INVESTIGATING VIRTUAL INSTRUCTOR ROLES AND ONLINE TEACHING EXPERIENCE:
A PROGRAM LEVEL CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *Delivery of distance education via internet based technology to make learning interactive and collaborative has become increasingly accepted in education nationwide and worldwide. New technologies provide the opportunity and challenge teachers to perform virtual instructor roles. This research study reflected on the virtual instructor roles and online teaching experiences towards eLearning delivery mode. The objective of the study was to explore the virtual instructor roles and online teaching experiences at program level at Graduate School of eLearning, Assumption University of Thailand. The virtual instructor roles included three dimensions: pedagogical dimension, managerial dimension, and technological dimension. A qualitative case study method was used in this study which included the instructors' positive impression towards on line teaching experiences. The respondents for the study were 15 faculties members from five online graduate programs at Graduate School of eLearning, Assumption University of Thailand. The structured questionnaire was used to obtain the qualitative data. The content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Findings revealed that there were some similarities and differences on reflections, impressions, and online teaching experiences among the faculty members.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in the world today is influenced mostly by technology in order to facilitate and support the quality of teaching and learning and meet the goals of education that is, contribute to the economic prosperity of a nation, therefore; the delivery of knowledge and transmission of updated knowledge and information are done in a variety of learning modes.

The increasing use of technology via internet in the delivery of knowledge and information will increase the number of people who interested in pursuing their education for professional development in various educational programs that delivered through eLearning, thus the development of teachers' roles as virtual instructor and   the online teaching and learning program in which courses, contents, and interactive learning activities are conducted and delivered via the internet based, gives more opportunity and be another option for the learners who are full time work study anywhere at any time, and any place. Education in Thailand today delivered mostly through traditional methods and needs to be uplifted to meet the standards of the teaching profession, to explore and prepare teachers as virtual instructors and upgrade their teaching methodology through the use of updated technology in order to keep pace with the rapid changes in knowledge delivery.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the virtual instructor roles and online teaching experiences at program level at Graduate School of eLearning, Assumption University.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The researchers reviewed the literatures base on previous research studies both quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodology research design, which covers the contents; online teaching and learning, virtual instructor roles, and teaching experiences.

K.J. Kim & C.J. Bonk (2006) conducted a research study on the future of online teaching and learning in higher education by using a survey of individual believed to have relevant experiences with and insights into the factors affecting the present and future state of online education. This study was a part of a longitudinal effort to understand the use of technology in teaching. The participants were instructors, instructional designers, and administrators who were members of either the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching in Online Education (MERLOT) or the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET). The results of the study confirmed some commonly held beliefs about online education, refuted others, and provided a range of predictions about the future of technology
-enabled education.

Swan K. (2003) reviewed the literature on learning effectiveness of asynchronous online environments. It showed the commonly accepted findings of no significant differences in learning outcomes between online and traditional course to examine that literature in terms of form of interactivity, a feature of online environments that might be made to matter in learning, thus explored and organized according to learner interactions with course content, student interactions with instructors, and interactions among classmates in online course environment. More interactions with computer and course interfaces and virtual interaction were also examined. The chapter concluded with a summary of what the research tell us and its for implementations online learning.

Coppola N.W., Hiltz S.R, and Rotter N.(2001) conducted a qualitative research study of role changes that occur when faculty become virtual professor , interviewed 20 faculties, coded with pattern analysis software, captured role changes enacted by instructors in ALN settings included cognitive role, affective role, managerial role. The results indicated that overall faculty reported a change in their teaching persona towards more precision in their presentation of materials and interactions, combined with a shift to a more Socratic pedagogy, emphasizing interactions with students

J.B. Arbaugh (2000) conducted a research study on virtual classroom characteristics and student satisfaction with internet based MBA courses. The researcher described the virtual classroom characteristics that although the virtual classroom had flexibility and its role in internet-based education, found and suggested that the greater volume and more equal student participation in class discussion were more than in traditional classroom. However; they generally enjoyed the process less than students in face to face groups.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to explore the virtual instructor roles and teaching experiences in online teaching and learning setting.

A qualitative research method was utilized for a program case study level. The respondents for this study were 15 faculty members from five online teaching and learning programs at Graduate School of eLearning, Assumption University.

The survey with structured questionnaire was used as a research instrument to obtain the qualitative data. The content analysis was useful in providing the overall picture and derived insights. The inductive and deductive approaches were applied for the content analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research study was divided the results into three parts; about the demographic information of respondents, the respondents' perceptions on virtual instructor roles, and the impressions on online teaching experiences.

4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

This research study, there were 15 faculty members responded the survey questionnaire. The respondent genders were female (60%) more than male (40%). The majority of respondent age was at 41-50 years old (46.66%), 26.66 percent of respondents was more than 60 years old. All of respondents (100%) hold doctoral degree and had classroom teaching experiences before online teaching, integrated teaching and blended learning. The respondents 'teaching experiences with online teaching varied from none to more than 9 years. About 95 percent of respondents had experiences in teaching integration of computer or technology into face to face for classroom teaching.

Table 1: Summary of Respondents' Demographic Information

Demographic Information		Respondents	Percentage
1. Gender:	Female	9	60
	Male	6	40
2. Age	31 - 40 years	2	13.33
	41 - 50 years	7	46.66
	51 - 60 years	2	13.33
	>60 years	4	26.66
3. Educational Background	Master Degree	0	0
	Doctoral Degree	15	100
4. Teaching Experiences	Classroom teaching	15	100
	Online Learning	15	100
	Teaching integration	4	26.66
	Blended Learning	2	13.33

4.2 The Respondents' Perception on Virtual Instructor Roles

Table 2: Summary of Respondents' Perception on Virtual   Instructor Roles in Three Dimensions

Virtual Instructor Roles	Mean	S.D.
1. Pedagogical Dimension	4.70	0.68
2. Managerial Dimension	4.88	0.57
3. Technological Dimension	4.46	0.74

The results of this research study revealed that most of respondents perceived virtual instructor roles in managerial dimension, pedagogical dimension, and technological dimension consecutively.

4.3: The Impressions about Teaching Experiences in Online Teaching?

The researchers categorized the impressions about teaching experiences in online teaching into both positive impressions and negative impressions towards teaching experiences in online teaching.

4.4 About Positive impressions about Teaching Experiences in Online Teaching

A number of faculty members noted that online teaching was prepared and well-designed course contents prior to the semester started, could maximize the student engagement as much as they could while teaching and learning process. The faculty members could update the contents, learning activities every year as necessary.

The impressions of such online teaching for students were noted by a number of faculty members:

" One of the things that I think was about it is good for learning opportunities and career development, the students could learn anywhere, create new idea and share idea into the class forum or live meetings both synchronous and asynchronous mode."

"The employees have freedom to learn at their own convenience, moreover; they don't have to leave their fulltime job, can study and work at the same time on the real issues that they confront in their workplace, especially, when the instructors use case studies to discuss. They can save their time and money for some other cost expenses, such as transportations for commuting to campus."

"When I teach online, I 'm trying to help student illustration the student's' experiences and let other classmates pick up the issues and expand to discuss and some of them support the discussion by applying some other researches."

"I think another important think for online teaching is that giving the feedback promptly to the students on their assignments or learning activities."

4.5 About Negative impressions about Teaching Experiences in Online Teaching

A number of faculty members compared online teaching versus classroom teaching and noted that online teaching consumed most of the time for preparing and producing the courseware and contents. Some of faculty members found that there were some of students lack of motivation and participation in learning activities. The students could not manage their time effectively to allocate their works and studies at the same time and sometimes they disappear from class, therefore; these group of students were needed more encouragement and closely monitored their learning activities.

5.   CONCLUSION

The results of this research study derived insights and reflected on the nature virtual instructor roles and online teaching experiences towards eLearning delivery mode. The findings revealed and confirmed that that the virtual instructor roles, teaching experiences in both online teaching and classroom teaching mode would be beneficial to student learning. As an institution, Graduate School of eLearning, Assumption University of Thailand continues to launch and offer the online teaching, need to deliberate to meet growing demands in the future and meets the global standards and quality of online learning. The faculty members expect some sort of training and support from their institution to keep pace with updated technology.   It is very important to visualize the future virtual instructor roles and online teaching and

learning environment for new generation with implementing changes in the teaching process; more student engagement, interactive learning and motivated learning activities.

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