p-ISSN 2252-7427, e-ISSN 2541-3635
https://journal.uniku.ac.id/index.php/IEFLJ/index

p-ISSN 2252-7427 e-ISSN 2541-3635
Indonesian EFL Journal
AISEE
The Association of Indonesia Scholars of English Education

EXPLORING THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPACT OF ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS IN AN EFL CONTEXT: EVIDENCE FROM A THAI PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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APA Citation: Irawan, N., Rachmadtullah, R., & Pechinthorn, K. (2026). Exploring the pedagogical impact of online learning platforms in an EFL context: Evidence from a Thai public university. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, *12*(2), 721-734. https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v12i2.23

Received: 01-03-2026 Accepted: 18-04-2026 Published: 30-05-2026

Abstract: The swift transition to online education has transformed EFL instruction. Although online learning platforms are gaining traction, their educational impact on Thai higher education remains largely unexplored. This study investigates how these platforms influence the learning experiences of international EFL students at a Thai public university. Through phenomenological case studies, the research delved into the experiences of five international undergraduates at this institution. Due to pandemic-related travel restrictions, full-time students were unable to attend campus classes. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were analyzed thematically. DingTalk served as the primary online learning platform, facilitating both synchronous and asynchronous education. The platform enabled flexible learning through continuous communication, swift access to educational resources, and interactive classroom participation. Participants also noted improvements in learning autonomy and accessibility. However, challenges included unreliable internet connections, reduced face-to-face interactions, communication barriers, and motivation issues in online teaching. The study found that the success of online learning platforms is influenced by pedagogical design, instructor support, and technological infrastructure. This study is among the first empirical investigations of DingTalk-supported EFL learning at a Thai public university. By discussing the advantages and disadvantages of online learning platforms in EFL education, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on technology-enhanced language learning. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples to examine the long-term educational impact of online learning platforms across different educational contexts.
Keywords: *DingTalk app; distance learning; international students; phenomenology approach.*

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning has been practiced in many countries worldwide, including Europe and the United Kingdom, since the 1830s. During this time, individuals in Sweden and England could learn composition or shorthand through mail (Adams et al., 2021). Conversely, the Open University pioneered a blended curriculum that integrates both online and face-to-face classes utilizing synchronous and asynchronous methods. Previously, some universities and educational practices were inaccessible, particularly in Asian countries (Dai, Li, & Jia, 2022; Masson et al., 2008). Universities worldwide can use distance learning to cater to international students and facilitate remote teaching and learning (Abdullah et al., 2024). When students participate in hybrid or blended learning (Boonmoh et al., 2022), they explore more deeply, expanding their viewpoints until this mode of learning becomes their second nature. Additionally, hybrid learning serves as an alternative to traditional classroom and remote education, merging in-person and online learning without exceeding 50% of the course duration, making it beneficial for educational engagement

(Tuan & Tram, 2022).

Previous research on online learning has mostly focused on four major challenges (Erdoğdu & Çakıroğlu, 2021; Nusong & Watanapokakul, 2025). The first significant point raised in earlier research is the advantage of online learning. Online learning can provide various benefits (Anjarwati & Sa'adah, 2021), including enhanced flexibility, improved access to education, and opportunities for lifelong learning that can be accessed anytime from anywhere in the world (Akhter et al., 2022; Jia & Ma, 2023). The second key issue identified in previous studies is a range of challenges that can affect online learning, such as technology failures, a lack of appropriate digital resources, and insufficient physical learning spaces, all of which can lead to poor learning outcomes (Meydanlioglu & Arikan, 2014). The third issue raised in previous research is an in-depth analysis of student engagement, which is critical in ensuring that online students remain motivated and continue to learn by engaging in meaningful learning interactions (Watanapokakul, 2024), participating in collaborative learning, and exercising autonomy to control their own learning (Wang et al., 2017). The final significant concern raised in previous studies on online learning is the need for an in-depth study of instructor preparation for online learning. Many teachers are hesitant or unable to teach online due to a lack of technical expertise or pedagogical skills to successfully conduct teaching and learning online (Wang et al., 2021). Most studies on online learning have focused on online learning management systems, which are widely used worldwide and may be used in a variety of educational contexts. Much of the research on online teaching has been found to be too broad and does not specifically focus on the pedagogical use of the online learning platform DingTalk (DingTalk), which is increasingly being used in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly by international students studying at Thai public universities. The current study aims to evaluate how DingTalk can be used to improve students' learning experiences and pedagogical practices in online learning settings (Sadaf et al., 2021). within the Thai higher-education system.

Distance learning fosters student engagement, making face-to-face (F2F) or traditional methods unnecessary in some cases. Students can access faculty members from any location, ensuring convenient learning throughout their lives (Irawan, Retnaningdyah, & Mustofa, 2021). Virtual classes are essential as they begin with regular teaching and learning sessions. Additionally, ICT (Vernadakis et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2024).) supports both face-to-face and online lectures, and blended learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) is anticipated to become the most popular educational approach in the future. Distance learning benefits all students and faculty. Technology can significantly enhance teaching efficiency and distance learning methods. This study aimed to examine the impact of academic self-efficacy, perceived utility of online learning systems, and teaching presence on student engagement and satisfaction with online learning using the DingTalk app (El-Sayad et al., 2021).

Blended learning differs from traditional learning (Nusong & Watanapokakul, 2025; Setiadi et al., 2016; Watanapokakul, 2022). A new hybrid system for timeless, borderless learning comprises numerous educational applications for discursive components (Pytash & O'Byrne, 2014). Distance learning is a simple educational method. For example, reducing transportation costs or assisting students with travel and the educational use of new media is a significant challenge for instructors and students who use advanced social media platforms (Tuan & Tram, 2022). However, the primary challenge of mixed and hybrid learning is that teachers must help students identify academic standards aligned with their personal and educational objectives, while engaging them in various forms of digital literacy. When students return to traditional teaching methods, digital literacy and teaching methods can be used interchangeably. According to recent comments (Masson et al., 2008; Songkram *et al.*, 2023), advancements in education and learning are critical issues. Students should understand how emerging media, particularly ICTs, interact with each other (Dziuban *et al.*, 2017). In conclusion, while some factors do not necessarily increase the number of problems students face, they do pose a significant challenge to a faculty member, department, and staff due to the disruption they cause, such as student separation, interruption of education, and time away from school (Coman *et al.*, 2020; Skelcher *et al.*, 2020) Otherwise, it can be flexible and convenient for interns who are stranded at home. Furthermore, teachers can combine asynchronous and synchronous digital tools with instructional methodologies.

Although blended and distance learning have been discussed extensively in previous studies, most have focused on the effectiveness of online

learning models, online literacy, or the integration of learning technologies in general. Limited research has been conducted on the pedagogical impact of DingTalk as an online learning tool (Hatlevik & Bjarnø, 2024). platform for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom (Foley, 2021), especially from the perspective of international students at a public university in Thailand (Sulaiman & Boonsuk, 2026). Thus, this study is novel in its attention to the impact of DingTalk on students' learning experience, interaction, engagement, and perceived learning effectiveness in a cross-cultural EFL context. This study contributes to the neglected area of technology-enhanced language learning literature by providing empirical evidence from a Thai public university (Thanamaimas & McKell, 2026).

The results of this study have both theoretical and practical implications for the hospitality industry. Theoretically, it contributes to the existing literature on online and blended learning by providing context-specific evidence for the pedagogical use of DingTalk in EFL education. The findings have practical implications for language teachers, curriculum designers, and higher education administrators in selecting and utilizing appropriate online learning platforms, enhancing digital pedagogical practices, and promoting student engagement in virtual learning environments. The findings may also inform institutional policies and future educational initiatives to improve the quality and sustainability of technology-mediated language learning in higher-education settings.

According to Spencer (2015), there is a growing trend among graduates favoring distance learning courses. Yu (2015) noted that peer interactions, experiential learning outside traditional classrooms, and various in-person (F2F) activities have improved. Gleason and Greenhow (2017) highlighted that social media and other platforms showcase digital literacy, aiding both students and educators in effectively understanding and presenting information. Consequently, digital literacy practices and learning have become more accessible to a wider audience. Furthermore, O'Byrne and Smith (2015) suggested that educators can enhance the adaptability of technology-driven literacy trends by incorporating multiliteracy into educational settings. A combination of different models and methods can aid students in honing their abilities. Students have the option to engage in both real-time and self-paced activities, such as using Zoom for synchronous sessions (Khrisat & Fakhouri, 2024), Google Classroom for asynchronous learning, DingTalk for both, or the widely used WhatsApp (WA) messenger. Access may be limited to social media platforms, or students may pursue self-directed learning via YouTube. Irawan, Retnaningdyah, and Mustofa (2023) observed that hybrid learning allows teachers and students to be more flexible. This approach merges online and in-person methods (Kliziene et al., 2021); however, the pandemic has also been leveraged to enhance social awareness and safety in the workplace. Students gain more knowledge through virtual learning interactions with instructors. Nevertheless, distance education, especially e-learning, has become essential.

The DingTalk application was primarily utilized in mainland China because its menus are predominantly in Chinese, posing translation challenges for users in other countries. Despite this, the app facilitated unrestricted communication with teachers nationwide. The teaching-learning framework offers diverse applications. Initially, faculty members should allocate time for preparation and socialization when using DingTalk, given the language barriers. Faculty should be trained to comprehend and translate the language into English for effective teaching and learning. Hwang (2018) found that while teamwork enhances individual learning and group discussions are more effective in online settings, students will employ DingTalk in lecture environments. Second, students from various countries will benefit from focusing on their instructors for more efficient online learning. The popularity of online and blended learning initiatives has surged (Yu, 2015), with improvements in access, innovation, change, and teacher training (Ferdig & Kennedy, 2018, p. 47). Conversely, the increased availability of online courses has shifted the focus away from the students. The emphasis is on ensuring satisfaction and contentment, both within and outside the classroom (Skelcher et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the DingTalk app can support and benefit international students studying from home (Moonma, 2021). Additionally, students have the freedom to learn from any location without geographical constraints (Chiu, 2022). This study empowers students to utilize any online platform at their convenience and assists them in choosing the most suitable platform for distance education. The researchers were interested in the experiences and perspectives of students regarding the flexibility of hybrid and distance learning via

social media apps, and the question below: (1) How do international students perceive and engage with the DingTalk app in their distance-learning experience? (2) What roles and activities do international students perform using the DingTalk app in distance learning environments?

METHOD

This study considered online experience (Owston et al., 2008). Researchers have evaluated teaching using both traditional and online systems (Sirbu et al., 2015), which is typical of distance learning (Klimova & Kacetl, 2015), as well as the potential of these styles in distance learning environments to improve social cohesion in the learning community and provide a shared catalyst for significant teaching improvements (Hwang, 2018). This research sought information from the home countries of overseas students from mainland China, Cambodia, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. They attended virtual classes at a Thai public university, utilizing only the DingTalk app. In addition, this study used narrative inquiry and a phenomenological case study (Parker-Jenkins, 2018; Tajfel, 1981) to examine students' perspectives on distance learning in the *"Creativity and Business Innovation Management"* class using the DingTalk app.

Researchers disseminated data obtained by listening to users' opinions and learning their impressions of a social media website. Using DingTalk, the researchers and participants discussed all pertinent information, experiences, comments, and emotions. The researchers began by analyzing instructor-student conversations. From November 2020 to March 2021, the researchers interviewed the entire cohort for data collection purposes. The researchers used an online, semi-structured interview to facilitate the students' participation. The researchers conducted interviews with the teams. Before the interview, the researchers informed the students about the DingTalk group conversation. In addition to semi-structured online communication, the first researcher engaged in informal communication with students via the DingTalk Chat. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour and five months. One faculty member organized his students' schedules to interview and analyze data once a week, serving as the initial researcher with deep motivation and understanding to maximize the data analysis. The interviews were conducted in English. No language other than English was used. DingTalk was used to record the interviews, and the researcher created a transcript based on a summary of the interviews.

The researchers observed over 100 participants but analyzed data from only five international students to maintain flexibility in conducting in-depth interviews and analyses with students from various countries, such as Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Korea, and Mainland China, via a faculty member who teaches at a public university in Thailand, specifically in Bangkok. It is a draw for overseas students to continue their studies despite distance. The researchers insisted that the blind volunteers remain anonymous and ethical (pseudonymized data). Despite their home seclusion, the DingTalk app bridged the gap between teaching and learning. These apps can locate and collect international students from these nations, including Chinese students.

Enhancing trustworthiness is crucial in qualitative research, and various strategies can be employed to achieve this. One approach we utilized was member checking, where we sent the interview summaries and our interpretations back to the participants through the DingTalk app. We requested that they verify the accuracy and provide additional information if necessary. Data triangulation was used as another method. We compared different data types, such as semi-structured interviews, informal DingTalk chat messages, students' documents, photos, and the researcher's field notes to validate the emerging results and minimize potential bias.

An audit trail documenting the researcher's methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation was maintained. This included detailing the interview schedule, transcription process, coding procedures and theme development. The researchers engaged in regular discussions to peer review their interpretations before finalizing the findings. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently. Interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, indicating that no new relevant information emerged and that the existing categories were sufficiently comprehensive to address the research questions effectively.

Although approximately 100 students registered for the online course, only five students were selected for the in-depth study. Purposeful sampling was adopted because the study employed phenomenological and/or narrative approaches. Thus, the information collected from the participants would enable the researcher to gain in-depth insight into their experiences and

understandings, rather than comparing the frequency of occurrence among the participants. The five selected participants represented five different nationalities (Thai, Chinese from Mainland China, Korean, Cambodian, and Filipino) and thus provided a diverse account of a variety of experiences that EFL students experienced while learning English as a foreign language. The five criteria used for selecting the participants were: 1) they were registered for the online course throughout the study period; 2) they actively participated in the online learning activities through DingTalk; 3) they were willing to have multiple interviews with the researcher and to provide any documents that the researcher requested; and 4) they were able to communicate with the researcher in English effectively. The five participants' stories were rich and diverse enough for the researcher to draw lessons from their lived experiences. Furthermore, saturation of data was reached, and thus, there was no need to keep recruiting more participants to gain any new themes and ideas. All participants were pseudonymized to protect their identities from being revealed. All other personal and identifying information was deleted from the data collected from the participants.

Table 1. *Participants' demographic data*

No	Name	Age	Gender Male (M)/ Female (F)	Country	Nationality
1	AA	21	F	Thailand	Thai
2	BB	23	F	mainland China	Chinese
3	CC	24	M	South Korea	Korean
4	DD	20	F	Cambodia	Cambodian
5	EE	19	M	Philippines	Filipino

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers attempted to synthesize their data collection efforts into conclusions and analyses. One researcher was primarily responsible for data collection, as he knew the international students through his role as a faculty member. One of the researchers served as their teacher, encouraging them to share their experiences while studying remotely. One of the best features of the distance learning experience is that it can motivate students to engage in online instruction and simplify the educational process via group chat; by comparison, face-to-face instruction (F2F) benefits were preserved in the virtual setting (Vernadakis et al., 2012). Students were encouraged to study online, especially if they had Internet access (Pane, 2009). However, distance learning has many benefits and removes limitations in finding educational opportunities and communicating with people all over the world. Distance learning could benefit international students who wish to study remotely because of cross-country mobility constraints. The researchers attempted to elaborate on some evidence in the classroom using screenshots or images. As a faculty member, the first researcher also guided international English students as an instructional medium, while some students had already returned to their homes.

All interview transcripts were analyzed for themes within the participants' learning experiences. All the recordings were transcribed verbatim immediately after the interviews and repeatedly reviewed throughout the analysis to become familiar with the data. The researchers performed the initial coding in an 'open coding' style, whereby the most significant words, phrases, and statements from the transcripts were assigned as codes. Subsequent similar codes were then grouped together as categories via 'axial coding' and finally the respective researcher generated the broadest possible themes via 'selective coding' whereby the respective categories were grouped together to form the aforementioned themes that were common throughout the respective learning experiences of the students as described in their interview transcripts.

The coding process was iterative. By repeatedly reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, the DingTalk recordings, the informal conversations on DingTalk with the participants, the supporting documents that the students had provided for the study, and the field notes of the researcher, the codes that had been identified through open coding were compared with each other. Similar codes were grouped together through axial coding and, in turn, were connected to form broader categories that reflected the themes that had emerged from the data. These themes were, in turn, grouped into four themes or categories that accounted for the pedagogical impact of DingTalk on the participants' EFL learning. The themes were refined through a process of constant comparison between the codes, categories, and themes, the researcher's field notes, informal conversations with the participants on DingTalk, the supporting documents provided by the students for the study, and the themes that had emerged from the data. The themes were refined until they accurately reflected the participants' experiences. The

researchers checked the themes with the participants to increase the credibility of the analysis (member check). The themes that emerged from the data were: (1) the flexibility and accessibility of online learning; (2) student engagement and interaction; (3) the technological and learning challenges that students encountered while using the app for online learning; and (4) the pedagogical value of the app.

The findings from our data were organized into four themes that reflected how DingTalk affected the pedagogy of the EFL students in this study.

Flexibility and Accessibility of Online Learning. The primary advantage of DingTalk for participants was the ability to continue studying online whenever and from wherever they pleased, accessing study materials, as well as school-based online activities and interactions via synchronous and/or asynchronous communication.

Student Engagement and Interaction. The way in which students interacted with each other and their teachers in a virtual environment was a vital component of their online learning experiences. Various communication tools, such as online group discussions and/or messages offered by DingTalk, were used for instructors and students to share ideas and complete joint tasks to fulfill learning objectives. Students agreed that although virtual interactions could be undertaken by students and teachers alike, there was no replacement for the real thing – face-to-face classroom environments.

Technological and Learning Challenges. Although students were able to continue studying online, they faced various challenges. These include the problems of unstable Internet connections, time-zone differences, technical problems with the online platform, and reduced opportunities for unplanned interaction in the online classroom.

Pedagogical Value of DingTalk. The pedagogical value of DingTalk depends mainly on instructors' teaching practice, such as providing feedback on time, designing proper learning activities, and mixing up synchronous and asynchronous online learning properly.

International students' experience in an online platform

Researchers should observe international students in online classes to better understand how teachers and students use the platform. The DingTalk app was designed to accommodate both synchronous and asynchronous instruction. As researchers consider the present, faculty members' positions in online learning environments will continue to shift (Hwang, 2018). Students can independently educate themselves about online learning (Simon et al., 2014). An online or web-based system is incompatible with a hybrid distribution strategy. The primary source of learning growth is the continuous development of new and more potent learning spaces that permit new learning levels (Meydanlioglu & Arikan, 2014). Personal experience and online education also contribute to a well-balanced knowledge base (Li et al., 2018). One of the primary ways teachers provide feedback to students is by providing feedback to other teachers. The researchers expanded on the findings in Table 2 by incorporating students' experiences, comments, and perspectives gained through distance learning via the DingTalk app.

Table 2. *International students' experiences*

No	Name	Comments
1	AA	To make my online learning effective, it is essential to pay attention and self-peer-review after school, whether it is online or in the classroom. *Online learning requires more review or study before entering, because it is not the same as classroom study, and the likelihood of encountering problems and taking action is lower*. In online learning, we have to ask when we don't understand. Having retrospective materials is good. Allowing us to return and look back if we want to review what we have studied, one crucial aspect of success in online learning is managing your time and being aware of your responsibilities, because our choices determine everything.
2	BB	First, I must pass this course, so I must study hard. Second, this emphasizes self-consciousness. Then, *I think online courses are very convenient, are not restricted by location, and can avoid the risk of being infected with the virus on the road or in school*. Moreover, online courses are convenient and not subject to time constraints. If you have a computer or mobile phone, you can take classes simultaneously, saving time on the way to school. In addition, online courses can be replayed indefinitely, which makes it convenient

		for us to watch them again if we lose our minds or do not hear clearly during the class.
3	CC	Due to the coronavirus situation, although I spent this semester in Korea, I communicated with my friends and teachers in Thailand and studied various subjects, such as offline classes in Korea. As a result, I think I successfully learned digitally online in Korea. Many students worldwide are struggling with the coronavirus crisis, but "online learning" is a way for us to study even in this situation. *To be able to learn online, I think it must be possible to communicate smoothly online*. In this regard, this subject was a very successful online learning.
4	DD	Nearly a year has passed since I have studied digital learning, especially online, from my home country. I have so many experiences with it. *Digital learning is not that bad at all*. Even though we can't see each other physically at university. But when we study, and everyone turns on the camera, I feel like we are all learning in the same classroom. First, I could get a lot of time to do a review and self-study at home. Also, I could get more time to research my reports or assignments.
5	EE	*My success in digital learning, especially studying online, is being active, developing my innovation skills, and being attentive to everything our teacher taught us*. It is also helping us to be productive in business, and to look forward to learning creativity. In the future, digital learning will help us achieve our success by applying what we have learned.

Distance learning benefits teachers and students by reducing travel costs, curtailing face-to-face communication, and permitting students to participate in discussions with their teachers (Adams *et al.,* 2021). Students who are active in the mobile world may benefit from distance learning (Nusong & Watanapokakul, 2025). In countries such as Thailand, South Korea, China and Cambodia, teachers regularly provide students with relevant information. Students must not worry about the pandemic spreading from person to person, the high cost of moving to Thailand, or flexibility in their schedules. As a student in Thailand, *online learning requires more review or study before entering because it is not the same as classroom study, and the likelihood of encountering problems and taking action is lower (AA, Thailand)*. Every learning opportunity can occur within a blended learning system. However, many faculty members have used distance education to create web-based courses and have succeeded in the online classroom environment. From Cambodian students, *Digital learning is not that bad at all (DD, Cambodia).*

Knowledge should be treated the same way students are treated when they remain in the classroom (Songkram et al., 2023). While the traditional technique could enable good teaching and learning, flexibility should be prioritized through the DingTalk app, sharing, and conversations. Additionally, the platform supports an active online learning system. A successful teaching technique could be advantageous if the faculty member and students agreed on an appropriate location and prioritized the internet connection during the learning process. Efficacy may be the objective of distance learning. International students can successfully manage their time and be motivated through synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Both aspects of the learning process can contribute to the dominance of the teaching-learning process. When most participants were online, online learning became the primary source of knowledge, and vice versa. The educational system is predicated on the interaction between teachers and pupils. Additional concepts and knowledge can be explained to pupils based on their experiences or abilities. Thus, online education could be successful if a faculty member adopted the innovation and creativity material for students cited by Chinese students; I *think online courses are very convenient, not restricted by location, and can avoid the risk of being infected with the virus on the road or in school (BB, mainland China).*

Additionally, interactive communication can help students develop their mental, behavioral, and physical strengths. In summary, students' thinking styles could influence how they absorb information from teachers. Intensive communication, including questioning, effectively mitigates the perplexing effects of online learning (Anjarwati & Sa'adah, 2021; Pytash & O'Byrne, 2014).

Students can view their achievements as they participate in interactive learning activities throughout the lesson. Active learners enable successful online learning. They should maintain contact with their teachers, even if they are stranded in their home country. Students who were not afraid to ask questions at any time demonstrated an understanding of the concepts taught by their teachers. They could recognize specific situations and constraints, whereas

students could realize how they could use devices or overcome obstacles to be less successful in online learning when utilizing a distance-learning system (Watanapokakul, 2022). As cited from Korean students, *to be able to learn online, I think it must be possible to communicate smoothly online (CC, South Korea)*. However, faculty members could adapt to various circumstances when teaching in three modes: traditional, offline, and online modes. In addition, the method for combining distance learning requires training and practice, particularly for teaching.

While teaching online was challenging, when faculty and students had to interact, they had to prepare their minds and plan how to deliver knowledge (Cheung, 2021). Additionally, faculty members must understand their students. While they focused on online students, they had experience in a school setting that would change abruptly. Thus, distance learning was combined with online and hybrid methods to allow faculty members and students to engage in literacy activities both asynchronously and synchronously. Conducting a blended class could benefit students if the faculty member focuses on multiple perspectives. Teachers had to explain concepts and share them using the DingTalk shared screen to teach effectively in the classroom and online. Students from Thailand were encouraged to enroll in this course. Other students, including those from Korea, China, the Philippines and Cambodia, registered online. The faculty member used the DingTalk app and shared their screen with all students, allowing them to study together in real-time. However, they received the same material. As cited by Filipino students, *my success in digital learning, especially online studying, is being active, developing my skills in innovation, and being attentive to everything our teacher taught us (EE, Philippines).* In addition, using asynchronous and synchronous methods in the DingTalk app could profoundly affect both traditional and online class methods from any perspective and for any reason. However, most faculty members felt comfortable using computer technologies (e.g., PowerPoint presentations and content-relevant video and audio), but not with mobile apps (Altuwairqi *et al.*, 2021; Chang & Lan, 2021).

International students use the DingTalk app for distance learning

At the end of January 2020, Thailand announced that it had discovered three cases of the pandemic. International students will be celebrating the Chinese New Year in China during that time, and they cannot return to Thailand quickly because of limitations. The phenomenon received widespread coverage, and as a result, the borders were temporarily closed. Because the university, particularly the international college that housed international students, had already predicted that the pandemic would spread among its students, it implemented online education as a precaution. Online learning was the optimal option for limiting the spread of the virus. For example, a faculty member might use the DingTalk App.

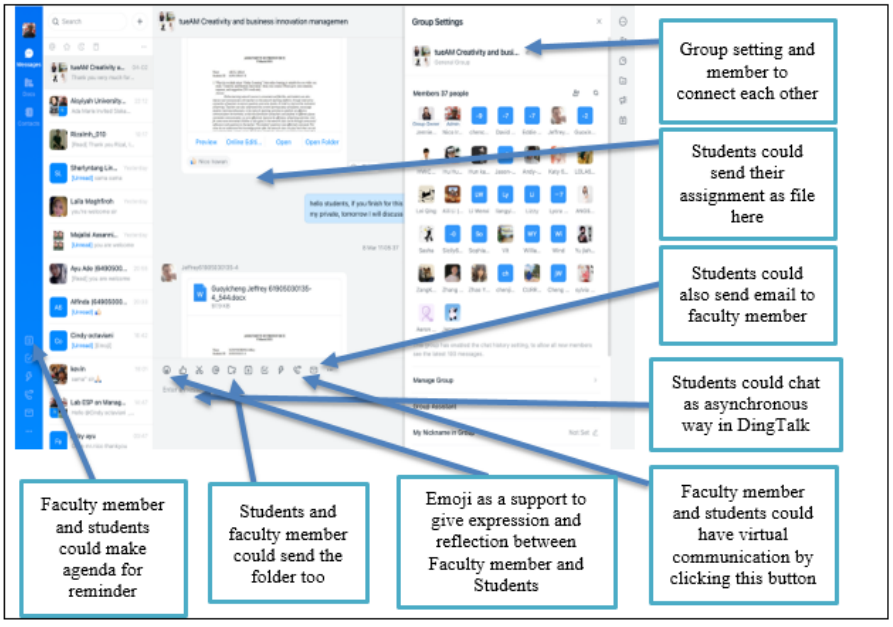


Figure 1. *DingTalk Functions for teaching and learning with many tools*

p-ISSN 2252-7427, e-ISSN 2541-3635
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The International College faculty members made the right decision in requesting the use of DingTalk for students' convenience, as they can offer both online and offline classes (synchronous and asynchronous). As a result of the analysis, Figure 1 illustrates how international students used the DingTalk application for distance learning to address their unique needs, particularly at the International College of a Thai public university.

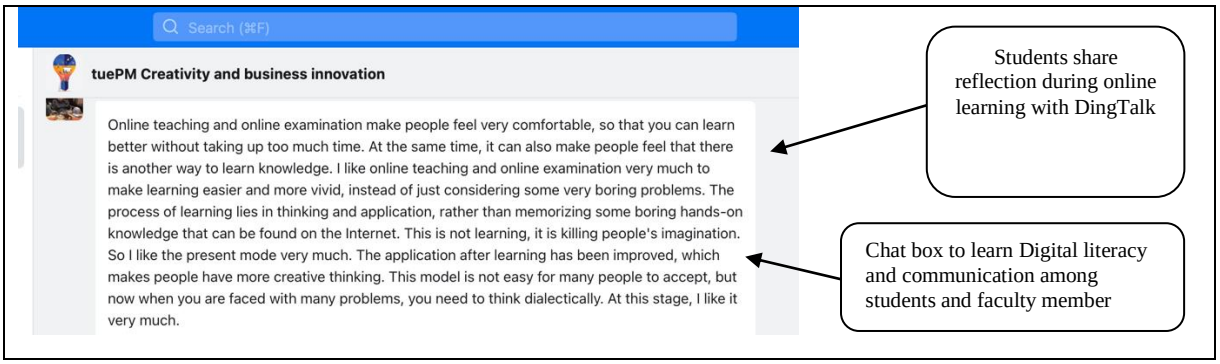


Figure 2. *DingTalk app for communication in distance learning (Reflection)*

Distance Learning was adaptable and straightforward for our Chinese students because the DingTalk app supported both synchronous and asynchronous teaching. A mobile phone or laptop computer can be used to access this service. Teachers can use this platform to provide information to students trapped abroad, even if they are at home. Students and teachers could quickly enact or operationalize the process via the DingTalk app. By having a system and stimulus in place, all users of the app can find comfort. The following were examples of innovative paraphrases used by students: The recordings were still intact and simply replicated for each faculty member who distributed and connected with students asynchronously (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Faculty and international students might use file-sharing and digital literacy activities to engage students who like to read and write in the chat box about running the subjects to help them accomplish their assignments. Digital literacy techniques can be respected by embracing a new phenomenon that is still based on technology.

When students and faculty members use mobile devices, talk, or read the news, they are most influenced by technology. They have entered a new era of research. Because of the rapid spread of the pandemic and the discovery of human-to-human transmission, traditional teaching methods must be reduced. Faculty and students seek to employ technology to support digital literacy practices, such as knowledge enactment and delivery. Students are compelled to discover new things when they read on their cell phones or tablets (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The more significant the role of social media in knowledge transfer, the better. This excellent strategy can be applied to numerous technological advancements. Individuals could perceive digital literacy activities as implementing a university's approach by incorporating techniques from the distance learning systems universities use. Here is a look at Cambodian students who were engaging in class remotely. She continued attending classes wherever she went.

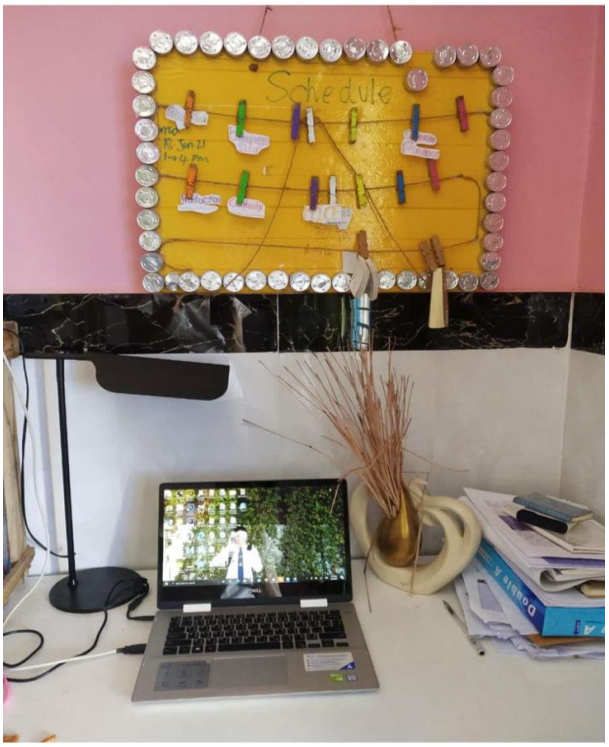


Figure 3. *Student's reflection during online study in Cambodia*

The student commented on creativity while studying online using the DingTalk app:

Creativity and Business Innovation have taught me several beneficial aspects. *Creativity is the ability to generate many ideas, not just one,*

but a great one. This course teaches us lessons and allows us to conduct more research on business innovation to explore broader ideas and strengthen our creative thinking**.** *I find myself getting to know more about a business that it's not just about using marketing strategies or sales methods; nevertheless*, it is more about being creative and thinking more about the innovations that we can complement our business *(DD, Cambodian)*



Figure 4. *Students' reflection while faculty members share photo-elicitation*

Here, the students reviewed while the faculty member shared photos and sent them to the DingTalk chat; the faculty member wanted them to share their reflections while studying online or through distance learning. The student comments and experiences are as follows:

When I viewed this photo, I regarded it as a picture that could mean a lot of different things to me. *The first is online learning*, which is a relatively new method of learning. As a result, there are no pupils in the classroom; the benefit is that kids are not crammed into the classroom. Because of social distancing, the downside is that professors must only teach via computer. Students and teachers are unable to communicate with one another. The second point to mention is the utilization of online media. *Using internet materials in the classroom must be interesting and help pupils understand the information taught*. The third factor is the connection, especially if it is slow. It can disrupt the studies and cause discomfort. So, *I guess everything is well, and we should be able to return to university every day* (AA, Thai).

In their exploration of distance learning, researchers have consistently encountered instances of digital literacy practices. With an internet connection, people can read and research on their smartphones while traveling. For many people, improving their digital literacy through virtual apps was a reasonable approach. Independent learning can benefit students by helping them put their digital literacy knowledge into practice. As illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, developing digital literacy benefits students by increasing their autonomy and enabling them to access information, mainly through the photovoice reflection. As a result, students' creativity could be ahead of the curve. Digital literacy practices educate and guide young learners about current events, empowering them to make informed and independent decisions. Internet connectivity was highly adaptable. Internet access, appropriately supported devices, and teachers who create an enjoyable learning environment make online learning more accessible.

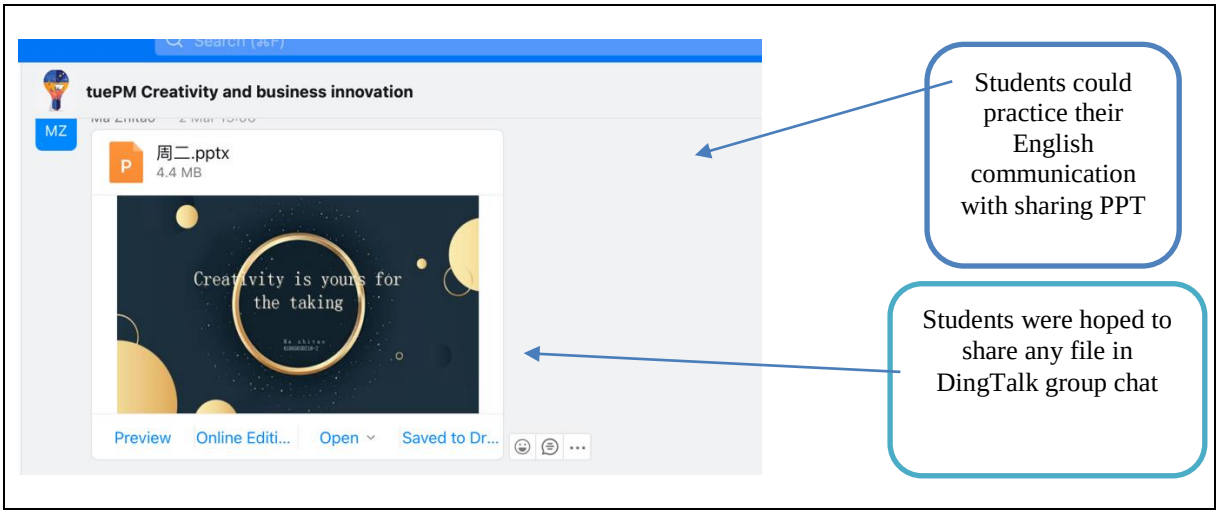


Figure 5. *DingTalk app for sharing materials and encouraging students to give presentations*

Here is the student's testimony and opinion while studying with the DingTalk app:

As an international student studying away from home, I have learned many things that I did not know before. My experience when I first came here was that I had to understand Thai

culture. *I am in Cambodia, learning from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic*. This has brought so many challenges for me because I am not really the kind of person who enjoys studying online. However, after months had passed, I found myself adjusting to online learning through *the Ding-Talk application*. Though it was not quite convenient before, but it actually helped me a lot. With the help of the Ding-Talk application, *I got to communicate with my professors in Thailand. Joining the Creativity and Business Management class and listening to the lectures daily*. I can text my professor in their private Ding-Talk to ask for more explanation, and they are all happy to answer my questions (DD, Cambodian).

Students could enjoy online classes because faculty members worked hard to keep them engaged, primarily through social media platforms (Erdoğdu & Çakıroğlu, 2021). As a result, students were encouraged to develop their digital literacy practices and skills through reading and writing about digitalization in online learning (Rahayu et al., 2024). A distance learner's organized and fixed life is defined by their proximity to time and space coordinates. While there is no denying the existence of fixed space-time scales, we can only study how students express their subjective time-space experiences through meticulous research (Kabat, 2014). Moreover, international students gained new insights through the DingTalk app. Even if they are confined to their country, teaching and learning can continue, and students can benefit from online or distance learning.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the pedagogical implications of DingTalk on the online learning experiences of international students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a Thai public university. This study employed a qualitative methodology. The findings revealed how DingTalk facilitated online learning by facilitating flexible online access to learning and allowing real-time and asynchronous communication. The tool also facilitated business-as-usual online learning during the pandemic period. However, the findings highlighted a range of problems associated with online connectivity, digital literacy, pedagogy, and institutional support. This suggests that effective online learning relies not only on online platforms and technology but also on effective pedagogical practices supported by quality institutional infrastructure and practices.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge regarding learning with online learning platforms, specifically DingTalk, which is an under-researched platform in the context of Thai higher education. Importantly, this study is the first to investigate the use of DingTalk by international students in an EFL context at a Thai public university. The findings of this study have several practical implications for language educators, university administrators, and educational policymakers at both university and national levels. This study has implications for designing online and blended learning environments that are engaging, inclusive, and sustainable for language learners. Future research employing larger samples and a mixed-methods approach should investigate the effects of online learning platforms in various educational contexts and settings.

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