EFL Teachers' Maxims: The Impact of COVID -19 Pandemic on Online Teaching in the Thai Tertiary Context

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand in 2020-2021 tremendously affected English language instruction in higher education institutions. When most English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers had to relocate their classes from face-to-face settings to online platforms, they were required to change their instructional techniques, tools and materials, and class activities to cope with the new classroom environment. This study aimed to examine English teachers' maxims of teaching the English language through online applications during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, which intensified the technology disruption in teaching. The main objective was to investigate teachers' personal principles regarding online instruction and emerging challenges. The quantitative data was obtained by a survey questionnaire administered to 67 university EFL lecturers. The qualitative data was collected through personal narratives and focus group interviews with 12 volunteer lecturers who shared their personal principles that navigated their teaching approaches. The findings revealed that the emerging teachers' maxims in online learning included planning lessons and selecting instructional tools, facilitating students' engagement, maintaining class management and order, and interacting with peer teachers. It was found that the major challenges in EFL online instruction were the effectiveness of instruction and issues in promoting students' engagement in collaborative tasks. In addition, the pivotal factors influencing virtual classrooms included teachers' level of preparation and students' limited interactions.

Keywords: Teacher Maxims; EFL instruction; Online Language Teaching; Online Pedagogy; COVID-19 impact

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, language educators and practitioners have widely discussed disruptive technology and its impact on the paradigm of language instruction. Not only in business sectors, but technology advancement has also encouraged entirely new methods in education and human development. According to Zighan (2022), disruptive technology requires a drastic change in the way organisations, both public and private sectors, transform their services to serve the fast-changing dynamics of consumer-oriented operations or be replaced by superior counterparts. In addition, the impact of disruptive technology was significantly magnified by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand in 2020, affecting all educational establishments in the nation. In response, most educational institutions had to transition to online or hybrid classrooms to curb the spread of the virus, and teachers were required to adjust to the need for online teaching (UNESCO Bangkok, 2020). Although some educators may still lack experience with online teaching methods and instructional technology, this crisis presented an opportunity for all of them to refine their technology-assisted instructional skills. These nationwide disruptions significantly affected students and teachers at all levels, including English language teachers, who were encouraged to find ways to minimise the immediate effects on their instructions.

During the 2020-2021 COVID-19 outbreak, online lessons raised more concerns among language educators due to their limited professional experience in handling online applications and virtual classroom management skills. Therefore, methods to modify teachers' teaching approaches, behaviours, syllabus, and curriculum, as well as strategies to help students succeed in this new learning environment are essential (Ariffin & Enh, 2022; Kanoksilapatham, 2021; Tao & Gao, 2022). When the pandemic struck, several challenges and questions emerged: how lessons should be delivered, what technology tools should be applied, how students would interact with their teachers and peers in virtual classrooms, and how to evaluate students' learning outcomes. For many teachers, it was the first time that their teaching protocol had to rely on technology tools more than ever. As mentioned by Gao and Zhang (2020), foreign language teachers at all levels were looking for the best way to engage their students in online lessons during the COVID-19 crisis. Due to the outbreak, professional learning for both experienced and novice teachers became crucial in a short time as every educational professional was struggling to overcome the challenges of facilitating learning in virtual classrooms (Alimi et al., 2021; Meinokat & Wagner, 2022). In Guerriero's (2017) perspective, it is vital for teachers to be prepared for any kind of educational disruptions that may arise in our fast-changing society. Teachers need to have a strong foundational understanding that incorporates the latest advancements in learning, and they need to engage in continuous professional learning to update such knowledge and skills.

RELATED LITERATURE

TEACHER MAXIMS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Everything teachers decided to do with technology tools directly impacted the learning outcomes. According to Richards (1996), teachers' mental processes are believed to "...provide interpretative frames which teachers use to understand and approach their own teaching[...] teachers' personal principles function like rules for best behaviours, or maxims, and guide many of the teachers' instructional decisions" (p.1). Therefore, maxims are the results of teachers' personal principles of teaching, which are developed from their educational experiences in teacher education and work settings. These have also been influenced by personal beliefs and value systems. Maxims, therefore, are generally regarded as personal working principles that have evolved into models for practical action or what is believed to be best practice.

Teachers' thoughts and mental processes work while they apply tools in online teaching. Richards (1996) remarked that maxims are personal principles that inform the teacher's approach to teaching. Teachers' maxims reflect upon cultural factors, belief systems, experience, and training, and the understanding of which maxims teachers give priority to and how they influence teacher practices is an important goal in teacher development. Maxims determine the motivations for teachers' decisions and guide their actions during teaching. The teacher shows this through the presentation of curricular goals, lesson plans, instructional activities, materials or tasks, and teaching techniques (Richards, p. 284), as presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Types of Teacher Maxims (Adapted from Richards, 1996)

Types	Definition	Examples
Maxims of Planning	A teacher's decision-making before a lesson. It involves teachers' underlying beliefs about planning, which can be student-centred or teacher-centred.	One implicit maxim of student-centred focuses on what learners are interested in learning. A teacher-centred maxim is concerned with implementing the pre-planned curriculum and lesson.
Maxims of Order	Focusing on maintaining order and discipline throughout a lesson, teachers demonstrate the maxim of order that is formal and more teacher-centred.	Teachers set class regulations and terms of agreement on tasks and assignments. Keeping track and records of student learning progress and outcomes.
Maxims of Encouragement	Building informal relationships between the teacher and students. To increase learners' autonomy, teachers' orientations towards teaching and personal beliefs lead them to create specific conditions in their classrooms.	There are several ways to encourage students to take more control of their own learning such as identifying their learning styles and interests, providing more options to practice their language abilities, and giving moral support.
Maxims of Involvement	A teacher's belief and practice about following learners' interests and maintaining their involvement can be expressed through how they get learners engaged in learning and activities. Students' needs and readiness are considered priority instructional design.	The lessons are improvised based on the students' responses. Teachers are flexible to change plans depending on students' responses, reflecting the beliefs about the role of teachers and students that determine the pedagogical approaches.

In short, maxims stem from teachers' belief systems founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching as well as their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it, according to Pennington and Richards (2016). These beliefs and values serve as background to teachers' decision-making and actions to follow the learners' interests in order to maintain student involvement. Therefore, personal perspective is a powerful influence on how teachers choose to teach.

FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHERS' TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Pennington and Richards (2016) state teachers' characteristics and behaviour are relative to social context. The interaction and interpretation of new experiences, including technology integration, gradually shape patterns of thinking and consequently allow changes in their approaches. Therefore, the more teachers widen their social networks and working contexts, the more they continue to modify their concepts, roles, and actions to adjust to the new situations and community of practice. When teachers decide to adopt technology in their classrooms, there are several factors to consider, including educational objectives and curriculum, student engagement, teacher training support, and collaboration and communications to enhance the learning experience and needs of students (Kandasamy et al., 2022; Redmond et al., 2018). However, this decision requires careful thought and planning, considering several key factors that directly impact the instruction.

What teachers have implemented in classrooms concerns their mental images, beliefs, and thoughts about their principles in teaching. Manyasi (2015) conducted a study investigating how teachers implemented the redesigned curriculum. English language teachers' mental processes were investigated and interpreted into how teachers managed the classes to follow their teaching approaches. Through interviews, it was found that the teachers' choices of maxims in English Language Teaching (ELT) were guided by the maxim of 'value addition', which significantly

affects the implementation of the curriculum. In other words, the teachers' maxims were shaped by contextual factors such as the school administration, external examinations, and policies. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers be trained in how to reconstruct their working practices or maxims of planning, accuracy, efficiency, and conformity to develop a new practice for the changing situation. In this regard, Suwannasom (2021) proposed that in order to effectively incorporate technology in the classroom, teachers' evaluation of the existing practices plays a vital role in navigating technology-mediated instruction. Teachers are encouraged to understand the potential of technological tools to support their teaching identities and accommodate students' varied learning preferences. To utilise digital tools and resources effectively, instructors need to acknowledge both the challenges and limitations that come with implementing technology as well as the benefits that result from their adoption. This is also remarked by Nunan and Richards (2015) that to promote learner autonomy, there must be a change in emphasis from teaching to learning. Language instructors should concentrate not only on in-class instruction but also consider the potential of learning outside the classroom. Teachers' viewpoints should align with the swiftly evolving internet-based technologies and the significantly expanded opportunities for foreign language learning and application beyond traditional classroom settings (Choi & Nunan, 2018).

In evaluating instructors' and students' perspectives on characteristics of effective online language teachers, Murphy et al. (2011) identified eight main categories based on survey responses from instructors and students in online language programs at the Open University in the United Kingdom. It is suggested that online language instructors are required to possess important characteristics from each of the eight categories:

1. Personal qualities (e.g., enthusiasm, approachable, supportive, committed);
2. Knowledge of the university system and distance learning (e.g., the course materials, expectations on students' assignments and exams);
3. One-to-one interpersonal and support skills (e.g., sufficient assistance, clear, customised, and timely feedback using appropriate language for the situation);
4. Group support and management (e.g., create a welcoming and encouraging environment, plan tutorial activities that emphasise student participation);
5. Subject matter expertise (e.g., high language competency or near-native speaker competency, understand how learners learn language units);
6. Teaching expertise (e.g., recognise students' needs, give examples, and facilitate students' development of language skills);
7. Organisation (e.g., be organised with records/materials, respond promptly to student queries);
8. Information technology skills (e.g., computer literacy skills, digital communication, awareness of information accountability).

Farrell and Bennis (2013) conducted a case study investigating the beliefs and classroom practices of one novice and one experienced teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Canada. It was found that an experienced teacher's classroom practices were more clearly related to his/her beliefs. The experienced teachers' practices and beliefs were more converging than those of the novice teacher. However, the divergence was considered normal as experienced teachers reacted to the natural flow of the development of the lesson, where they adjusted to the realities of the classroom. The study suggested that challenges were vital for teachers to reflect on their existing beliefs and contextual teaching practices, whether they fit into the current situations and

teaching goals. In this regard, examining language teachers' beliefs and classroom practices is not to look for 'best practices'; rather, teachers can contemplate their beliefs and what is being practised in their classes.

From another EFL context, the teacher's role and professional beliefs have been addressed in the evolution of teachers' online pedagogy conducted by Taghizadeh and Amirkhani (2022). The findings reveal that classroom organisation, student encouragement, and a positive learning environment are the most popular tactics for online classroom instruction. It is recommended that teachers highlight the use of collaborative work and learner-centred practices in fostering student engagement, as well as the construction of online learning communities to improve students' engagement in the wake of emerging challenges. In an online environment, students are likely to require more peer support and teacher scaffolding to keep them engaged in virtual classrooms. As also discovered in Thomas's (2020) study, Thai university students' behaviours during the global pandemic tend to be less engaged in online or e-learning activities. Additionally, they might lack a nearby community of peers, making it necessary to offer them increased attention and learning support. Therefore, it is crucial to provide academic guidance while learning online to ensure that students stay motivated and connected throughout the virtual experiences. In the same vein, Sukman and Mhunkongdee (2021) confirmed that the teacher's sufficient guidance is crucial in cultivating the learners' mindset in navigating the online learning experience.

In addition to teachers' roles in online classroom management and interaction, it is commonly acknowledged that teachers' technological competence is one of the factors for successful online instruction. Drawing from the European framework for the Digital Competence of Educators. Wong and Moorhouse (2021) analysed how language instructors in primary and secondary schools displayed digital competence in the areas of materials, lesson designs, evaluation, and ability to empower students. According to the findings, teachers effectively used synchronous and asynchronous tools to address students' goals and digital interactions; nevertheless, they lacked digital competence in the use of assessment. It is recommended that teachers' ability to use technology is essential for the success of online instruction. To address the shortcomings of digital pedagogy and assessment competence, it is crucial to establish specialised professional development and training programs to provide language instructors with the essential expertise and competence to create, execute, and evaluate digital tools efficiently. According to Anderson (2008), interaction among teachers can foster the opportunity to sustain development and support through professional communities. These interactions also encourage teachers to learn more about their subject and from other teachers sharing the same experiences and instructional contexts.

CHALLENGES IN EFL INSTRUCTION AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

In the emergency teaching situation resulting from the COVID-19 global impact, teachers' perceptions, immediate adjustment of practice, and pedagogical issues that language teachers have had in online teaching and learning have been widely investigated. For example, Le et al. (2022) investigated how Vietnamese EFL teachers modified their lessons to encourage students' diverse forms of interaction. Although some teacher-student contact and student-content interaction were promoted, student-student interactions were less achieved. According to the findings, many language teachers reflected that the absence of online teaching training, an unsupportive school policy, and poor internet connections were among the problems they experienced in fostering online interaction. At a Czech Republic university, Klimova (2021) studied teachers' and students'

perceptions and attitudes to online language learning during the COVID-19 epidemic. The finding revealed that both teachers and students had favourable opinions of online language courses and were ready to participate via digital platforms. However, in order to ensure the quality of education in online language lessons, it is vital to offer both facilities and personal assistance. Face-to-face sessions among students and the teacher's role in language learning are essential.

Regarding the difficulties in adopting immediate online teaching practice during the COVID-19 crisis, Boonmoh et al. (2022) found that Thai EFL teachers' main challenges in online instruction were not about limited technology tools or teachers' knowledge and skills in using online platforms. Participating teachers were concerned about the unavailability of face-to-face interaction as well as the lack of connection between instructors and pupils. In fact, most instructors do not require further training that exposes them to a variety of online technology. However, they needed extra strategies to improve their online teaching skills as well as teaching methods to allow them to maximise their pedagogical knowledge while using technology or digital applications.

Various challenges within EFL virtual classrooms during the crisis were identified in EFL contexts. Thumvichit (2021) explored how 162 English teachers in Thai universities adapted to teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reveal that, despite facing challenges, teachers maintained their commitment to student learning. In the absence of traditional interactive methods, teachers turned to social media to engage with students. They collaborated with students to enhance teaching, fostered self-directed learning, and employed adaptable assessment approaches. While teachers might have difficulties at first, they become accustomed to online teaching and discover the appropriate methods that fit into their practices. Sipe and Sitthitikul (2022) investigated Thai university teachers' and students' perceptions of learning English during the new normal. These challenges were issues related to participation, opportunities for cheating, internet connectivity problems, and disruptions in teaching and learning. The absence of in-person presence also impacted the interaction in virtual EFL classes, which is crucial for effective learning. The study suggested methods to enhance EFL teaching and learning in this new normal, including ensuring a fast and stable internet connection, using cameras and laptops, and forming smaller online study groups. Teachers are advised to incorporate engaging methods grounded in social learning theory and to become familiar with online applications.

In a recent study by Kanoksilapatham (2023), Thai university students' self-regulated learning (SRL) behaviours were investigated in the context of online learning resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings reveal that the students have high levels of goal setting and environmental structuring, indicating that they are proactive in setting goals and creating a conducive learning environment for themselves. However, students were reported to have relatively lower levels of task strategies and time management in online platforms, suggesting that they may struggle with effectively planning and managing their learning tasks and time. It is recommended that instructors instil SRL in students and facilitate effective strategies in online learning environments. Meanwhile, Do (2023) examined the benefits perceived by Vietnamese EFL learners who engaged in online collaborative learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also recommends that teachers should train students to develop specific collaborative learning skills to ensure that they can work productively and harmoniously in pairs and small groups. Additionally, teachers should comprehensively re-examine online learning collaboration because online communication is always mediated through a machine, which is unlikely ever to be exactly the same as face-to-face interaction. Both studies addressed that teachers' support and

their choices in instructional management play a pivotal role in determining students' learning achievements, enabling them to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The aforementioned studies indicate that when teachers are required to teach according to the changing environments and learners' demands, the attempt to accommodate the constraints directly affects their classroom decisions. However, the imposed constraints also offer opportunities to reshape their approaches and construct new modes of teaching and learner support strategies that respond to those constraints while also incorporating individual values and teaching ideals. In other words, teachers come across the negotiation process, which is a part of dynamic professional development and evolution (Burkins, 2009; Sultan & Suhaimi, 2012). It can be stated that when confronting an unfamiliar or even problematic situation, such as online classrooms, identity adjustments and negotiation are required for teachers to go through professional evolution. This is what Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) called 'dynamic rather than stable' and 'a constantly evolving phenomenon' (p. 177), meaning that teachers' professional practice needs to be open to contextual modification in daily practice.

RATIONALE

The working principles of maxims that teachers develop reflect their personal and individual understanding of the most practical way to teach. Teachers use multiple maxims for many of their proactive and interactive decisions in the classroom. They choose maxims that help to create successful lessons, but classroom constraints frequently limit which maxims can be used. In this study, maxims are regarded as "working principles" based on personal values and philosophies as well as individual educational and teaching experiences. The development of maxims should be explored as a part of teacher development; the emergence of principles of practice is grown from acting upon rules of practice. Recognising the maxims of teaching is an important aspect of teacher development that can be achieved through numerous reflective actions, especially when they are facing challenges in their daily practice.

In the previous literature, there is a range of teacher maxims found in different classroom contexts. Teachers are likely to adopt certain approaches that enable them to achieve the lesson goals. A teacher can employ different maxims if their teaching environment changes. It was found that classroom constraints are often determining factors in teachers' choice of maxims. Furthermore, the maxims that teachers articulate or narrate may not be the same as their actual practice in live classrooms. Each teacher may change their teaching according to their students' reactions and challenges in the classroom. The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak during 2020-2021 was one of the tremendous challenges to English language teachers' practices; this challenge also prompted the adjustment and adaptation in teaching techniques and class management. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how teachers managed to overcome the obstacles induced by the pandemic to continue their lessons despite the shortcomings of techniques and support of online classroom instructions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study aimed to examine English teachers' maxims of teaching the English language online in 2020-2021, which were the result of technological disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand. It also investigated teachers' personal principles regarding online English language instruction and the dynamics of virtual classroom management. In particular, the research

addressed how the participants' maxims evolved because of a shift in teaching situations, including instructional platforms, digital content, online interactions, and classroom management.

1. What were the Thai university English teachers' maxims of teaching the English language online during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What were the challenges of online English language teaching in Thai universities due to the technology disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic?

METHODOLOGY

This research observed the teaching principles or 'maxims' of English language teachers in conducting online lessons resulting from the digital disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand. The data collection included teachers' narratives and online focus group interviews with volunteers about their personal principles, which inform their approach to online teaching. A survey questionnaire was also distributed to discover the perceived challenges and other factors affecting their online instruction.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The target participants were English language teachers working in public universities in Thailand. Invitation emails and letters with an online survey form were sent to target participants, asking them to respond to the questionnaire and attend the focus group interview voluntarily. There were 67 people responding to the survey and 12 people (8 females and 4 males) interested in joining the focus group as well as writing the narratives. The following table shows the type of data collection sessions in which each participant is involved.

TABLE 2 Participants in Focus Group Interviews and Narratives

Participants	Focus Group Interview	Narrative Response
Female (F1)	✓	-
Female (F2)	✓	-
Female (F3)	✓	✓
Female (F4)	✓	✓
Female (F5)	✓	-
Female (F6)	✓	✓
Female (F7)	✓	-
Female (F8)	✓	-
Male (M1)	✓	✓
Male (M2)	✓	-
Male (M3)	✓	-
Male (M4)	✓	✓

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURES

The 50-minute online focus group interviews were held in three sessions, each hosting four informants. During the interview, participants were encouraged to reflect on the maxims that guide their teaching practices, especially how they managed the online lessons during the lockdown, remote instructional approaches, and virtual classroom practice. The interview questions used in the focus group sessions were as follows:

1. What were your ideas and methods of preparing teaching materials, planning lessons, and organising activities that emphasise student participation in online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic? How do you plan skill training and knowledge delivery to align with the course objectives?
2. What strategies and methods did you use for classroom management to ensure that students follow the rules in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? How do you assign activities or tasks to students, manage class attendance, set deadlines for submissions, and handle online submissions?
3. How did you collaborate with other teachers in the same subject to solve teaching and learning-related issues, share information, and exchange teaching techniques?
4. What were your approaches and methods for interacting with students to provide guidance, encouragement, and motivation, enabling them to learn and solve problems on their own?
5. How did you adjust your teaching approach and choose suitable technologies based on the learners' needs and the nature of the subject? How did you address and troubleshoot issues that arise from using technology for both you and the students?
6. Additionally, do you have any other thoughts or methods related to achieving success, things to be cautious about, and areas that need improvement in online English language teaching?

After the interviews, they were requested to write their stories or narratives to describe their principles and give instances of classroom situations, teaching challenges, and students' responses that influenced the classroom decisions. Based on Richards's (1996) classification, participating teachers' narrative accounts of their instructional practices will be analysed and classified according to the maxims of planning, order, encouragement, and involvement. Furthermore, any emerging maxims or working principles given by the teachers were also identified and categorised.

The survey data were analysed by means of descriptive statistics. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded. Interview transcripts and personal narratives were scanned repeatedly for recurring themes, as well as teachers' personal narratives. Finally, teachers' reflection statements of beliefs and practices were categorised into maxims of online teaching during the pandemic.

FINDINGS

FINDINGS 1: TEACHERS' MAXIM IN ONLINE LANGUAGE TEACHING

The interview participants share their personal principles rooted in their approaches to online instruction and decision-making in managing their virtual classes. The participants' reflections that they selected to share in the focus group were supported by their principles in teaching and how they prioritised their class objectives. According to the informants' perspectives regarding different aspects of online classrooms, there were six types of maxims emerged from the interviews:

THE MAXIM OF PLANNING

A teacher's decision-making throughout a lesson is influenced by the planning maxim. This can be identified through instructors' underlying planning ideas, which can be either student- or teacher-centred. One underlying tenet of student-centred orientation is to focus on how to engage students in online classes by giving them more feasible and digestible learning inputs. The following narratives and focus group sharing were classified below:

> At the planning stage, the online lesson should be structured differently from on-site classes. This means I have to divide my lessons into smaller units for about twenty minutes. Unlike contact classes, teachers should not give lectures for more than an hour as students' attention decreases as time goes on in online classes. Multiple kinds of activities should be applied to maintain students' attention because many students often lose focus during the online lecture. [F1, interview]

> The content was divided into smaller parts to facilitate students' understanding and to keep them focused on the steps of learning. I often make sure that students are following the class progress by repeating what we did previously before introducing a new lesson. It is important that students realise the connection between tasks. They need to understand the aim of each task that contributes to the whole instruction. [F3, interview]

The implementation of the pre-planned curriculum and lesson objectives are also the focus of a teacher-centred maxim. Some participants mentioned that they simply plan the lessons by using the course objectives to guide the whole course plan.

> Teaching objectives should be set as guidelines for lesson design in both offline and online classes. The organisation of lessons was planned according to the course learning outcomes. [F5, interview]

> Students are expected to complete the assignments and achieve the expected learning outcomes according to the key indicators. [F6, interview]

> Each type of activity should be accompanied by specific technology tools that can enhance skill practice and development. The tools that are suitable for classroom instruction should allow teachers and students to exchange information and discuss the assignment. [F4, interview]

> Since learning online relies heavily on visual media, it is extremely important to use visual media such as infographics, pictures, diagrams, and figures, which are more effective than traditional text-based content. PowerPoint slides should be easy to understand for lesson reviews. [F3, narrative]

In summary, teachers prepared classes by considering three primary criteria that influence online learning success. To make learning easier, the lessons are broken down into smaller pieces. The core course objectives, however, are closely adhered to sustain the curriculum goals, which also anchor the technological tools utilised in each class.

THE MAXIM OF ORDER

Participants agreed that class regulations and requirements were explicitly given in an online class since interpersonal and physical contact was reduced. To manage the online class environment, teachers explained class rules and regulations to maintain order and discipline. Giving students direct instruction, assignment timelines, and requirements is highly important. The maxims were reflected as follows:

> Students who study online must know their pathway of learning at the beginning of the course, it is necessary to tell them explicitly what are the objectives and course structure. The requirements that they need to achieve after completing the course. Class regulations and Guidelines for assignments are provided at the beginning of the course so that students have a mutual understanding of the course goals. [F2, interview]

> Although class attendance is compulsory in every session, students are not required to turn on their cameras as it may affect connection stability. If their cameras were turned off, they were required to answer questions assigned to them individually. What is convenient about online teaching is that teachers can use the tools to check students' attendance and participation, give assignments, and send notifications to manage the class. [M1, interview]

> Assignment schedules are given explicitly to the students so that they can check the progress of classroom activities and tasks. Rubrics are officially announced to raise awareness of their expected learning outcomes. Students know what skills they need to practice and how they would be evaluated according to the requirements stated in the rubrics. Nevertheless, students can negotiate when and how to submit the tasks according to their progress and group responsibility due to several constraints of online technical issues. [M2, interview]

> When students are required to submit an assignment, the teacher provides both verbal and written instruction to ensure that everyone understands the requirements. The objectives and outcomes of each assignment must be stated explicitly to every student. Students are assured that they can ask the instructor all questions if they do not understand without hesitation. Some students reflect that they have difficulties in following assignments for each class, so class requirements and communication must be direct and clear. [F3, narrative]

From above, a teacher's maxim of order, like other maxims, is heavily stressed because of concerns about technology-related issues and other external constraints. Online class management was also impacted by his or her previous teaching experiences. In fact, these participants seemed to transfer the class management similarly to what they had done before in offline classrooms.

THE MAXIM OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouraging more casual interactions between teachers and students is vital for all kinds of classrooms. In a distant environment, learner autonomy is vital and needs to be supported by teachers as facilitators. Some teachers also created a friendly atmosphere in the classroom by encouraging students to discuss, speak up, and follow the recommended techniques without being afraid of making mistakes. This can be done through online applications and synchronous platforms.

> My students were told that they could reach me almost anytime via online chat tools. I tried my best to respond to their inquiries as soon as possible. I gave my phone contact to them so that they could reach me by phone or LINE chat. Although students can contact me by online chat, they were allowed to do so before 8:00 p.m. [M3, interview]

> Students were encouraged to share their thoughts and answers without being afraid of making mistakes. If they gave incorrect responses, I gave them more explanation until they understood and gave the right answer. More examples were provided to help students understand the content. [F6, interview]

To create a friendly atmosphere in the class, I often talk casually about other topics apart from lesson content. Line Group Chat was applied for class communication, announcements, and personal notes. Students are assured that they can contact the instructors at any time. [F7, interview]

Students are always encouraged to answer questions and opinions without the fear of making mistakes. I always tell them that it's okay to not understand the lesson. I try to give moral support every time a student participates in the activities by giving a compliment or cheer-up words. It is necessary for the students to show their understanding of the lesson. The wrong answer is considered an indication of their understanding. The teacher can use the response and feedback to improve the instruction or give more explicit examples to improve their comprehension. [F4, narrative]

Line groups are created to help students in case they have questions, or the teachers can share materials through the chat application. Online students need extra assistance Because they don't have the opportunity to interact with the teachers, unlike in normal classrooms. [F5, interview]

According to the participants' evidence, teachers' personal connections with students could promote positive learning environments in online instruction. Furthermore, giving students moral support and flexibility was crucial to keep them engaged in the lessons. Teachers allowed students to make mistakes and felt free to share their thoughts in class to encourage their confidence in participation.

THE MAXIMS OF INVOLVEMENT

Although online or virtual classrooms are usually deprived of gestures and psychological clues in language interactions among students, participants acknowledge these limitations and search for ways to encourage students to use digital features and other communication channels to stay connected. For this kind of advantage, some teachers found it useful to get students involved in-class assignments and activities.

Although online group activities might be challenging, students can take their time discussing the tasks at any time at their convenience. Students were also encouraged to give feedback on their classmates' answers or presentations on online whiteboards using emoticons or stickers. [M4, interview]

Since online classrooms allow students to ask questions in several channels, some students can reach me directly and more privately through personal messaging. They can ask questions or communicate with the teacher without being afraid of others' reactions. I usually give direct feedback and respond individually so that the others can continue working on the assignment. [M1, interview]

In break-out rooms, students take control of their own activities for the given task time. The group members know that they are being recorded, so they actively play their parts. The teacher can check later how the member contributes to the assignment. [F6, interview]

From above, giving students moral support and flexibility was crucial to keep them engaged in the lessons. Using digital features to contact the teachers or peers, sharing their reactions, and taking control of the assignment progress can encourage students' confidence in participation.

THE MAXIMS OF COLLEAGUES' SUPPORT

Although teachers independently managed their own online classrooms through class management platforms, pedagogical and technical support were sought after among colleagues. Since online teaching options were unprepared for almost everyone, colleagues' assistance was established to help them develop resilience in class adversity.

> My teaching team members usually talked and met online through social networking platforms such as Line and Facebook chat. Semi-formal talks and meetings were often held online to agree on test specifications and content structures. Sharing files and slides or other multimedia materials was very common. Some of them shared teaching techniques to integrate technology into lessons with the team members. [M4, narrative]

Since the integration of technology and lectures has been challenging for teachers in the COVID-19 situation, many of them were keen to learn how their peers overcame the challenges.

> Giving online exams is always the greatest concern of online teachers. We mainly discussed grading criteria and evaluation schemes. Actually, we tried to minimise the test scores and put more weight on individual assignments or collaborative tasks. We have been searching for the most reliable but least complicated testing tools but haven't found the most suitable one. [F4, interview]

Sharing how to handle class management issues and student activities was mentioned. Peer coaching was offered to help their colleagues get through technical difficulties.

> I learned from a friend how to use a break-out room in MS Teams to create collaborative activities for online lessons. Some suggested that tests should have been adjusted to assignments or projects since online testing validity was still problematic. To keep students engaged in lessons, questioning techniques and using quizzes or online games were shared. [F6, interview]

THE MAXIM OF CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOL

Participating teachers generously discussed their experiences in dealing with the technology tools to deliver the best learning experience for their students. Several reasons were mentioned in making their choices on applications and software that fit perfectly with their lesson content and activities.

> I chose the tool that can do several things as a one-stop service, so students don't have to switch between applications. Teachers should understand that not everyone has the same device to facilitate their online learning. Some students had only a mobile device to do everything. It is not convenient if they have to switch to other devices to work on an assignment that cannot be done on a mobile phone. [F6, narrative]

> Students are always asked if they are comfortable with the tools being used; at the same time, the teacher needs to learn new tools that students have suggested to accommodate learning. There are free tools or open-source materials so that students can access them without additional cost or extra learning time.
> [F2, interview]

> Using Kahoot or Mentimeter to encourage students to respond and engage. Also, YouTube is a great tool for students to study examples of communicative situations. Students can review the lessons anytime they want by watching the recorded videos. [F5, interview]

Since the online environment has secluded learners from their instructors and classmates, it is critical to select the tools that the majority is comfortable with. Although online participation and engagement cannot be compared to actual classrooms, online collaborative technologies are essential for learning augmentation.

FINDING 2: CHALLENGES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING ONLINE EFL INSTRUCTION

From the survey questionnaire illustrated in Figure 1, participants selected items of challenges that they had experienced from the beginning of the COVID-19 strike in early 2020. The findings revealed that the greatest challenge for online teaching was how to make students understand the lessons at 37 per cent. The second was concerned regarding teachers' lesson preparation and students' lack of interaction in the class, which both received 21 per cent equally. For other perceived challenges in teaching EFL classes online, some of the respondents chose connection issues and program errors at 16 and 5 per cent, respectively.
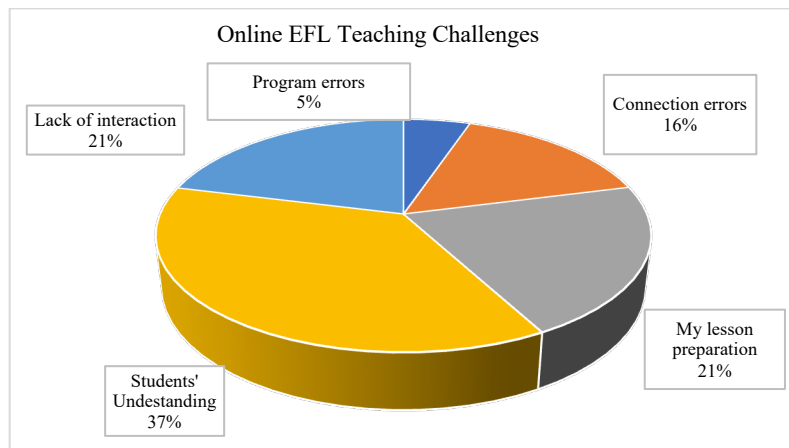

FIGURE 1 Challenges in online EFL classroom

Regarding the factors that have been influencing their decisions in online teaching and learning practice, participants reported that interaction with students was the major determining factor in their instruction at 42 per cent. As shown in Figure 2, this was followed by having supportive programs (27%) and having online teaching experience (21%), respectively. Other factors, such as interaction with their colleagues and having a mentor to supervise their online teaching, were equally reported (5%).
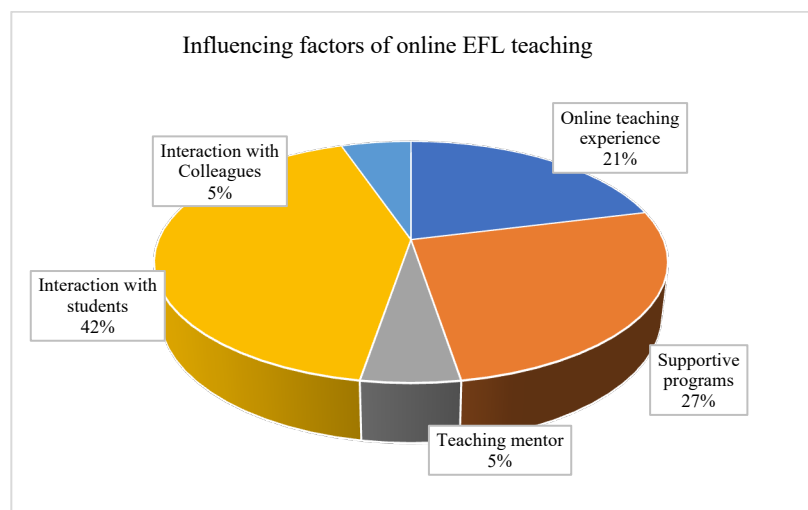

FIGURE 2 Influencing factors of online EFL teaching

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the investigation into teachers' maxims and challenges in online EFL instruction revealed that teachers were in search of the most effective ways to deliver their lessons. Actually, conducting online teaching not only requires digital skills and reliable software and hardware but also demands that teachers, especially language teachers, carefully employ several pedagogical strategies. This includes planning, designing the lessons, and employing classroom management techniques. There are six working principles or maxims that were practised in their online classes:

- Planning: purposeful, precise, digestible, well-structured;
- Order: using online functions to keep class records, timelines, and class rules;
- Encouragement: 24-hour resources, moral support, quick response, individual support;
- Involvement: cooperation, digital reactions, students' control, collaborations, task flexibility;
- Choosing the tools: multiple functions, one-stop application, familiar, free, reliable, and
- Colleague Support: material sharing, problem-solving, tips and tricks.

From the findings, there was evidence of teachers' principles on the four maxims proposed by Richards (1996); however, there were two emerging maxims in the online language teaching environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two maxims included maxims of choosing the tools and providing colleague support. This can be explained by the fact that teachers need more techniques and working principles to manage their online classes since the online mode has affected the ecology of language classrooms. In addition, the emerging maxims found in this study are in line with what Murphy et al. (2011) provided about teachers' group support and management in technology-based instruction that required teachers' awareness of the new classroom conditions and supportive technology implementation. This finding is also in accordance with what Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) remarked on teachers' working principles as they constantly evolve depending on the classroom situation; teachers' professional practice needs to be open to contextual modification in daily practice. The dynamic of learning is regulated by additional factors in an online setting, which might have a significant effect on students' learning. As a result of the involvement of technology and other people, including colleagues, in the teaching process, it was no longer only about instructors and learners. The tool itself and human support were taking part in determining teachers' working principles.

Nevertheless, in online learning, students' engagement has been the determining factor for teachers in creating the lessons. Participating teachers stated that they often experienced discussion and negotiation with students through several channels. Their class activities were adjusted according to students' feedback and reflections. The conviction and practice of a teacher in pursuing students' interests and redesigning the lessons to fit learners' objectives may be shown in how they engage students in learning and activities. Facilitating class interaction among students has been one of the most addressed issues in online language instruction, being previously emphasised by Pennington and Richards (2016), Wong and Moorhouse (2021), and Kanoksilapatham (2023).

For challenges and factors affecting online language instruction, the findings suggested that during the strike of the COVID-19 pandemic for almost two years, participating teachers' most perceived challenges in giving online instruction included students' lack of interaction and teachers' lesson preparations. This is in line with previous studies' findings on the difficulty of creating activities for students to interact through online tools (Boonmoh et al., 2022; Le et al.,

2022; Sipe & Sitthitikul, 2022). Although several applications facilitate real-time interaction among students and between teachers and students, educators reported some limitations in having students interact online or doing collaborative tasks. The issues regarding teachers' preparations and students' lack of interactions in online learning have appeared as central concerns of previous researchers (Boonmoh et al., 2022; Klimova, 2021; Thumvichit, 2021). Nevertheless, in order to increase students' participation in virtual environments, collaborative activities and learner-centred techniques, as well as the establishment of online learning communities and scaffolding schemes, could be incorporated (Murphy et al., 2011; Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021; Taghizadeh & Amirkhani, 2022)

According to Farrell and Bennis (2013), teachers' views and what is being implemented in their classrooms manifest their choices of contextual decisions and actions rather than looking at or searching for 'best practices' in the classroom. Participants agreed that preparation for online classes was always a great obstacle in delivering virtual lessons. Participating teachers faced one of the greatest changes in their lives when all of their physical classes were terminated, and everyone in the country had to teach online with no exception. In this case, the opportunities to reshape their approaches and construct new modes of teaching were immense. In other words, teachers reflect on their existing beliefs and contextual practices to determine whether they fit into the current situations and teaching goals (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). This becomes the negotiation process, which is a part of dynamic professional development (Burkins, 2009). The identity adjustments and negotiations in the new environment are regarded as professional evolution, which is open to contextual modification in daily practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Sultan et al., 2011).

Teachers' working principles or maxims in conducting online or hybrid classes are dynamic processes that require constant improvement. There is no 'finished line' or 'best practice' for teachers' teaching techniques because the classroom ecology has been changing instantly in this digital world. Teachers' maxims in online language instruction in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak in Thailand are not merely an immediate response to the teaching adjustment but also an opportunity for reshaping instructional strategies and creating new teaching paradigms that address those limitations while also embracing personal beliefs and teaching objectives. Teachers' practice must be reviewed and updated regularly to assist students in achieving the targeted learning goals while also satisfying their individual requirements. Nevertheless, virtual language lessons should not be viewed as a panacea for escaping the outbreak or other classroom limitations. Rather, technology should be normalised in everyday lessons and regularly employed to provide learning affordances such as increased engagement and time on task as well as access to real multimedia content.

Although most English language classes are now resuming on-site, teachers should continue to embrace the principles that they have developed over the past two years. By adopting technology in normal classrooms, teachers can provide students with more options and more authority in learning, which may enhance both teachers' and students' lifelong learning and skills. Therefore, everyone is ready to reshape their thoughts and adjust themselves to cope with any upcoming challenges in the future.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

First of all, this study was conducted with a small number of participants; consequently, the results cannot generally describe the working principles of the whole EFL teacher population in Thai university settings during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. The researcher has already acknowledged this shortcoming and continued working on further issues in online language learning with a wider perspective on data collection in the next investigation. For further studies into teachers' principles in online language instruction, identifying types of language skills, levels of students, and teachers' background experiences in online teaching should be considered. Moreover, class observations and students' responses to online instruction will contribute to the investigation of the online learning paradigm. In fact, more studies into hybrid classrooms, teachers' techniques, students' challenges, and strategies to overcome barriers are interesting to explore.

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