# The Convergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic and EFL Writing Pedagogy: The Paradigm Shift

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*Abstract:* In the academic context in the COVID-19 era, learning, once traditionally taking place in the classroom, has been changed to be driven online. This happens in all fields of study, including the writing pedagogy. Even in the post-pandemic, its influence can still be witnessed in forms of online or digital learning via various communication platforms such as ZOOM or Webex Meetings. However, though this phenomenon sparks a surprising educational transformation as being discussed in diverse articles across different disciplines, its silver linings, positively affecting writing pedagogy, specifically in the EFL writing instruction context, can be recognized though they come with great challenges as being reviewed. To be aware of these issues, this academic article aims to raise this topic as a paradigm shift of EFL writing pedagogy, particularly in higher education by virtue of the COVID-19 pandemic. In so doing, the novel EFL writing pedagogy frameworks, its new feedback regime, and its triangular dimensions are introduced and discussed for long-term practical pedagogical implications, especially after the pandemic legend in the digital era.

*Keyword:* EFL writing pedagogy, EFL writing, writing pedagogy, online learning, digital learning, COVID-19

## Introduction

Since the COVID-19 outbreak was first recognized in Wuhan, China in December 2019, it was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. Unfortunately, it had been an ongoing pandemic for a lengthy period, and it created not only short-term but also long-term profound effects on different areas: politics, economy, culture, industries, travel, health issues, etc. Definitely, education was not an exception. When it was at its peak, which was different in time and location, schools, colleges, universities, or any academic institutions were closed. Teaching and learning were at the crossroads whether it needed to be paused for a while or held on a little longer without any ideas when to start it all over again, or it needed to be done in a

different way, a new normal.

As the outbreak kept going, human beings at that time were the ones born to adapt themselves to whatever environment they were pushed into. The so-called "a new normal" was created, so they could survive in the situation they were encountering during that time. In terms of the educational context in Thailand, whatever could be done needed to be agreed and reached a consensus by both parties: The Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation and the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA). Therefore, schools needed to be postponed until no transmissions were reported. When they were open, the partial re-opening and the alternate-day arrangement for attendance were done first to make sure that no new cases of transmission would ever be reported in any area of the country again. Recently, the full-scale school re-opening was carried out together with measures introduced by the Public Health Ministry. However, before we have come this far to be back on track, we have learned from this invaluable experience to cope with our global nightmare.

Writing pedagogy took place either synchronously or asynchronously before the pandemic. Those teachers who started employing the synchronized method in their writing instruction before are now the ones who get used to the idea. Nonetheless, most writing pedagogy in Thailand usually happened on site. Undoubtedly, online learning was initially recognized as an alien in writing pedagogy to not only teachers but also students even in the higher educational context. To embrace the full opportunities that the pandemic provides us and to relish the challenges in this opportunity, the dynamic paradigm shift of writing instruction can be introduced and discussed for more practical pedagogical implications in the EFL higher educational context in this article.

*Objective*

The objective of this paper is to introduce and discuss the paradigm shift of EFL writing instruction as a result of the silver linings and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic for more practical pedagogical implications in EFL writing pedagogy in the higher educational context.

## From Silver Linings to the Paradigm Shift

*A Call for the Novel EFL Writing Pedagogy*

Once a virus burst into a global pandemic, technology turned out to be the weapon teachers carried in the virtual educational battlefield. Before this, online learning was merely regarded as a supplement to the physical classroom (Salters, 2020). Pre-recorded lecture video clips, school Wi-Fi, digital slide shows, online resources, or online forums were employed in online learning. For online learning, 80% or more of the content was delivered online in the online courses (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Recently, MOOCs has been getting more and more popular, especially in higher education in Thailand. It is an online platform with unlimited access since registration is required. Based on this platform, online learning can be carried out through various types of teaching materials, for instance, videos of lectures or other kinds of content, links, forums, etc. or even assessment can be done online through this web-based educational offering. Online courses like this include both synchronous online meetings through platforms like MOOCs and asynchronous discussions. Because of advanced technology and digital media development, online courses these days, however, can be performed 100% online through high-tech gadgets or latest software and applications, ushering in the era of digital learning.

Like any other field, EFL writing pedagogy involving synchronous and asynchronous learning can be driven online. Online learning experience in EFL writing pedagogy can be shown in Figure 1 as follows.
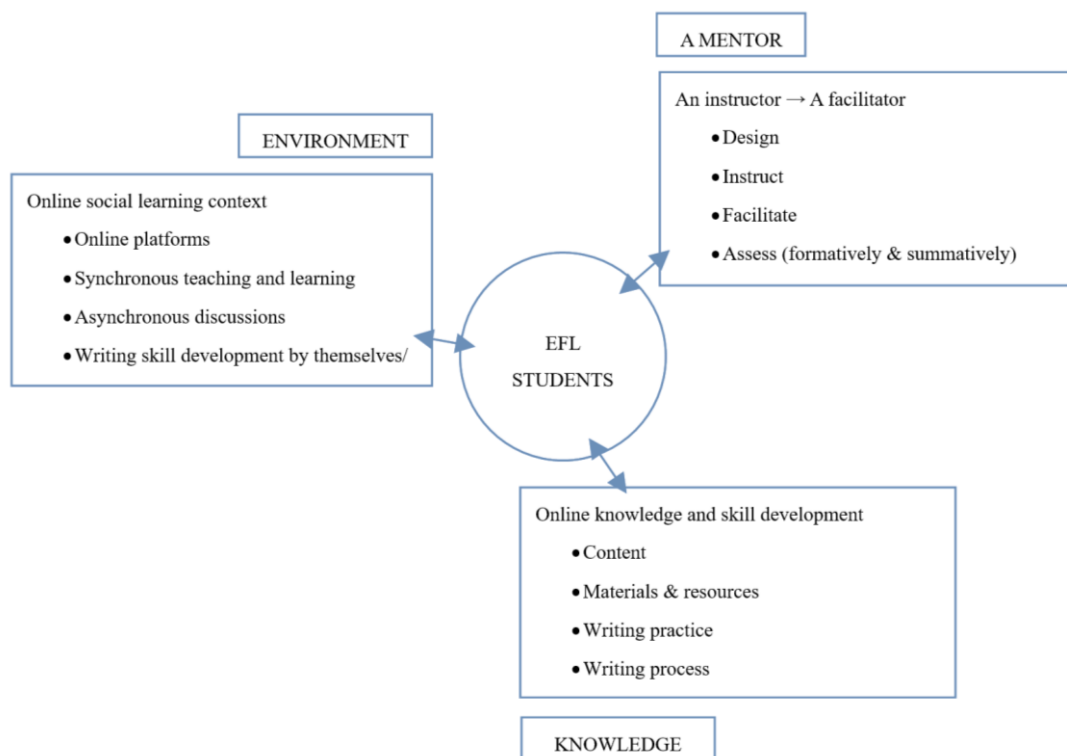
**Figure 1**

*Online Learning Experience in EFL Writing Pedagogy Framework*



Figure 1 is adapted from learning experience framework illustrated by Boettcher (2003-2016), as cited by Boettcher and Conrad (2016), to display the four main interactive and collaborative elements: students, a mentor, knowledge, and environment to create a multifaceted online learning experience in EFL writing pedagogy in higher education. The first element is the central part of the online learning experience; that is, students or EFL students in higher education. This online learning experience can be gained by an individual student, or these students can share this experience in pairs or in groups. Different stages of learning how to write require various numbers of students to take part in to establish the multidimensional online learning experience that replicates those in the real-world context. The second significant element is a mentor or an instructor as a facilitator for online learning how to write. Being the instructor, one oversees planning the lessons and designing the methods and the materials to be employed when teaching online. The instructor in online learning is the person who facilitates EFL students and makes sure that they have sufficient learning experience to do exercises, complete writing assignments, and finally work on writing projects by themselves. As learning takes place, assessment is inevitable, for it can track the progress of these students' writing development for further diagnosis (formative assessment) and showing their empirical writing skill development results (summative assessment). Another key element is the learning process. Because learning how to write happens online, the content can be diverse and up to date in terms of forms or details. With more internet access, it can be the latest e-books published online, websites, channels on YouTube, blogs, and so forth. It is like a pool of learning materials and resources from all over the world are in their hands via only one digital gadget like a computer, a laptop, a tablet, or even a smartphone. Moreover, writing practice, the writing process, and the writing project, once conducted on site, can be easily done online through a variety of platforms. Finally, the fourth element is the establishment of the online social learning context. This aspect is important as the students' writing skill enhancement can be supported through the social context via numerous platforms like MOOCs, for example. Both synchronous and asynchronous learning can take place on such platforms for lectures or discussions, even for the interactive and collaborative learning atmosphere can be created through

those online platforms. Through these platforms, the instructor can still manage the interactions: individual, in pairs, small or big groups for different kinds of writing skill development to promote self-regulated learning, formative peer assessment, and collaboration with the instructor.

During the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital learning became "a new normal learning method" for both teachers and students (Brennan, 2020). Formerly, it usually took place in remote areas where students could not go to schools which were normally far from where they lived. Such a learning method helped narrow the gap of inequality between students in urban areas and those in suburban areas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, as we needed to remain social and physical distancing with technology as our thirty-third organ, digital learning played a crucial role to lift restrictions on education. Otherwise, learning, like business, was brought to a halt in such a difficult time. Through digital learning, a classroom turned out to be the online space where learning occurred. Every single process in this kind of learning method was 100% online. Technological proficiency was inevitably required for not only teachers but also students to promote collaborative learning happening through videos, chats, or breakout rooms synchronously (Salters, 2020).

In so doing, the digital learning experience in EFL writing pedagogy once taking place during the pandemic can ensue from the phenomenon. This involves three major facets of such an experience which can be displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**
*Digital Learning Experience in EFL Writing Pedagogy Framework*



Figure 2 developed based on the three Ps of digital curriculum: personalization, place, and purpose introduced by Salters (2020), illustrates three main features of digital learning experience in EFL writing pedagogy. As EFL writing pedagogy in this kind of learning experience is digitally driven, it establishes an open-ended learning system of learning experience, including three features: personalized EFL writing pedagogy, digital EFL writing space, and purposeful EFL writing context. Firstly, personalized EFL writing pedagogy is a more flexible learning experience compared to the face-to-face classroom context. In this case, EFL writing sessions can be digitally personalized in terms of class management and access, full-time access resources, writing assignments and the submission process, or even the grading system. For instance, teachers can choose one of online meeting applications, such as Zoom, Cisco WebEx Meetings, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams etc., to create a digital classroom where a wide range of learning resources like videos, voice records, notes, or other digital materials can be shared and discussed synchronously. Through different platforms and applications, the EFL writing process can still be completed. Moreover, writing

assignments can digitally be assigned, tracked, and graded through Google Doc, Google Classroom, and other applications of the likes . For digital EFL writing pedagogy, it can take place anywhere. With a gadget and internet access, both teachers and students can flexibly teach and learn no matter where they are in this world. This promotes an opportunity for a 24/7 digital global learning community where a limitation of place is overcome. That means teachers and students from any writing classrooms or institutions across the world can digitally collaborate, learn, and develop their writing proficiency. Consequently, EFL writing pedagogy becomes a more purposeful learning experience for students and a more meaningful professional experience for teachers. Through such learning experience, it encourages ultimate engagement, good teamwork, and effective lifelong assessment. All of which enhance lifelong learning.

*A Call for the New Feedback Regime in Online and Digital EFL Writing Pedagogy*

Good feedback should encourage both discussion and revision of students' writing assignments for more improvement to foster their regulations of learning (Guasch & Espasa, 2015). During the social context of learning through the collaborative and interactive writing process, knowledge in the form of feedback can be broadened to improve students' writing tasks in collaborative writing or group discussions based on a socio-constructive approach. This communicative exchange that once took place on site can still be conducted synchronously or asynchronously in both online learning and digital learning spaces. Like what happens in the traditional writing classroom, a communicativen sociocultural learning environment or learning community can be online or digitally driven whereas autonomy can still be promoted based on sociocultural and cognitive perspectives through online learning or digital learning though it is more complicated (Meskill, 2013).

Either in online learning or digital learning, feedback can be given synchronously and asynchronously in EFL writing. Even in the in-person classrooms, feedback itself is sometimes provided solely synchronously and asynchronously or together with face-to-face feedback. Unfortunately, face-to-face dialogic feedback was impossible to take place in learning when the COVID-19 pandemic plunged our globe. This eventually raises a significant question of how the virtual feedback process can be performed, especially the formative one to improve EFL students' writing continuously and continually effectively.

According to the feedback loop in writing introduced by Guasch & Espasa (2015) and the virtual peer review activities presented by Breuch (2004), the new feedback regime, the virtual feedback process, for online and digital EFL writing pedagogy can be done in three phases: production, exchange, and implication as demonstrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**
*The Virtual Feedback Process in Online and Digital EFL Writing Pedagogy*

Regarding Figure 3, the feedback process must run through three phases in the virtual learning environment of EFL writing pedagogy. In this initial phase of writing production, students do their writing assignments or writing tasks by using word processing to compose their writing products. The next phase is the feedback exchange step where both teachers and students must decide whether this phase will be done synchronously, asynchronously, or both. If it is synchronous feedback exchange, the feedback can be given and received via chats, virtual meetings, or video calls on the applications they mutually agree on. If the asynchronous feedback exchange is chosen, the process of giving and receiving feedback can be done through emails, Google Classroom, or MOOCs. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that both processes can be employed at the same time to promote interactions and negotiations of ideas between teachers and students or among students themselves for more productive and constructive feedback. However, as EFL students, providing synchronous feedback in the target language can possibly be difficult due to their language barrier, asynchronous feedback, another supplementary feedback source, is regarded as their preferred solution in the peer feedback process (Shang, 2017). Finally, students use the feedback they receive to improve their writing products in the implementation of the feedback phase. Nonetheless, if they cannot use the feedback to polish their writing products, they should be able to go back to the previous step to make a discussion for any confusions that probably occur synchronously and/or asynchronously.

All in all, either online learning or digital learning is the bright side and the great challenge at the same time, especially in EFL writing pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## From Challenges to the Paradigm Shift

*The COVID-19 Pandemic vs. Online and Digital EFL Writing Pedagogy*

Amid the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and online and digital learning in EFL writing pedagogy, although certain blessings can be recognized and cherished, they do come with some great challenges since every coin has two sides. This therefore can be viewed as a butterfly effect illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**
*A Butterfly Effect in Online and Digital EFL Writing Pedagogy during the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Figure 4 introduces a butterfly effect occurring in online and digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in EFL writing pedagogy. Whereas silver linings can be discovered from these learning approaches, there are some challenges to face and deal with. Primarily, various types of learning spaces are available for both teachers and students for online and digital learning. Consequently, learning experience is not merely limited to a classroom setting. Teachers can teach from where they are or even pre-record their lectures in case they cannot teach on the scheduled time, so students are capable of learning or even reviewing the previous lessons anytime based on their individual learning pace or learning style. Students, on the other hand, can choose a place where they feel relaxed and comfortable to learn (Salters, 2020). It can be their bedrooms at home, a library on campus, etc. where their motivation for learning increases which finally possibly directly affects their learning outcomes and their learning achievement. Nevertheless, available learning spaces are sometimes restricted in certain aspects. That is, some families have many children. It is quite difficult if each must find their own private learning space at home where their learning cannot be interfered with or disturbed. Inevitably, this also includes the additional expense of affording the digital learning equipment for each learning site. Another positive impact is that online and digital learning enhance students' self-discipline because they are more in charge of their own learning through these learning approaches. In such case, it is easier for them to be distracted by fun things on the digital devices while they are learning; for instance, games, chats, and particularly social media sites because of the higher potential of the technology and Internet access (Janson, 2021). Therefore, it is worth noting that self-discipline can be strongly developed through these learning methods if students are able to deal with these distractions in online and digital learning. Finally, when students maintain self-discipline while studying online or digitally, this constructive characteristic of self-led learning can promote lifelong learning in the long run. That is, they can be responsible for their own learning within and beyond the academic context (Salters, 2020). Nonetheless, it is interesting to remark that, as a global pool of learning sources can be easily accessed with one click, cheating unsurprisingly becomes a high risk (Janson, 2021). Their quality mindset should be instilled and applied to recognize that whereas the information is freely available online, it does not mean that they can copy it. They must learn how to deal with this kind of information to support their learning in their rights. As a consequence, this turns out to be the most challenging issue, especially in the realm of EFL writing pedagogy in the digital era.
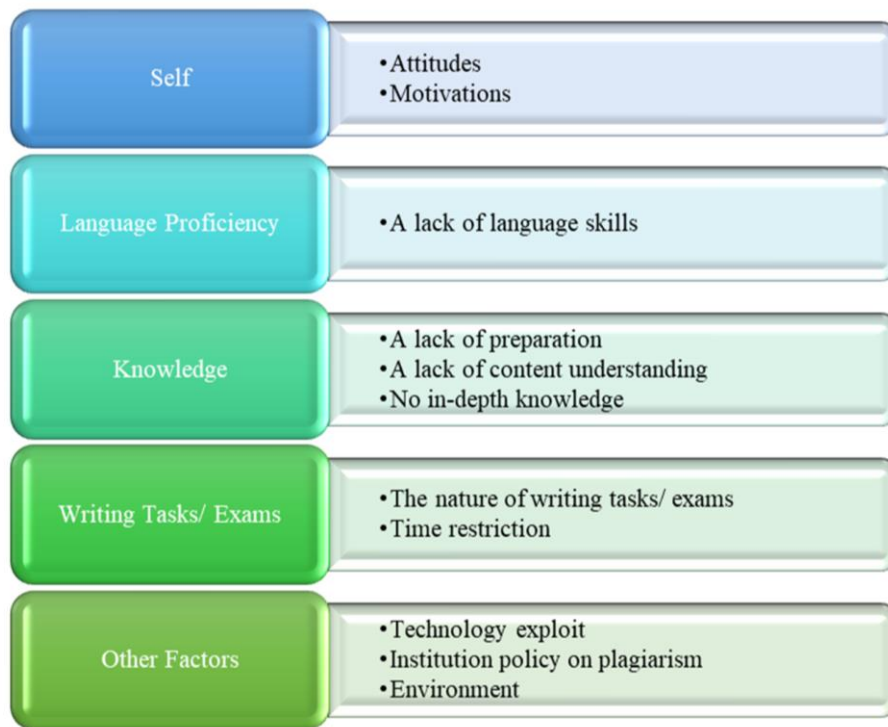
### The EFL Writing Pedagogical War in Online and Digital Learning

Regardless of online and digital learning, plagiarism is fundamentally considered as a real challenge in any academic field. It always seems to be an arduous task for teachers to deal with this daunting challenge, especially in writing pedagogy. However, on-site learning offers more possibilities of restricting the amount of plagiarism as evidenced by considerable research (King & Case, 2014). For instance, students are required to do their individual tasks with the teacher's presence in such a learning atmosphere. In other cases, smartphones are not allowed to avoid plagiarism from online sources or through social networking sites. In the era of AI when everything can be easily accomplished with a simple click, e-cheating is considered a great challenge in writing pedagogy, particularly in the EFL instruction where students' certain performance or limited proficiency in their second language stimulates such behavior.

Various causes of academic dishonesty based on different perspectives and studies are proposed by several researchers (King & Case, 2014; Rets & Ilya, 2018; Dendir & Maxwell, 2020). All of them could happen with any kind of writing tasks, for example, assignments, exams, homework, or paper projects. These can be grouped into five categories to reveal the possible incentives of students' academic dishonesty in online and digital EFL writing pedagogy as listed in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**
Five Causes of Academic Dishonesty in Online and Digital EFL Writing Pedagogy

| Self | • Attitudes<br>• Motivations |
|------|------------------------------|
| Language Proficiency | • A lack of language skills |
| Knowledge | • A lack of preparation<br>• A lack of content understanding<br>• No in-depth knowledge |
| Writing Tasks/ Exams | • The nature of writing tasks/ exams<br>• Time restriction |
| Other Factors | • Technology exploit<br>• Institution policy on plagiarism<br>• Environment |

This academic misconduct of students can happen in online and digital EFL writing pedagogy because of one, some, or all the reasons disclosed in Figure 5. The fundamental factor could be the students themselves, particularly their attitudes toward plagiarism. If they perceive that plagiarism is not a serious matter to them and easy to do, or it is considered as familiar behavior as everyone does it, there is a high potential for them to do it without feeling guilty, more importantly if it can be another effective way to help themselves or their friends. Besides, those students who have instrumental motivations like getting higher grades, getting ahead, or passing the course tend to view academic dishonesty as acceptable. The second cause is based on their language proficiency. As EFL students, their limited language proficiency can be a major influence on cheating, especially if they have weak or no language skills. Moreover, knowledge is another significant issue. When students are not ready to do any kinds of writing tasks like assignments, homework, paper projects or exams since they do not understand the content they are working on, or they do not have sufficient knowledge on a particular topic they are dealing with, copying can be regarded as an attractive choice for them. Next, the nature of the writing assignments or exams is also the main factor to encourage or discourage plagiarism. If those writing assignments or exams are content based rather than critical creative assignments, there is a possible potential for them to get involved with this academic dishonesty. Furthermore, time allocation of the assignment submission or exams is another great influence directly affecting assignment or exam management and plagiarism engagement. If they have insufficient time to do them, a better way to quickly complete them is copying. Finally, other factors like technology exploitation and institution policy on cheating can be other temptations to encourage or discourage cheating. As students are in the era of advanced technology, online open-access resources are always available. It is, thus, difficult for them to deny this temptation. Additionally, the institutional policy on plagiarism is important because it influences the way they shape their attitudes and behavior, specifically towards plagiarism. If less serious or no punishment for plagiarism is set, more students tend to do it. In addition, environment is another essential factor promoting such academic misconduct, specifically when students are in the atmosphere where they feel comfortable or have an opportunity to cheat, such as the absence

of proctoring.

Either online learning or digital learning is becoming popular in higher education even after the pandemic, in contrast, compromise or violations of academic integrity is raised as a key problematic concern in such learning environments (Dendir & Maxwell, 2020). Different studies report a rise of e-cheating in the academic context (Khan & Balasubramanian, 2012; King & Case, 2014). This possibly occurs because of an increase in 24/7 online sources and available supportive technology (Khan & Balasubramanian, 2012). Regarding online and digital learning in EFL writing pedagogy, it is undeniable that technology is also another crucial factor promoting plagiarism as stated above. This can be done in terms of downloading the completed writing tasks from the Internet and submitting it as one's own work, copying and pasting the content from the online materials, or using the information from the online sources without proper citation (King & Case, 2014). All these behaviors, however, tend to happen with EFL students in writing pedagogy at diverse levels.

In the EFL writing context where online or digital learning is employed, e-cheating can probably take place owing to the reasons aforementioned. As these learning contexts remain with or without the pandemic in the future, it turns into a bitter and sweet challenge to deal with. To change this great challenge into a supportive learning atmosphere where both teachers and students reap its benefits and acknowledge its efficacy, it can be done in three dimensions of online and digital EFL writing pedagogy as follows.

**Figure 6**
Three Dimensions of Online and Digital EFL Writing Pedagogy



**E-EFL Course**

- E-L2 process-based writing instruction and skill development
- Orientation to e-cheating
- Productive technology exploits
- Citations and references

**E-Writing Tasks**

- Critical and creative
- Personalized topics
- E-portfolios

**E-Writing Assessment**

- E-assessment
- E-proctoring

Figure 6 demonstrates the three dimensions of online and digital EFL writing pedagogy. Basically, writing skill development is the focus in the writing course. To discourage e-cheating in online or digital learning, a well-prepared e-L2 process-based writing instruction must principally be given to equip students to foster them to master such skill. Moreover, it is significant to introduce the concept of e-cheating at the beginning of this e-writing course, so this cannot be an excuse for committing such unethical behavior. In so doing, university policy on e-cheating and punishment should be clearly discussed in online or digital EFL pedagogy, so students are able to be aware of its serious and negative consequences. This subsequently creates mutual understanding in both parties: teachers and students which finally helps shape the students' appropriate attitude toward

academic misconduct, and the teachers know what they must do when e-cheating happens. Nevertheless, good writing instruction and writing skill improvement are not enough to develop characteristics of a good writer. To be a good writer, it is necessary for students to be well instructed in the following notions. For the first one, they should be equipped with technological skills like how to use technology and online open-access resources to polish and improve their writing tasks. That is, digital enhanced writing activities should be integrated into online and digital EFL writing pedagogy to create the virtual communicative sociocultural learning environment based on the socio-constructive approach to promote collaboration and interaction of learning how to write with even more productive technology exploits through scaffolding (Naghdipour, 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2021). Apart from that, students need to learn how to express the ideas or present the information retrieved from the online sources with the proper citations and references. Otherwise, e-cheating could possibly take place either with or without their intention. For the second dimension, writing tasks: assignments, homework, paper projects, or even exams being assigned should include critical, creative, personalized writing tasks relevant to students themselves, so they must learn to apply the information they know or gather to criticize, analyze, and present it within their own contexts to minimize their opportunity to rely on e-cheating. Furthermore, as e-writing instruction is based on the process-based approach, all steps in the e-writing process should be paid attention. Similarly, all drafts and the final products should be treated equally. That's why e-portfolios should be employed, so teachers can track their students' learning and skill development progress to give constructive feedback and adjust their instruction or learning and skill development activities as a remedy to help enhance their writing skill and performance. Finally, technology and up-to-date applications should be used as e-pedagogical tools to facilitate e-writing assessment. That is, both e-formative assessment and e-summative assessment should be integrated into online or digital EFL writing pedagogy through different online and digital channels like comments, direct messages, videos, etc. either synchronously or asynchronously. Most significantly, e-triangular assessment (self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment) should be included to foster students' writing skill and performance. With feedback they receive from diverse useful sources could potentially decrease the percentage of their decision to cheat online. Nonetheless, e-proctoring should be implemented in the online or digital EFL writing pedagogy to reduce the chance of committing unethical behavior on the exams online (Dendir & Maxwell, 2020). In so doing, the key parts of the e-proctoring system: students' exam devices, monitoring tools, and administration and control are required (Mohammed & Ali, 2022). In addition, whether it is live proctoring (online proctoring or human online proctoring), recorded proctoring, fully automated proctoring, semiautomated proctoring, or no proctoring (Atoum, Chen, Liu, Hsu, & Liu, 2017; Hussein, Yusuf, Deb, Fong, & Naidu, 2020), a certain e-proctoring method should be selected based on different factors depending on each context.

## Conclusion

Online or digital learning should be geared up for the new normal in the academic context in general after the pandemic, including in EFL writing pedagogy, especially in higher education in Thailand. Additionally, technology should be used to significantly enhance students' writing proficiency, particularly in the virtual learning environment. Although this is quite an ideal for some institutes in Thailand because of diverse factors and variables, it is undeniable to admit that it is a good start to introduce and implement a novel e-writing approach into EFL writing pedagogy in the Thai higher educational context. Sooner or later, it is going to be the mainstream of language learning and skill development across the globe.

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