the sudden change of the mode of teaching and learning. [Teacher-E] admits, "*Sometimes we have an issue with internet so sometimes I use my mobile phone too because I need to use [a] hot spot - sometimes, not every day.*"

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
There has to be a stable and fast internet connection in order to effectively teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) online.	25	0	0	100	14.4

ASK STUDENTS TO TURN THEIR CAMERAS ON

The teachers who took the survey suggested that students should also turn their cameras on to maximize student-teacher interaction in the virtual classroom. "*I think the chances of interaction will be better if the cameras are turned on. I keep my cameras turned on. I do believe that it does help to a great extent,*" [Teacher-C] admits.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I suggest that students and teachers have to turn their cameras on for better interaction during the online class.	19	5	1	76	9.45

USE A LAPTOP COMPUTER

The teacher participants, through survey data, also support this suggestion.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Teachers should use laptop computers over smaller devices to teach EFL online effectively.	22	2	1	88	11.8

[Teacher-D] "*I suggest to the students to use laptop or pc because you can control everything at once. Some students would need to according to their learning style. They need to learn to watch you and learn something so it's better to have the students use a laptop or pc. They should use the bigger device.*"

[Teacher-E] "*I think laptop is more convenient because we can see the bigger picture especially when we are reading our files and in terms to coming to mobile phone it has a small screen so it's difficult to share. Laptop is more convenient than the smaller device which is mobile phone.*"

CREATE AN ONLINE GROUP

For easier communication and consultation, the majority of the participants proposed an online group for each class.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Teachers and students should have an "online group" forum to communicate academic concerns. (i.e Facebook group).	24	1	0	96	13.6

"*I could say Facebook is [the] main platform because we only have 2 hours a week using zoom but Facebook helps because I got to communicate with them at any time. I know it can be stressful to teachers and students but I think being available to students will allow for us to bond them even better.*" [Teacher-C]

INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY & ONLINE TOOLS INTO TEACHING

Teaching in this new normal is not without the use of technology, especially the online tools that help facilitate learning.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I integrate online platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, and emails into my teaching.	25	0	0	100	14.4

"*Use various online tools. Help students to be more motivated in learning,*" says [Teacher-6]. [Teacher-C] also agrees, "*We have proposed the use of google classroom you know where students can access lessons there and we could also provide like the tools where the students can engage in.*"

GET PROPER AND TECHNICAL TRAININGS

While many teachers have already been exposed to the use of online tools of teaching during the shift to the "new normal", a big number of the participants believed that a proper technical training for them remains necessary.

Survey item	+ve (n=25)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
There has to be proper technical trainings for teachers for online teaching.	19	3	3	76	9.24

[Teacher-19] *"Trainings related to online [teaching] should be conducted on a regular basis to enhance teachers' knowledge and to encourage sharing of teaching techniques among teachers. Clear policies regarding online lessons (turning on cameras and microphones, online tests, etc) should also be set to ensure that the lessons are conducted smoothly."*

THE STUDENTS' VOICE

Students believe the effective ways to learn English include the following:

HAVE A STABLE AND FAST INTERNET

Just like what the teachers have suggested, students also lamented the slow internet connection that affects their learning. With this, the participants proposed for a stable and fast internet connection in order to learn English courses effectively. [Student-217] "*Have a stable [and] a reliable internet connection. A reliable internet connection is vital. You want to avoid being disconnected, especially during live teaching.*"

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
There has to be a stable and fast internet connection in order to effectively learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) online.	279	56	7	81.6	145

TURN YOUR CAMERA ON

Students are divided on whether to turn the cameras on or not during class. Some students argued that turning their cameras on while learning helps to facilitate better interaction in the online class, while other students had their reasons for opposing the same.

[Student-212] insists, "*Always turn on the camera while studying. And listen carefully when the teacher teaches. When you don't understand, turn on the mic, ask the teacher or ask in the Zoom chat. Try to be involved with the teacher as this will make learning more fun and understandable.*"

[Student-F] during the interview says, "*I think everyone should turn on their cameras. I want to see everyone's face. It makes me want to study more and if everyone wants to study more, too, answering the question from the teacher is [easier] too.*"

USE A LAPTOP COMPUTER

Due to laptop computers' size and special features over other smaller devices, students suggested their use to effectively learn English courses.

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Students should use laptop computers over smaller devices to learn English online effectively.	204	118	20	59.6	92.1

[Student-123] "*[Students should] need to find a ready internet signal for each class and have to find a laptop to study online instead of using a mobile phone because the mobile phone is small. Sometimes it's hard to see. Laptops are much larger and can use multiple screens.*"

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CLASS ON ONLINE GROUP

To communicate academic concerns quickly and smoothly, the students suggested that an online group be created for each class.

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Teachers and students should have an online group forum (i.e Facebook group) to communicate academic concerns.	276	65	1	80.7	144

[Student-D] during the interview says, "*Yes, we use Facebook group when [the] teacher gives us assignment and asks us to send to Facebook group and YouTube. It's for easy communication and [using the] Facebook group, we use [it] a lot for reading.*"

FIND A SUITABLE PLACE

In online learning, finding the right place to study, where there are no disruptions, is very important.

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
Interference due to the presence of noise created by other people or family members in the same room while learning.	148	106	88	43.3	30.8

[Student-113] "*Online learning can be improved by trying to avoid areas where outside noise is heard, or perhaps to study in your own room. Close the app or turn off notifications from other applications that may attract attention from our studies. Try to pay attention and listen to what the teacher is teaching.*"

ARRANGE CONSULTATION HOURS WITH YOUR TEACHER

For many students, arranging an online consultation with the teacher is important, especially that some of them found it hard to submit their work on time.

Survey item	+ve (n=342)	NEU	-ve	% of (+)	SD
I arrange an online consultation with my English teacher.	168	118	56	49.1	56.1

"*What I would like to improve is maybe teachers would be more flexible about submitting assignments and working in groups because some students may not have equipment to facilitate learning. I would also like teachers to create a relaxing learning atmosphere for students. This will give students more courage to answer questions.*" [Student-143]

DISCUSSION

This investigation has explored the EFL teaching /learning practices of the research participants. To answer the first research question, this mixed-methods study revealed a number of challenges in the EFL virtual classrooms - four of these are common to the participants, namely - participation problems, chances of cheating, internet issue, and teaching & learning disruptions. It can be noted that Alolaywi (2021) already lamented how technical issues associated with inefficient internet service have become one of the major challenges in teaching online. AlTameemy and Alrefaee (2021), in agreement warn that "the inability of EFL learners to access online learning devices and connectivity of the internet could develop the digital divide because of economic disparity within EFL learners."

Interestingly, the teachers also consider "comfortable" learning at home as disadvantageous to teaching EFL as students tend to focus less. In addition, their inability to recognize their students' face caused by "turned-off cameras" also contribute to the "interaction" problem in the EFL virtual classroom, a factor needed to facilitate learning. This highlights the need for the students to turn their cameras on as argued by their teachers. This must have prompted Redinger et al. (2020) to recommend enabling cameras and using virtual small group breakouts, screen sharing, or virtual chalkboards to imitate the interactive learning classroom of an onsite teaching.

On top of the number of challenges, students also see "health concerns" and the challenge "groupwork" brings as a result of online EFL learning. This must have pushed Sukman and Mhunkongdee's (2021) to investigate Thai EFL learners' voices on learning English online during the Covid19 pandemic. Their study revealed that the participants expressed preference for learning

English onsite over online citing these challenges - unstable internet connection, lack of interaction and teachers' explanation, as well as potential distractions. With these, Krishnapatria (2020) earlier issued a warning, saying, that for many educators and learners, getting used to online learning from conventional one may pose some challenges and concerns. Naciri et al. (2020) also concede that the educational institutions are presented with surmounting challenges in its education system, adding that the pandemic will have an impact on the educational provision.

In response to the second research question, this study discovered 4 common themes as "proposed ways" on how to teach and learn EFL effectively. These are: to have a fast and stable internet, enabling of cameras, use of laptop computers over smaller devices, and having an online group. Redinger et al. (2020) warn that "a learner with a muted microphone and camera "turned off" is likely to succumb to distraction". According to them, the need for educators to integrate constructivist teaching techniques grounded in social learning theory, when possible, is necessary in order to maintain an engaging and collaborating classroom.

The teachers also find more ways as "effective" this new normal. These include the integration of technology and online tools into EFL teaching, and getting proper technical trainings. Redinger et al. (2020), have a piece of suggestion to teachers to conduct a practice session beforehand to familiarize themselves with the virtual classroom and discover potential glitches. According to them, conducting this session as "faculty only" with live chat is necessary to obtain real-time feedback from fellow educators.

The students, on the other hand, find other ways to learn EFL effectively in the new normal. These include finding a suitable place for learning, and arranging consultation hours with the teacher. This voice from the students supports the earlier investigation of Sukman and Mhunkongdee (2021) on Thai EFL Learners' voices on learning English online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their study revealed that the students expressed positive attitudes towards online learning as it was seen as suitable during the current pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this investigation highlight the vulnerability of the teaching-learning process in terms of distractions during this pandemic. Despite the challenges, the proposed ways contribute to the current body of knowledge on "how to teach and learn English courses" in the new normal. Results of this study also imply that the challenges and suggestions appear to be "observable and applicable" to other non-English courses taught online. In addition, this research was only limited to second-year university students and English teachers as its participants. It would be interesting to see in future studies if the investigation could focus on all student levels as well as teachers handling other major university courses other than English, such Engineering, Science, or medical courses.

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