

A Lesson from a Sudden Change of the GMS Educational Policy due to the Abrupt Disruption of the COVID -19 Pandemic

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Abstracts

The abrupt change in Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) educational policies in relation to modes of teaching due to the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic highlights the challenges faced in transitioning to online methods of tuition. Due to the significance of English for the GMS's social, economic, and national growth, this study targets these challenges by identifying problems and needs in reading English, and investigating GMS educational policies relating to learning pedagogy. GMS students studying as undergraduates in Thai universities were purposively selected as samples (36 in total) from Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and China in the Mekong region. An online questionnaire, semi-structured video interviews, and documentary study yielded the data during the first semester of the academic year 2021. Major problems identified were overloaded online English reading tasks with limited time and inadequate learning facilities such as stable internet and smartphones. Additionally, training or support from teachers for self-directed study was found to be inadequate. Thus, they needed more support and motivation from teachers through blended learning with a proper number of online tasks and time allocation, including training to cultivate autonomous learning ability and IT skills. Also, the findings from the documentary study indicated that the abrupt shift from on-site learning to online learning with an uncertain time of the reintroduction of face-to-face or blended learning seemed to work well in controlling the pandemic but in turn it appeared to be an expedient measure resulting in undesirable ramifications such as the drop out of learners and loss of job of educational staff and reduced learning outcomes. Findings suggest modification of the educational policy for effective teaching and learning to increase students' English reading proficiency.

Keywords: Sudden Change, GMS Educational Policy, Abrupt Disruption, Covid-19 Pandemic, Autonomous Learning

Introduction

The changes to education due to the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries in every continent. This equates to approximately 94 per cent of the world's student population, especially in low and lower-middle-income countries (OECD, 2000 : online). For example, learning losses from closures of schools and other learning spaces has exacerbated pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many, particularly for those living in poor areas (United nations,

2021 : online). This disruption with its substantial effects on education has led to pressure to change the educational policy governments worldwide.

The target situation of this study is the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) group under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The GMS group includes Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China. The GMS group was formed based on the Mekong River basin (Asian Development Bank, 1995 : 9), including Guangxi Province of the People's Republic of China despite not sharing the Mekong basin. These countries have been seriously affected by the pandemic and were considered low and lower-middle-income countries in this study.

Accordingly, this study proposed to find suggestions for the GMS policy adjustments to solve problems in reading English of GMS university students based on the identification of their reading problems and needs, including the investigation of the GMS national, educational policy and the changes of the policy during the Covid- 19 pandemic.

Some examples of the sudden changes of the GMS educational policy due to the COVID-19 pandemic which greatly affected higher education in Thailand were changing the class style from face-to-face learning to online learning or blended learning. China rectified its educational plan, citing and reiterating the themes of higher-level policies such as deciding to move classes online. Likewise, Lao PDR applied three scenarios with the main purposes of prevention; preparation for continuity of learning with better opening-up and coordinated response from schools that remained open and/or decided to close schools (partial or nationwide) while awaiting safer return/re-opening of schools (UNICEF Lao PDR, 2021 : online). Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam twice informed the study of the adjustment of exam schedules for higher education system both short and long term to ensure the continuity of education through online training, while the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (MoEYS) of Cambodian implemented distance learning after the nationwide shutdown of educational institutes at all levels, although teachers and school personnel had difficulty in adapting with ICT skills to support distance learning, resulting in an ineffective delivery of continuous learning and learning outcomes with limited quality of education.

These educational sudden changes were not easy for the countries to adjust to, and resulted in unpredictable and abrupt disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to a call for identifying the students' problems and needs while investigating national educational policy and finding suggestions for solving their problems in English reading, particularly as English is the official working language of GMS entities in the ASEAN community. English is also a medium of instruction for international students from the GMS neighbouring countries whose regional cooperation and integration directly affect their growth in trans-border institutions and other relevant mechanisms, especially in educational human resources development. Thus, the development of English reading skills is important for GMS policymakers and policy analysis to craft policies and programs that can contribute to economic and social progress. Literacy in English as an international language is essential for them, especially at a university level in the Information Age where knowledge and skills play crucial roles in enhancing productivity growth and innovation and in improving social cohesion. English language skill is not only one of the main indicators of human resource development but also one of important skills in the global, knowledge-based economy as it directly affects the economic success and social advancement of both individuals and societies (OECD, 2000 : online).

So far, few empirical studies have focused on investigating the English reading problems and the needs of GMS university students, especially with the sudden change of the national policy under the abrupt pandemic disruption, to find suggestions to solve the consequent problems, thus rationalizing this current research.

Research Objectives

To find suggestions to solve the GMS students' English reading problems arising from sudden change to GMS educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study design is qualitative, with the data being derived from an in-depth semi-structured interview based on a specifically- designed questionnaire for identifying the target students' problems and needs for reading academic reading English materials. This included a documentary study investigating GMS educational policy and the sudden change due to the disruption.

Population and sample

The research population were 3377 GMS students and 114,963 Thai students who were first- year university students studying in either international or regular programs in five Thai universities during the academic year 2020 (Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), 2019 : online). They are Chulalongkorn University, Chiang Mai University, Khon Kaen University, Burapa University and Prince of Songkla University representing the central, northern, northeastern, eastern, and southern parts of Thailand respectively. They were considered as the research setting including the universities in other GMS countries.

The research samples were selected through stratified sampling based on the method of Yamane (1970 : 9), which yielded 358 GMS and 399 Thai university students. With the qualitative data obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews, the approved numbers of samples through the stratified purposeful sampling or quota sampling were 15 to 30 samples. Based on this theory, the purposively- selected samples of this current study were 12 from each country or 72 in total. While all 12 Thai universities were purposively selected from five universities as mentioned previously, 6 GMS students were studying in Thai universities, and the other 6 were studying in a university in their own GMS country. These students were purposively selected by a coordinator from each university who had signed a Memoranda of Understanding or Agreement (MOU/ MOA) with the university the researcher is working for in Thailand. A purposive sampling method was applied to reduce bias due to the participants' homogeneous nature, so any eligible participants were selected through the same eligibility criteria. That was: 1) being the first-year university that could be easily accessible by the researcher or the coordinator either in Thailand or their own country, 2) having taken the English reading test provided whose results were used to classify their English reading ability. There were three classifications based on the CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages ranging from A, B to C representing low, average and high reading proficiency levels accordingly. As a result, within each group of 12 students from each country, there were 4 students whose reading proficiency was high, while the other 4 were average and the rest were low and 3) having agreed to participate in this study with willingness and the

ethical consent. This study was approved by Khon Kaen University Ethics Committee on Research at the Center for Ethics in Human Research, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand with approval number: HE633162. All human research procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the committee responsible for human experimentation (institutional and national), and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2013. All study participants gave informed consent to participate in the research, which included the agreement that the results would be published, and all of them had signed the consent form online. The data collection started after the ethical approval from Khon Kaen University on March 3rd, 2021. After each selected participant was contacted to complete the ethical consent form online, the researcher made an appointment with each of them to take the test focusing on their English reading ability.

Research Instruments

Four main sources of data were the English reading comprehension test, the questionnaire and online interviews for obtaining information relating to their problems and needs in English reading. This included the documents from the related websites or texts in the forms of official documents, news or articles about the GMS national educational policy and its changes in each country.

There were two sets of different but parallel reading tests, with three passages in each to suit participants' fields of study. The first set was for the participants studying in the field of Sciences and Technology, while the second one was for the participants studying in Humanities and Social Sciences field. Each of these two reading comprehension tests consisted of three passages selected from the standardized test: International English Language Testing System (IELTS) materials. They were the original tests that were not available as an online resource to avoid bias. The test questions were adapted to multiple choice formats. After being approved by language experts in Thai universities, the tests were trialled in the pilot study with 30 relevant students studying in different Thai universities. Thus, their reliability was measured through the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20, or KR-20 with a test with binary variables i.e., right or wrong answers or answers with varying difficulty i.e., very easy items mixed with more challenging ones but with only one correct answer for each question. The acceptable KR-20 score depends on the type of test but generally, a score of above .5 is usually considered reasonable. The results of the analysis were .838 and .861 which were above 0.5 or higher. This inferred the acceptable reliability of the tests.

Finally, the participants were grouped into three categories based on their test results. Later, the researcher would also make another appointment for him or her to complete the questionnaire and the interview focusing on participants' problems and needs in reading English both in general and during the COVID-19 pandemic through a video call. The questionnaire predominantly consisted of open-ended questions. The in-depth semi-structured interview was mainly based on the questionnaire designed to confirm the participant understands of the questionnaire, including relevant questions emphasizing the problems with existing solutions and the needs in reading English during the pandemic. The interview was to confirm the participants' understanding of the questions. It was adapted from the work of The questionnaire's content validity through Index of item-objective congruence (IOC) was 1.00 approved by 5 experts; three of them being were statistic experts and the other two English language experts.

Research Conceptual Framework

To completely understand this study, Figure 1. represents the concept through this conceptual framework.

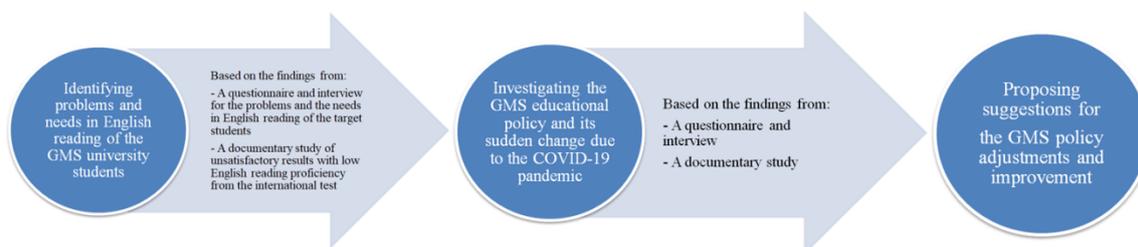


figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study

Data Collection

The data collection both from the questionnaire and the interview including the documents about the GMS national and educational policy and its changes lasted from March 2021 to February 2022.

The process of accessing the source of data was through gaining access to the websites with the designed keywords, then listing the most relevant documents from each website, deselecting the duplicate ones from the list of each country, and later classifying all chosen ones into three aspects i.e. the policy focusing on teaching and learning English especially reading skill and its policy changes from the effects of the pandemic and lastly purposively selected most relevant 60 documents for each GMS country.

Also, the process of collecting data for the GMS national educational policy and its changes was carried out through four steps: 1) using the key words i.e. national, educational policy of each GMS country and its policy changes during the COVID-19 pandemic to search for the most relevant data on the websites focusing on each 6 GMS country from March 3rd 2021 to February 28th 2022. They were mainly the official documents of each GMS country and the latest articles related to their national, educational policy and policy changes during the pandemic. The numbers of documents being analysed for each country were 10 so, the total numbers were 60 altogether, 2) analysing their contents of some sample documents through Yamane (1970:9) method within three aspects of the data i.e. its existing educational policy and its policy changes due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, 3) analysing all of the target, well -selected documents after the samples were approved by the language experts to avoid bias as a sensitivity analysis and 4) presenting all the findings in the forms of narrative description in the table for each country alphabetically.

Data analysis

The qualitative data were analysed through content analysis method of Erlingsson, C. and Brysiewicz, P. (2017) and presented in terms of descriptive narration.

Results

1. The GMS students’ problems, solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic

The first set of the findings was from the qualitative data derived from the questionnaire and the in-depth semi-structured interview focusing on the problems and the needs in in improving reading ability of the GMS university students after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these samples was purposively selected from each GMS group of participants to represent different problems, solutions and needs. All the data from each GMS country were analysed through the same method of content analysis based on five steps of Erlingsson, C. and Brysiewicz, P’s method (2017). The findings from each country were provided alphabetically from Cambodia, China, Laos PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The first one was from Cambodian participants as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Sample of the GMS students’ problems, solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sample 1: Cambodia)

Overarching theme:	Problems, Existing solutions and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of the educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic		
Steps of Content Analysis	Problems	Existing solutions	Needs
Theme	Problems related to time allocation for reading assignment for improving reading ability during the COVID-19 pandemic about time management	Solving problems by trying to manage time for completing assignments from the teacher with unsuitable time allocation and too demanding tasks through online mode of learning	Suitable assignments with appropriate time allocation and numbers of tasks with the most preferable learning modality i.e., face-to - face learning modality with adequate guidance integrated with the online one during the pandemic including opportunity to voice the needs for learning to read English
Category	Problems in improving reading ability from the assignment related to time allocation, number	Coping reading problems by managing time to complete assignment within limited time	Need face-to-face learning modality and to voice the needs in learning to read English during the pandemic

	of tasks and mode of learning		
Code	Problems with tasks about unsuitable time allocation and number of tasks.	Having problems in completing assignment within the time given especially through an online mode of learning	Need face-to-face not only online learning modality as well as a chance to voice learning needs
Condensed meaning units	Problems with the limited time provided, cannot finish reading tasks on time	Having difficulty in completing task within limited time, teachers should assign tasks with suitable allocated time.	Need to study through face-to-face modality, for interaction with teacher, may give more time
Meaning unit	I have a problem with limited time provided to finish my reading assignments. I hardly finished my reading tasks on time through an online during the COVID-19 pandemic.	I had difficulty in finishing the reading task on -line within the time given. I think teachers should assign reading tasks which are suitable for allocated time because my classmates and I cannot finish the task on time. Nobody dared to tell the teacher about our problems.	I prefer studying through face-to-face modality or on-site to online one if there is no COVID-19 pandemic because I can interact with my teacher and negotiate with her. She might have allowed us more time to complete the task. I think we need to have a chance to voice our needs about our learning as well.

The findings from the Cambodian participants reflected one of their main problems about unsuitable time allocation for reading assignment which seemed to be demanding within limited time and teachers' supports or guidance provided. This led to more attempts from the students to manage the time to complete reading assignments through online mode of learning. This also entailed the needs to ask for suitable assignments with appropriate time allocation and numbers of tasks with the most preferable learning modality i.e., face-to -face learning modality with adequate supports or guidance integrated with the online one during the pandemic including opportunity to voice their needs for learning to read English as they preferred.

Table 2 Sample of the GMS students’ problems, solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sample 2: China)

Overarching theme: Problems, Existing solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of the educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic

Steps of Content Analysis	Problems	Existing solutions	Needs
Theme	Problems in being left to be autonomous learners without enough supports or guidance	Trying to apply self-directed study for solving reading problems during the COVID-19 pandemic	Needed more supports and guidance before leaving to be autonomous learners especially through blended learning between on-site and online learning modality during the COVID-19 pandemic
Category	Problems in finding the right source of information from the internets	Solving reading problems by applying a self-directed study through online learning	Blended learning modality
Code	Struggling to find the right sources of information through online learning	Encountering difficulties from self-directed studying through online learning	Blended learning modality as their most preferable learning modality
Condensed meaning units	Learn from the internet, need teachers’ guidance about the right websites to search for the meanings of specific technical terms	Facing difficulties in learning on my own like struggling to find the right meanings of the difficult terms despite using both an online and print dictionary	Prefer both online and on-site learning modality
Meaning unit	Although I can learn everything from the internet, many times, I have a problem with searching for the right	I often have a problem when I came across some difficult terms while reading despite searching for the	Despite of realizing the usefulness of an online learning, I still really want to study in class with my classmates and

<p>website to find needed information like a technical term with its specific meaning in a particular context or field.</p> <p>I need some guidance from a teacher about this.</p>	<p>meanings either in an online or a print dictionary as a teacher used to suggest me.</p>	<p>teacher. Although online learning is necessary during this pandemic, I think the blended one between online and on-site learning modality is preferable for me and my classmates who still need to have human interactions with other friends and teacher.</p>
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The findings from the Chinese participants signified one of their major problems in struggling to abruptly become autonomous learners without being well-prepared and well-equipped with enough support or guidance with the sudden disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in putting pressure on them to apply self-directed study for solving reading problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, they needed more support and guidance from the teacher and involving authorities before they could gradually become autonomous learners, especially through their preferable blended learning between on-site and online learning modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3 Sample of the GMS students’ problems, solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sample 3: Laos PDR)

Overarching theme:	Problems, Existing solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of the educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic		
Steps of content analysis	Problems	Existing solutions	Needs
Theme	Problems in improving reading ability due to the lack of IT skills and reading strategies	Practice reading strategies and IT skills texts through self-directed study to improve reading ability	Need more supports and guidance for gaining reading strategies and IT skills from teacher and classmates through an on-site learning modality

Category	Problems of the lack of IT skills and reading strategies	Solving reading problems through self-directed study for practicing reading strategies and IT skills	Lack of reading strategies and IT skills with more supports and guidance through on-site learning modality
Code	Lack of both IT skills and reading strategies like guessing meanings of unknown words from the contexts	Practice reading more technical texts through self-directed study for practicing reading strategies and IT skills.	Prefer on-site learning to online one for supports and guidance about reading strategies and IT skills from teacher and classmates
Condensed meaning units	Lack of IT skills to deal with different programs for online learning modality especially with complicated functions of some IT programs full of unfamiliar technical terms	Try to improve reading ability through self-directed study by reading technical texts for practicing reading strategies and IT skills through websites.	Prefer on-site learning to online one for supports and guidance about reading strategies and IT skills from my teacher and classmates
Meaning unit	My main problem is lacking IT skills. I have difficulty with complicated functions of some IT programs which are mainly full of unfamiliar technical terms in English. I, thus, spend most of my reading time searching the meanings of unfamiliar technical terms especially in technical texts like technology and for needed information in various programs.	I have tried to read different books either the print texts or online ones in various websites focusing on Technology to apply different reading strategies like guessing the meaning of unknown words from their contexts in order to improve my English reading ability.	I prefer on-site learning to online one as I could get supports and guidance about reading strategies and IT skills from my teacher and classmates. I think on-site learning in t can help me gain more understanding and knowledge than an online one.

The findings from the Laotian participant indicated that one of their rooted problems in improving reading ability was the lack of reading strategies and IT skills so they struggled to practice reading strategies and IT skills through self-directed study to improve reading ability. Therefore, they required more support and guidance for gaining reading strategies and IT skills from teachers and classmates through on-site learning modality.

Table 4 Sample of the GMS students’ problems, solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sample 4: Myanmar)

Overarching theme:	Problems, Existing solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of the educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic		
Steps of Content Analysis	Problems	Existing solutions	Needs
Theme	Problems with unstable internet connection limiting access to online learning and sources of information	Read textbooks, printed materials, or other offline applications through self-directed study for improving English reading with limited access to online learning due to unstable internet connection	Need appropriate learning facilities like good internet connection and other learning facilities from educational institutes for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic despite of preference for an on-site learning
Category	Problems with unstable internet connection limiting access to online learning and sources of information	Read textbooks/printed materials / other offline applications /self-directed study for improving English reading/limited access to online learning /unstable internet connection	Expect good internet connection and other learning facilities from educational institutes despite the preference for an on-site to online learning
Code	Main problem concerning unstable internet connection limiting access to online classes or sources of information on websites	Read textbooks or printed materials and other offline applications /self-directed study for improving English reading/ limited access to online learning /unstable internet connection	Expect a good internet connection and other learning facilities for effective online learning despite the preference for on-site learning because of easy access to support from a teacher

Condensed meaning units	Main problem of learning online concerns unstable internet connection/ Cause limited access to online classes or sources of information on websites	Read textbooks or printed materials and other offline applications through self-directed study for improving my English reading due to limited access to online learning from an unstable internet connection	Expect the government to provide learning facilities like good internet connection and other learning facilities for effective online learning through educational institutes like the university /Prefer on-site learning because of easy access to support from a teacher
Meaning unit	The main problem of learning online for me is the unstable internet connection. It causes limited access to online classes or sources of information on websites.	I turn to read textbooks or printed materials and other offline applications through self-directed study for improving my English reading due to limited access to online learning from an unstable internet connection.	I expect the government to provide appropriate learning facilities like good internet connection and other learning facilities for effective online learning through educational institutes like a university while I prefer to learn through on-site learning because of easy access to support from a teacher.

The findings from the Burmese participant reflected one of their crucial problems in improving reading ability through the lack of stable internet connection leading to limited access to online learning and other sources of information. This entailed solving reading problems by self-directed study for reading textbooks or printed materials and other offline applications for reading ability improvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there was a call for providing appropriate learning facilities like good internet connection and other learning facilities from educational institutes for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic despite the preference for on-site learning.

Table 5 Sample of the GMS students’ problems, solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sample 5: Thailand)

Overarching theme:	Problems, Existing solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of the educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic		
Steps of Content Analysis	Problems	Existing solutions	Needs
Theme	Problem in adjusting to learning online in order to improve English reading ability without appropriate learning facilities like personal computers or laptops	Solving reading problems without any personal computer by enlarging the front in a mobile phone’ screen to complete online reading assignments through self-directed study	Need accessible, appropriate and adequate facilities learning facilities for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic like a laptop for rent, free or low-cost internet package
Category	Problem in adjusting to learning online without appropriate learning facilities like personal computers or laptops	Solving reading problems by enlarging the front in a mobile phone’ screen to complete online reading assignments through self-directed study	Need accessible learning facilities for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic like a laptop for rent, free or low- cost internet package
Code	Problem in adjusting to learning through online learning without necessary facilities like personal computers	Enlarge the front in a mobile phone’ screen to skim for main ideas and scan for specific ones to complete online reading assignments	Expect learning facilities needed for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic like a laptop for rent, free or low- cost internet package
Condensed meaning units	Main problem in adjusting oneself to online learning with some unfamiliar IT applications/ Feeling very uncomfortable like feeling dizzy or	Have to enlarge the front in a mobile phone’ screen by zooming it to skim for main ideas and scan for specific ones to complete online reading assignments	Have difficulty studying online especially reading English through a small screen on my mobile phone/ want educational institutions or involving authorities provide

	vomiting after spending too many hours continuously reading on a small screen in my mobile phone/ Don't own a personal computer or laptop/ Get used to reading on big screen in the classroom		learning facilities needed for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic like a laptop for rent or free or low-cost internet package for students
Meaning unit	My main problem is adjusting myself to online learning with some unfamiliar IT applications. For example, it makes me feel very uncomfortable like feeling dizzy or even vomiting after spending too many hours continuously reading on a small screen in my mobile phone as I don't own a personal computer or laptop. I get used to reading on big screen in the classroom.	I have to enlarge the front in my mobile phone' screen by zooming it and then try to skim for the main ideas and scan for specific ones through note taking to complete my reading assignments online.	I have difficulty studying online especially reading English through a small screen on my mobile phone. I would like the educational institutions or involving authorities provide learning facilities needed for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic like a laptop for rent or free or low- cost internet package for students.

The findings from the Thai participant showed that one of their crucial problems through online learning was difficulty in adjusting to learning online to improve English reading abilities without appropriate learning facilities like personal computers or laptops. Thus, they have tried to solve reading problems by enlarging the front of a mobile phone screen to complete online reading assignments through self-directed study. This led to the need for accessible, appropriate and adequate facilities for online learning from the government through educational institutes, such as providing laptops for rent, and free or low-cost internet packages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6 Sample of the GMS students’ problems, solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of its educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sample 6: Vietnam)

Overarching theme:	Problems, Existing solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the sudden change of the educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic		
Steps of Content Analysis	Problems	Existing solutions	Needs
Theme	Problems in lacking concentration and motivation to read an learning with the preference for an on-site learning	Apply self-directed study through self-motivation to focus on studying online with translation program to complete reading assignments	Need blended learnings between on-site and online learning for direct interaction and idea sharing enabling more concentration on learning
Category	Problems in lacking concentration and motivation to read through online learning	Apply self-directed study through self-motivation to focus on studying online with translation programs to complete difficult reading assignments	Prefer learning on-site blending with online learning for direct interaction and idea sharing for more concentration on learning.
Code	Lack of concentration and motivation to read through online learning	Try to motivate yourself to focus on studying online using translation program to complete difficult reading assignments with inadequate support from a teacher	Prefer learning on-site to online learning for interacting and sharing ideas enabling more concentration on learning.
Condensed meaning units	Have difficulty in concentrating on reading through online learning/ Feel like lacking motivation for reading or feeling lazy to read while studying alone/ Miss the classroom atmosphere with direct human	Don’t like learning online /try to motivate me to focus on studying without enough support from a teacher/ Read only the introduction and the conclusion not the whole text/ rely on	Prefer learning on-site to online learning for interacting and sharing ideas with teachers and friends enabling more concentration on learning.

	interaction with teachers and friends/ Prefer learning on-site to learning online	translation program to complete difficult reading assignments	
Meaning unit	I have difficulty in concentrating on my reading through online learning. I feel like lacking motivation for reading. In other words, I feel lazy to read while studying alone in my dormitory. I miss the classroom atmosphere with direct human interaction with teachers and friends. I prefer learning on-site to learning online if I can choose.	Although I don't like learning online, I have tried my best to motivate myself to focus on studying without enough supports from a teacher. Thus, sometimes, instead of reading the whole text, I read only the introduction and the conclusion and then I rely on translation program to help me complete some difficult reading assignments.	I prefer learning on-site or in class to online learning because I can get human interaction and share ideas with teachers and friends during learning activities which enable me to concentrate more on learning.

The findings from the Vietnamese participant showed that one of their major problems in improving their reading ability was lacking concentration and motivation to read through online learning. Therefore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they applied self-directed study through self-motivation to focus on studying online using translation programs to complete reading assignments. This resulted in the need for blended learning between on-site and online learning for direct interaction and idea sharing enabling more concentration on learning.

2. GMS national educational policy and its sudden change due to the abrupt disruption of COVID-19 pandemic

The investigation of the existing GMS national educational policy and its sudden change due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic was based on the documentary study. Similarly, the findings were presented according to the name of each country in alphabetical order from Cambodia to Vietnam. The policy was focused on three main aspects i.e., modes of learning, materials, methods of teaching and assessment as they were significantly adjusted due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first sample was from Cambodia.

Table 7 Sample of educational policy and its sudden change due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic

(Sample of Cambodia based on Sothy, C. (2021) and Chet, C. & Sok, S. (2020: 20–26))

(Sample of China based on Ma, Guoxin et al., (2021) and Wang, X. (2020:online))

(Sample of Lao PDR based on Unicef Lao PDR. (2021:online) and UNESCO (2021:online))

Lists	The GMS Country		
	Cambodia	China	Lao PDR
Educational Policy	100 % percent traditional face-to-face teaching	100 % percent on-site learning	100 % percent on-site learning
Its sudden change	The closing of a school was announced on March 16, 2020, but it was not implemented until October 30, 2020, while distance or online learning has replaced on-site instruction which the COVID-19 controversy had served as a big wake-up call for a more strategic use of ICTs in Cambodian education.	The Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) postponed all educational activities in late January 2020 and on May 11, 2020, students returned to college with COVID-19 viral tests for all staff and students. MoE advised schools and universities to replace face-to-face instruction with online delivery through live broadcasts, MOOCs, recorded videos, and online conversation to assist remote study.	All schools and universities were ordered to be closed on March 19, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Its effects	The pandemic adversely impacted the implementation of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports' Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019-2023. The government, parents, and children were all unsure what to do next after school closures were replaced by distance or online learning with the lack	Many students and institutions highlighted concerns (such as technical restrictions), especially in rural areas where internet connectivity is unreliable, and many students and families can't afford the necessary equipment to access online content. The delay in	The recession's effects on public education resulting in approximately 30% income loss by 2020 and would cause budget deficits to reach about 7% of GDP. Since the pandemic affected 1,708,501 students in pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical-vocational, and other

	<p>of necessary ICT skills and devices of students and some school staff. Although the courses were distributed on the Ministry's formal channels including radio, TV, Website, Facebook, YouTube, and other partners' webpages, social media did not reach all learners since not all of them had access to cell phones and in certain locations the internet was poor and unstable. This led to unsuccessful continuous learning delivery, resulting in reduced education quality owing to a lack of resources or a training environment which students felt there was reduced or even no interaction between teachers and students opposite traditional face to face teaching Also, distance learning worsened the quality of education owing to infinite suspension time, and the school lacked sufficient time for digital curriculum, resulting in its ineffectiveness compared to classroom-based learning. The abrupt disruption of COVID-19</p>	<p>university study in the first quarter caused worry for students who were not sure if they would graduate on time and find work in the current market while several university lecturers had to take breaks because they couldn't return to campus owing to the pandemic or its implications, and their incomes were reduced. The university's choice to conduct the semester (including physical education) online with little notice was clearly a policy expedient, especially in light of major impediments that one would anticipate mirroring the early phases of transitioning traditional teaching into IT-assisted environments. Even though online learning attendance and satisfaction ratings were high, universities and students felt unsure because the teaching/learning experience could be changed at any time.</p>	<p>schools for 2019-2020, the expanded school calendar was employed to minimize learning loss from school closures. Moreover, most rural families had restricted Internet and national television access including the lack of access to electricity of numerous schools lack with poor digital literacy even among teachers while additional budget cuts as a result of the economic repercussions also negatively influenced school delivery and exacerbated an already severe learning crisis.</p>
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	<p>negatively impacted school budgets, delaying the implementation of continuous learning dramatically increasing the dropout rate of children because of abrupt school closures that reduced access to quality instruction and learning.</p>		
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>The government, the MoEYS, and other stakeholders should effectively respond to the circumstances to guarantee efficient education while the program for continuous learning should be enhanced as a high priority for online learning utilizing social media.</p>	<p>The education ministry should offer free college courses online like iCourse, Zhihuishu for students at all levels by buying equipment or paying for internet not only primary and secondary students in some provinces including investigating if online teaching and learning functions were improved as a new experience of the students. International education, especially through technology-enhanced learning, which enables cost-effective, fast, and flexible exchanges of educational resources, was expected to bring nations closer despite differences and conflicts during difficult times. It is recommended to apply technology-</p>	<p>To support online learning through accessible online and offline via an app platform like the establishment of the Ministry of Education's Teaching and Learning Platform, Khang Panya Lao and focus on already-utilized resources to improve access to education, particularly for the most disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Also, increase learning engagement by understanding the needs of marginalized and vulnerable students and implementing localized approaches including developing clarity of information and mapping of such requirements and barriers as a part of the education sector plan especially during school closure. This included mobilizing combined data sources</p>

		<p>enhanced learning enabling cost-effective, fast, and flexible exchanges of educational resources for international education hopefully to bring nations closer despite differences and conflicts during difficult times in order to set a strategic footing in promoting border-transcending education.</p> <p>As online learning and blended learning were utilized as a contingency plan to tackle the pandemic, University-level research on online learning should be supported, particularly regarding the formulation of policy, the evaluation of learning, and the perceptions of stakeholders.</p>	<p>through WhatsApp and other apps like KoBoCollect, phone surveys, or even secured physical surveying to ensure future lockdowns and system pressures to effectively allow uninterrupted information flows.</p>
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The table showed the same traditional teaching mode i.e. face to face or on-site learning and the same change i.e., the closure of educational institutes and the abrupt shift from on-site learning to online learning. This directly resulted in difficulties to cope with online learning with limited resources and abilities without proper training for teachers, students and staff. Therefore, the suggestions were the same for good management in offering adequate or free learning resources with suitable training courses or programs for both teachers and students including staffs to gain the ability and skill to cope with either teaching or learning through online or blended learning.

Table 8 Sample of educational policy and its sudden change due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic

(Sample of Myanmar based on Myanmar’s Ministry of Education (2021) and Khaing P. H., Marie L., and Camille K. H. (2022).)

(Sample of Thailand based on Marieke V., Ricardo E., Laura R., Miso L. and Thanit H. (2020), Maesincee S., Glass A., Barrett A. (2021) and Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council (2020).)

(Sample of Vietnam based on Kim A. D. (2021) and Ha N. N., Anh N. P. (2022).)

Lists	The GMS Country		
	Myanmar	Thailand	Vietnam
Educational Policy	100 % percent on-site learning	100 % percent on-site learning	100 % percent on-site learning
Its sudden change	The Ministry of Education closed all institutions led to the postponement of exams for most universities so that graduating students were unable to complete their studies on time.	The Minister of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI) decided to close all universities with the transition from the current curriculum to online education and issued 42 items of hygiene measures to promote student safety and reduce risk two weeks before reopening. The covid-19 disruption had changed the mindsets and behaviours of people about the new culture of living, the new culture of working and the new culture of learning for the opportunity to create a better world not just in health care/medicine but also economic, societal, and environmental issues as well economic, society,	After the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) authorized provinces to use television and online education to engage students in learning, free mobile data charges for students, instructors, and parents for online learning through Viettel, VNPT, MobiFone, and Vietnamobile on March 26–19, 2021. Also, some Vietnamese HEIs had internationalized and digitized their curricula to reshape teacher competencies to meet new quality criteria following the higher education reform agenda leading to redesigning the instructors' abilities to conform to new quality requirements.

		and environmental issues as well.	
Its effects	The Education Degree Colleges were compelled to cease their normal operation, as well as the teaching-learning process for student instructors as the Ministry of Education did not adequately prepare teachers for online teaching, so student instructors no longer have the right to study, as online instruction took longer than necessary, indicating significant impacts of the pandemic on teacher education.	With technological limitations to online learning lacking devices and a stable Internet signal, particularly in rural areas, and time to monitor students, Thailand is facing not just Covid-19 disruption but also technological and social disruption resulting in learning loss and dropout. This could be inferred that the MoE has to take care of not only 2-3 million undergraduate students, but also everybody in the productive workforce by addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges.	While online learning suited "stay at home" students in big cities, it wasn't practicable for students in remote isolated places without constant internet connectivity. Moreover, after the closure of educational institutes, remote learning has become a difficulty, causing job loss for thousands of professionals and educational disruption for millions of students. The ambiguity of the educational policy delayed student fee payments, which affected public school instructors and staff salaries entailing significant damage to the quality of teaching and learning in Vietnamese HE, especially in curriculum, content delivery, and evaluation due to inadequate infrastructure and resources, particularly in remote places with inconsistent internet access, as well as limited digitization of teaching and learning, especially QA activities.
Recommendations	Teacher-educators need to be well	Initiate the next best strategy to keep	To assure the continuity of their

	<p>trained in how to use the digital platform for learning for their professional growth and to prepare for online lectures to student-teachers.</p>	<p>students and parents engaged in the learning process by sending teachers on personal household visits while involving a larger budget for worksheets, fuel costs and teacher allowances whose expenses should be covered by the government under the Thailand 15-Year Free Education Scheme. Also, more jobs should be offered to affected people through creating jobs under the supervision of the universities for students and graduate students to engage in this program including setting up reskilling and upskilling i.e. English and Digital literacy to these targeted people.</p>	<p>students' education, schools and colleges have been urged to implement various forms of online instruction. Furthermore, home schooling could be a solution to this crisis because it was so important for the family, the school, and the community to work together including learning from experiences of other countries. Teachers should, if possible, receive training in content development and assessment through online and offline learning in order to assist disadvantaged pupils in disadvantaged locations, especially in light of the ongoing crisis such as learning how to grade graduation projects and theses online and using different kinds of online tests to make grading easier. Because of this, many universities.</p>
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Similarly, the educational policy is the same with a similar change in terms of replacing traditional face-to-face learning with online learning after the closure of educational institutes. This entailed a series of unfavourable effects for teachers, students and staff to deal with online learning without any clear plan management and proper preparation to cope with them due to limited resources, ability and suitable training. Therefore, similar suggestions were in the form of asking the authorities to offer learning resources with proper training to develop the ability and skill to cope with either online learning or blended learning.

Conclusion

In accordance with the study's objectives, the research results were separated into three groups. Problems, current solutions, and demands of GMS students in learning to read English online, as well as changes to GMS educational policy, were included. The absence of learning resources, including access to the internet and stable internet, as well as the absence of personal computers and smart phones, was the first set of conclusions about the issues facing the students. This included insufficient planning and preparation for instructors and students to acclimate to the sudden shift to online teaching and learning, which resulted in a failure of online learning delivery. The students experienced overloaded reading assignments within time constraints and with no or inadequate support. This led to learning frustration and the loss of the student's interest and motivation. Most of the students solved these problems by struggling on their own to get access to the learning facilities to complete their assignments in time with inadequate abilities for undertaking self-directed study online. This led to the second set of findings which was the students' needs. The main requirements of the students were having access to efficient and sufficient learning resources, including appropriate training programmes or courses for enhancing their IT and independent learning abilities and skills. They also wanted the chance to voice their various concerns. The third or the last set of findings was the GMS educational policy and its change which demonstrated the same traditional teaching mode i.e. face to face or on-site learning and the same change i.e. the closure of educational institutes and the abrupt shift from on-site learning to online learning. This directly resulted in their difficulty to cope with online learning due to limited resources and ability from no or inadequate proper training for teachers, students and staff. Therefore, the suggestions were the same for good management in offering adequate or free learning resources with suitable training courses or programs for both teachers and students to gain the ability and skill to cope with either teaching or learning through online or blended learning. Although this abrupt change of the policy from on-site to online learning could solve the problems of the pandemic to a greater extent, it seemed to be an expedient-based measure which caused a series of unforeseen and undesirable ramifications. This is discussed in detail with suggestions in the following section.

Discussion

This study aimed at identifying the lessons we can learn from a sudden change of educational policy due to the abrupt disruption of the COVID-19 Pandemic among the GMS countries in the forms of suggestions for the GMS policy adjustments, precautions and planning for facilitating the development of their university students' English reading ability.

From the findings presented above, it is clear that the sudden change of educational policy to the introduction of online learning with little or short notice could address the problems of the pandemic to a greater extent; however, it seemed to be an expedient-based measure which caused a series of unforeseen and undesirable ramifications. The first set of results included inadequate learning resources, such as steady internet, laptops, and smart phones, that prevented many instructors, students, and staff members from accessing them, leading to a failure in the delivery of online learning. This implied mismanagement by the involved authorities. These findings were in line with those of Baticulon, E. et al (2021: 615 – 626.) and Pradana, M. & Syarifuddin S. (2021) who demonstrated students' difficulties in gaining access to technological learning facilities were a real struggle and constraint in online

education. This entailed suggestions for good management in putting aside an extra budget to provide adequate and proper learning facilities needed for the digital transformation of education. Moreover, the over demanding reading assignments with limited time constraints without inadequate support, especially in reading English as a foreign language led to learning frustration and the loss of students' interest and motivation resulting in their struggle to complete self-directed study due to their lack of training. This inferred no proper planning and preparation and no proper planning and preparation of the involved parties. These findings concur with those of Slaybaugh B. (2022) and Nae N. (2020), who confirmed the call for proper training for teachers teaching online to be able to design interesting and effective teaching methods and materials to prevent loss of interest, motivation or even learning or student dropout. It was suggested as a result that instructors should have access to appropriate training programmes so they may design original and creative educational initiatives that are adaptable for online learning. This was strongly supported by Kumar, A. et al., (2021) who suggested encouraging the university workforce to design modified curricula or to apply co-teach units with experienced staff including a systematic assessment. This led to suggestions for further study to examine whether the learning outcomes of the educational initiatives through online learning were practical or not focusing on their feasibility, benefits, shortcomings and so on. Similarly, students also needed to be well trained in digital literacy or IT skill and autonomous learning skills to be able to study on their own through self-directed study or self-regulated learning (SRL). This was in accordance with the finding of Oates S. (2019) who strongly promoted autonomous, self-regulated learning. This resulted in the suggestion to train students to develop this SRL skill, “an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment” (Pintrich, 2000). In contrast with conclusions regarding shifting from on-site to online learning as an expedient measure causing various unfavourable unforeseen ramifications, this study recommends using distant learning as an alternative teaching strategy since it is suitable for a particular purpose or circumstance and can improve learning through efficient, quick, and flexible exchanges of affordable educational resources (Ma G. et al., 2021). At this point in our thinking, it is thought that online learning should go together with strong management and preparation through upskilling both instructors and students as described before for adjusting educational policy to reach the best educational outcomes as intended. The use of a framework for the selection of variables to analyse in depth and the method design that allowed for the identification of both actual and relative ideas are among the study's other strengths, which also included a varied sample of students from six GMS nations.

Recommendations

Based on the main findings and discussion above, suggestions for further study are to explore and establish effective training courses for both teachers and learners to manage either online or blended learning and encourage educational institutes to create novel and innovative learning initiatives suitable for online learning with ongoing systematic assessment and evaluation. This includes researching how to prevent learning loss such as students dropping out of the educational system or otherwise lagging behind others in learning, and how to help them by effectively catering to their needs in a new learning environment. This entails building upon existing pedagogical practices and also creating a new body of knowledge based on the

teaching and learning experiences encountered during the COVID-induced disruption to established methods of teaching, especially for English reading improvement.

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