

# Digital Problems and Parental Support among Thai Learners during Online Learning

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## ABSTRACT

In April 2021, the 3rd wave of the covid-19 pandemic hit the whole country of Thailand. The majority of the schools decided to change from face-to-face learning to online learning. The abrupt closure of schools is mandated, and students are missing the time for playing with friends, social interaction for learning and development, and their daily routine of discipline in school. Parents automatically became vital learning agents at home, facilitating and assisting students in understanding how to continue learning, how to use digital tools, and how to maintain and support students in this manner. This study was a design of the parental support at home, the technicalities using distance learning of the parents and teachers, and other accessible online avenues. This qualitative method was purposely to explore and investigate further the experiences of parents, students, and teachers about distance learning and management during the Covid-19 pandemic era to obtain valuable insight and understanding of real-life experiences in varying situations and circumstances. A purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. Data were collected from seventy (70) Primary Thai parents and thirty-six (36) foreign teachers falling in the inclusion criteria. Considering the COVID-19 restrictions, the data were collected via Google Forms and online interviews. The analysis of the obtained data focused on two (2) themes: (A) The digital problems encountered by Thai parents and foreign teachers during online learning and (B) The influence of Thai parents on their children's academics during online learning. The findings of this study highlighted the areas in digital technology that Thai parents and foreign teachers found difficulties during online learning. Internet connection and lack of knowledge on using platforms were found to be the top problems among foreign teachers. The same problem was found among parents; having and giving all the other things concerning juggling around may help parents and children develop a sense of solidarity and comfort. The undertaking may seem overwhelming and daunting because families are experiencing pressures with additional financial stress and employment flux. However, the findings on the influence of parents on students during online learning were promising. Parents believe that their involvement at home responsibility is needed and significant. Among the good parental practices were expecting their children to do well in online learning and following up their children's classwork by asking what they had learned.

## KEYWORDS

*Covid-19, online learning, digital problems, parental support, platforms*

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## INTRODUCTION

Digital learning is the backbone of instructional technology that is of vital support during this Covid-19 pandemic. It influences and helps students, teachers, and parents to achieve learning goals. Unfortunately, technical problems during online classes have been occurring for foreign teachers and parents. Since online teaching is a primary tool recently of teachers to attend to the learning needs of the students, it always involves problems, especially in using digital as a medium of instruction. Foreign teachers are sometimes experiencing a lack of preparation, technological support, and deep literacy that leads to struggles in using it and affects the learning of valuable time.

In addition, the factors narrowing with the fair use and services of the technology has been a challenge to sustain possible management of the new system in a manner that has reliable sources of networks and services for parents at home and teachers in school. Some of the issues teachers can face relate to the technology itself. Others relate to student or parent expectations or whether there's enough of the right professional development to help teachers become proficient in digital technology (Hyndman, B. 2018).

Furthermore, the researchers find it interesting with so many possible reasons to know the progress and the gaps of a child's academic performance. The parent's involvement has also become significant and valuable support for the child's academic achievement and use of technology. According to Sitimurang E.L. et al (2020), parents are required to play an active role in guiding their children to study at home. The lessons they have to follow every day, parents at home must know, the child's homework assignments have to be completed.

While it was mentioned that the school closures do not only affect students, but they also present parents with new challenges to support their children's education during this time (Mala, D. 2021 Bangkok Post), none has focused specifically on the technical problems that parents and teachers encounter during online learning.

Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang, & Jiang (2020) noted that good parenting skills become particularly crucial when children are confined at home. Besides monitoring child performance and behavior, parents also need to respect their identity and needs and help children develop self-discipline skills. Parental support is evident in some Thai households during online learning; however, the effect of Thai parents' involvement in their children's online learning is yet to be researched. Although, some studies indicate that parental involvement is one factor of academic achievement, and by having a positive perspective toward education, a child is more likely to succeed. (Ibañez et al, 2004).

The inspiration for using the START Approach is an acronym for See-Think-Aim-Refine-Tell. It was based on the idea that research is empirical, and thus, begins with anything that is seen. Further, the approach is based on the idea that research is public, and thus, it ends with a 'share-to-another' style (Camara, 2019). The researcher observed that some learners in primary school had their parents with them while learning online, assisting them. However, during online learning, these parents would encounter technical difficulties. As a result, the parents would call their child's teacher to ask for assistance in resolving the problem, and sometimes this caused distraction and frustration between teachers and parents. Furthermore, with the sudden change of classroom set-up to online education, some teachers also encountered technical problems while learning online. These difficulties can disrupt classes and affect the quality of the lesson. With these in mind, the study attempts to determine the implications of parents' presence during online learning in the child's academics and identify the technical problems both the parents and teachers face.

## Research Questions

Generally, this study aimed to determine the digital problems and parental support among Thai learners during online learning for the school year 2021 -2022 of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Further, it sought to identify the levels of the parents' perceptions towards their practices during online learning and to find out the support schools could provide to parents and teachers to lessen the digital problems and improve the pupils' learning.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample Population

For this research, purposive sampling was the most suitable choice for selecting respondents because the researchers are staying in different provinces in Thailand, and the respondents are also from different locales. The respondents consisted of two groups: (A) Primary Thai Parents and (B) Foreign Teachers. With the context of underlying assumptions, the research sample was based on the inclusion criteria. A set of seventy (70) selected parents from Wat Pa Ngio School, Ban Ngui, Sam Khok District, Pathumthani, Thailand, spend time formally assisting their children during online learning with the morbidity of having access to an internet connection. Sixty-four (64) parents opted to respond to the survey, of which fifty-six (56) were parents, six (6) were carers/caregivers, and two (2) were unknown (either a parent or a carer/caregiver). Also, Foreign Kindergarten and Primary teachers from Anuban Taksin Rayong International School, Rayong, were selected for the study to look into the digital problems they encounter when teaching online. The respondents comprised thirty-six (36) teachers. All responded, of which thirty two (32) were females, two (2) were males, and two (2) were unknown gender.

### Instrumentation, Data Collection, and Analysis

The data collection instrumentation consisted of two sections: a survey-questionnaire and a set of 5 open-ended questions related to the digital problems of Thai parents and Foreign Kindergarten and Primary teachers and the influence of Thai parents during online learning. Two different sets of survey-questionnaires and interview questions were designed for the two groups of respondents: A) Thai Parents and B) Foreign Teachers. Considering the recent COVID-19 restrictions in Thailand, the researchers opted for the online interview with the selected respondents.

**A) Primary Thai Parents.** The survey respondents were volunteers from parents of Wat Pa Ngio School, Ban Ngui, Sam Khok District, Pathumthani, Thailand. Researchers contacted the academic head of the English department if they could participate in the survey. Hence, the medium of instruction of the survey questionnaire was written in English and translated to Thai. It was designed via Google Forms and distributed among Thai parents using Facebook messenger and line. The survey- questionnaire consisted of different parts. The first part was about the Thai parents' demographic information; the second part included a set of questions about the Thai parents' influence on their children's academics, and the third part was about the digital problems they encountered during online learning. In addition, a zoom interview also was conducted with the selected pupils and parents.



**B) Foreign Teachers.** The researchers conducted pilot testing using an online interview with sampled foreign teachers and school managers regarding their digital problems during online learning. Furthermore, a survey-questionnaire for the Foreign Kindergarten and Primary teachers was created via Google Forms and was distributed among the teachers using Gmail and Facebook messenger. The survey-questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was about the teachers' demographic information, and the second part was about the digital problems they encounter during online learning.

The consistent data collected digitally via Google Forms from the survey questionnaires were subjected to identify, categorize, transcribed, encoded into two groups, and then analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Two major themes emerged from the analysis of the current data set that reflects how parents perceived online learning and the digital problems encountered by both parents and teachers.

**Table 1. Frequency on the elements for the parental practices**

(Part IA: Parental Practices)	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I am expecting my child to be a good student.	4.85	A
2. I am expecting my child to get high grades.	4.1	O
3. I am checking my child's school work and homework.	4.02	O
4. I am asking my child what he/she learned in class.	4.35	A
5. I decide the things that my child needs to do.	3.52	O
<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>O</b>

Legend:

Relative Value: 5- Always (A); 4- Often (O); 3- Sometimes (S); 2- Rarely (R); 1- Never (N)

Statistical Limits: (5) 4.21-5.00; (4) 3.41-4.20; (3) 2.61-3.40; (2) 1.81-2.60; (1) 1.00-1.8

It can be seen from the table above that parents often do the parental practices (4.17). It can also be gleaned that parents always expect their child to be a good student (4.85) and always ask what their children learned in their classes (4.35). The parents also perceived that they often expect their child to have high grades (4.1), often check their children's homework (4.02), and often decide the things that their children need to do (3.52). These parameters were taken into consideration by the researchers for the initial assessment and would help in crafting because such would directly impact the levels of perceptions of the significance and gaps of the parent's support during online learning. In a study by McAfee, Distance Learning Challenges, taken in April 2020, the following were found as difficulties faced by parents (of kids in K-12) with virtual learning: Keeping their children focused on schoolwork (instead of other online activities) 50.31%. Establishing a daily routine 49.26%. Establishing a wake-up and bedtime schedule 33.40%. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) argue that a parent's "role construction" is molded by a parent's personal experiences with their own schooling, prior experiences with involvement, and ongoing experiences with their child's educators. The researchers found out that this is good, and one of the best things parents can do is regularly set clear, measurable goals that a child has something to focus on and constantly follow up and check on them to see if they are in progress to reaching their goals and developing a growth mindset.

**Table 2. Frequency on the elements for the parental interaction**

(Part IB: Parental Interaction)	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I am actively involved in all activities of my child's learning growth.	3.95	O
2. I initiate to let my child excel academically.	3.97	O
3. I am strict and disciplined.	3.85	O
4. I am very supportive in all aspects of my child's growth, especially in a learning capacity.	4.74	A
5. I let my child explore and discover their creativity.	4.48	A
6. I organize and plan my child's daily activities.	3.63	O
7. I talk to and motivate my child.	4.44	A
8. I provide learning support when needed.	4.66	A
9. I act as a manager to ensure that my child did all the tasks properly.	3.87	O
10. I am present during online learning.	3.38	O
<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>O</b>

Legend:

Relative Value: 5- Always (A); 4- Often (O); 3- Sometimes (S); 2- Rarely (R); 1- Never (N)

Statistical Limits: (5) 4.21-5.00; (4) 3.41-4.20; (3) 2.61-3.40; (2) 1.81-2.60; (1) 1.00-1.8

In terms of parental interaction, for table 2, the findings were remarkable (4.1). The researchers believed that involvement at home is vital, especially when parents discuss school activities and help their children plan their programs, which positively impacts overall academic achievement (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Van Voorhis, 2003). Data showed that parents are very supportive in all aspects of their child's growth, especially in a learning capacity (4.74) that provides learning support when needed (4.66) and allows their children to explore and discover creativity (4.48) with talking and motivating (4.44). The parents initiate to let the child excel academically (3.97) and are actively involved in all activities for learning growth (3.95). They act as managers to ensure that their child does all the tasks properly (3.87) and are strict and disciplined (3.85). The parents organize and plan their child's daily activities (3.63). According to Bhamani, Makhdoom, Bharuchi, Ali, Kaleem & Ahmed Vol. 7 No. 1 (June 2020), a proper timetable is set where the child wakes up at 8:00 am for Zoom classes until 2:00 pm to complete the given task for each subject, during which both parent and child sit together to give support in completing the school task. Parents were so concerned that they were present during online learning (3.38). However, not all of our schools, teachers, and parents are ready to homeschool the children. Mr. Sompong noted that distance learning would only be productive if students have the discipline to study and have a supportive environment in their family homes. (Bangkok Post, 2021) Although, parent's support and involvement are the keys because many children are shy about asking for help from their teachers during virtual learning or do not know what to ask for, and in this case, there will be gaps in the pupil's learning which will give them an unstable foundation and have long-term consequences for their education.

**Table 3. Frequency of the use of Desktop, Laptop, Notebook**

(Part IIA: Use of Desktop, Laptop, Netbook)	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I can turn on and off the computer.	3.4	BK
2. I can identify the parts of the computer.	3.08	BK
3. I can adjust the volume of the computer sound.	3.55	AK
4. I can turn on and off the computer camera.	3.34	BK
5. I can fix simple computer issue (troubleshooting).	2.98	BK
<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>BK</b>

Legend:

Relative Value: 5- Superior Knowledge (SK); 4- Adequate Knowledge (AK); 3- Basic Knowledge (BK); 2- Minimal Knowledge; 1- No Knowledge (NK)

Statistical Limits: (5) 4.21-5.00; (4) 3.41-4.20; (3) 2.61-3.40; (2) 1.81-2.60 ;( 1) 1.00-1.8

The findings in Table 3 showed that the average number of Thai parents have basic knowledge of using any computer - desktop, laptop, or netbooks, etc. (3.27). It can be seen that while parents have adequate knowledge on adjusting the volume of the computer sound (3.55), they only have basic knowledge on turning on/off the computer (3.4) as well as turning on/off its camera (3.34), identifying the parts of the computer (3.08), and simple troubleshooting (2.98). However, it is understandable that in only one area, the parents have adequate knowledge. The rest are basic, which also showed that simple troubleshooting (2.98) is the least among the basic things they know about the usage of computers. Parents cite a number of different reasons why they think parenting has grown more difficult over the years. Some of the most common responses tend to stress the impact of digital technology and the rise of social media (Pew Research Center, 2020). The findings align with the study conducted by Serkan Dencir (2012), which stated that a clear majority of parents have no computer competency. According to Bangkok Post (2021), a survey conducted by the Education Unit of the World Bank in Bangkok found the education system is fatigued and not well-prepared to implement large-scale online learning. Also, a study by edtech company Promethean found that only 5% of teachers feel like they're receiving full training and support for edtech in their schools. It shouldn't be a surprise then if you as a parent feel unsupported.

**Table 4. Frequency of technical problem of the parent's use of Platforms and Apps**

(Part IIB: Use of Platforms and Apps)	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I am familiar with the different platforms and applications used by my child.	2.98	BK
2. I can open the platform (Google Meet, Hangouts, Zoom, and Line) and apps.	3.1	BK
3. I can open and use Google or any browsers.	3.39	BK
4. I can open and use Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint).	3.1	BK
5. I can send my child's work/photos using the app and platform.	3.24	BK
6. I can make and answer calls using the platform.	3.3	BK
7. I can mute and unmute the microphone.	3.48	AK



8. I can adjust the hearing volume of my child's headset/ headphones/ earphones	3.48	AK
9. I can download and upload my child's work.	3.42	AK
10. I am able to explore new platforms, applications, programs, and websites.	3.05	BK
<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>BK</b>

Legend:

Relative Value: 5- Superior Knowledge (SK); 4- Adequate Knowledge (AK); 3- Basic Knowledge (BK); 2- Minimal Knowledge); 1- No Knowledge ((NK)

Statistical Limits: (5) 4.21-5.00; (4) 3.41-4.20; (3) 2.61-3.40; (2) 1.81-2.60 ;( 1) 1.00-1.8

In terms of platforms and apps usage, Table 4 showed that, on average, Thai parents also have basic knowledge in this area (3.25). It is indicated that parents have adequate knowledge on muting and unmuting the microphone (3.48) and adjusting the hearing volume of their child's headset/ headphones/ earphones (3.48). The parents also have adequate knowledge on downloading and uploading their child's work. The findings above also showed that parents have basic knowledge on these areas of using platforms and apps: opening and using of Google and other browsers (3.39); making and answering calls using the platform (3.3); sending their child's work/photos using the app and platform (3.24); opening the platform and/or app (3.1); opening and using Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint); exploring new platforms, applications, programs, and websites (3.05); and familiarizing with the different platforms and applications used by their child (2.98).

Although the findings stipulated that Thai parents, on average, have basic knowledge on the usage of platforms and apps during the online learning of their children, familiarizing, opening, and exploring of the platforms, apps, and websites, as well as opening and using of Microsoft Office were the least known by parents to use. The use of platforms and apps have been useful during online learning to both teachers and students. There are many advantages to using e-learning platforms and according to [Roco Fernandez, et al](#), these are some of them: teacher-student and student-teacher communication can improve with incorporated communication tools, incorporating tools for student follow-up and evaluation, they offer flexible and open learning; and constant updating of information is possible. At this time, many parents may give up teaching their children to learn at home because of the inability to master technology and the unavailability of learning resources and media. The teacher prepares materials to assist the learning process, which are materials that students must do in writing, audio, and video. Parents are essential partners in all aspects of education, including the issue of technology. Parents should be able to download the material and direct their children to work on it. For this reason, parents must master technology and be able to guide children to study online. In a study conducted by [Shelima Bhamani, et al, \(2020\)](#) it was mentioned that those parents already familiar with technology and online tools were far more effective in creating a routine of learning at home with their children, including activities and home assignments given by the schools, and using more online resources for reading and home-based activities.

**Table 5. Frequency of the Technical problems of foreign teachers during online learning**

<b>(Part IA: Use of Platforms and Apps)</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. No internet connection plans/speed	3.32	S
2. Familiarity with Platforms ( zoom, line, google meet, MS Teams)	3.79	U
3. Problem on navigating apps, programs, and platforms	2.87	S
4. Troubleshooting	2.55	R
5. Having problems of Uploading and downloading files	2.42	R
6. Software application problem ( very loading, not responding)	2.95	S
7. Having Problem on Converting Files ( i.e., MS word-PDF)	2.42	R
8. Having problem on Filling and finding computer files	2.13	R
9. Having Problem on Backing up files	2.26	R
<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>S</b>

Legend:

Relative Value: 5- Always (A); 4- Usually (U); 3- Sometimes (S); 2- Rarely (R); 1- Never (N)

Statistical Limits: (5) 4.21-5.00; (4) 3.41-4.20; (3) 2.61-3.40; (2) 1.81-2.60 ;( 1) 1.00-1.8

Table 5 showed the technical problems encountered by the foreign teachers during online teaching, wherein the 9 top technical problems encountered sometimes occur during the online teaching of the foreign teachers based on the average mean of 3.

Many teachers struggle with technical issues that are unavoidable and cause stress. They become helpless if technical errors come in the middle of the live session or communicating with students (Diwa, M., 2021). The technical problem that teachers usually have with online teaching is the use of Platforms (3.79). Because of this, teachers are having difficulty delivering the lesson because of the digital platform, lack of proper knowledge and support reflects on the teacher's performance online. Also, foreign teachers sometimes have problems with the internet connection (3.32). Since internet connection is the primary usable tool in conducting online teaching, connecting, and communicating of teachers and learners in the online teaching era, having unstable and low internet connections seems to be the problem of the teachers that results in undesirable outcomes of teaching, online learning and teaching are only effective if students have consistent access to the internet and computers (Bangkok Post, 2021). Another problem of the teachers sometimes is software applications that are very loaded and not responding (2.95). The case of software applications sometimes triggers the momentum of the teaching time that corresponds to the wasted moment for learning. The teacher's technical problem is sometimes navigating the application, programs, and platform (2.87). This technical problem itself shows that the computer knowledge of the teachers is very minimal and needs support to enhance the ideas on using and navigating the software application. Troubleshooting (2.55), having problems uploading and downloading, and converting files (2.42), problems on backing up files (2.26), and problems on fillings and finding computer files (2.13) are the rare technical problems that occur on the foreign teachers during the online learning. It connotes that the teachers are knowledgeable enough to de-escalate the problems with simple computer controls and some software. (OECD, 2020[11]) Further concerns relate to the fact that the effectiveness of online learning might have been hindered, in some cases, by the lack of basic digital skills among certain students and teachers, making them unprepared to adapt to the new situation so abruptly. Training and support for teachers to use digital tools and resources can improve their confidence and



capabilities, their effective use, and understanding of their benefits ([The Scottish Government, 2015](#)). A staggering 84% of teachers reported facing challenges in delivering education digitally, with close to half the teachers facing issues related to the internet, signal issues, and data expenses. Two out of every five teachers lack the necessary devices to deliver education digitally; the situation is particularly grave in UP and Chhattisgarh where 80% and 67% of teachers respectively lack the requisite devices to deliver education online ([India Today Magazine, 2021](#)).

## CONCLUSION

It is inevitable to think and explore relevant literature to suit open inquiry in a pandemic era. The global lockdown and abrupt school closures were the consequences in which new learning strategies have to be adapted and adjusted to a new routine, such as working from home and online learning for the children. The findings highlighted above are real experiences of teachers, parents, and their children.

In facing the reality of this novel crisis, there is no stress-free and easy way to overcome the problems and issues that parents are facing and fronting with virtual learning. Moreover, parents have to work hard to help bridge and address the learning gap in their children's academic, emotional, and social lives during these challenging times. Home is home, and school is school. Both places have a very different vibe, yet students are now being asked to get into the school mentality at home. ([georgiatestprep.com](#)) However, parents require a learn-as-you-go approach and adapting to the specific needs for their child's success. In the interview of the researchers, some of the parents said that they learn how to manage a day and make the best of learning at home suitable and convenient in these circumstances and must become very creative. They also need to provide convenience and a quiet space for their children to help them mentally delineate their learning space and fulfill learning goals.

Following the statements above, the researchers recommend that parents continue applying and exploring different ways to effectively support and influence their child's behavior and academic development during online learning. Schools should extend pastoral support to families whose students struggle behaviorally and academically. Communication between the school (teachers) and parents on the expectations from students during online learning must also be clear. Providing virtual meetings for parents by the school to address their children's academic, emotional, and social development would also benefit both the students and their parents. It will further strengthen the relationship between the parents and school and between parents and their children.

Furthermore, we all know students use devices like smartphones, tablets, desktops, and laptops in their online learning. However, sometimes both tech-savvy and tech-hesitant parents are not always familiar with the world of online learning and the platforms and apps the teacher and children use for learning. Distance learning using online learning has many challenges faced by parents. Parents at home replace the role of teachers in school, and they are the ones who play an active role at home to support their children during online learning. The findings in this study that showed the digital difficulties that parents encounter during the online learning of their children revealed the lack of mastery of technology of parents and areas that need to be catered to enable them to support their children learning online successfully.

Teachers share the same dilemma with parents in dealing with and delivering education through digital medium difficulties. It is understandable and reasonable that this wave of innovations in learning is not always convenient, easy, and appealing. However, teachers and parents have taken appropriate measures to ensure that education is not compromised. As a result, children can retain and continue learning and growing from

their routine lives, even staying at home. Well-respected academic Sompong Jitradub said online learning and teaching are only effective if students have consistent access to the internet and computers, and if teachers have received targeted training and support for online instruction. (Bangkok Post, 2021). Based on the research findings and discussions on the digital problems of teachers, it revealed that the major issues were internet connection and familiarity with the different platforms for learning. Therefore, it is necessary for the teachers to have proper training and support from the school to elevate the quality of distance learning. Unfortunately, things have not been as attractive as they may seem. The teachers had to speedily learn, back up, and spend more time learning how to use the different digital apps. For class preparation, special contents have to be created in PowerPoint presentations, videos, and other online learning tools.

The success of utilizing the different digital technologies not only depends on sufficient access to tools and resources but also on the knowledge and support networks for teachers and the availability of sufficient training. Providing the Foreign teachers, both Kindergarten and Primary, with this support and adequate tools and resources will enable them to use digital technologies effectively during online learning. Studies show how training and support for teachers to use digital tools and resources can improve their confidence and capabilities, effective use, and understanding of their benefits. Therefore, the researchers also recommend that schools provide sufficient training (CPD, webinars, etc.) and resources for teachers on using digital technologies, specifically with the platforms used and apps for online learning. That pertains to parents who struggle with digital technologies. Schools could also provide training to parents concerning their areas of difficulty so they will become more knowledgeable of their children's usage of digital platforms and apps, as this will further help improve learning.

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