

## **Training Abroad on Developing E-portfolio for Thai Teachers: Lessons Learned**

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### **ABSTRACT**

International programs by university lecturers in Indonesia, both research and community service, are currently highly encouraged. This kind of international program is believed to provide many benefits such as: increasing cooperation networks both academically and non-academically. In its implementation, not all international programs run smoothly as planned. There are various problems faced by the organizers caused by differences in language, culture, rules, etc. This article will reveal the author's experience in organizing an international training program on developing electronic portfolio ( e-portfolio) especially for English and Arabic teachers in Thailand, covering challenges and lessons learned that come with it.

This study uses a qualitative narrative approach with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique is based on the theory of Miles and Huberman which includes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

The findings of this study are the constraints and lessons that can be drawn from this training. Some of the obstacles faced are preparation that requires sufficient time, language barriers, and differences in culture and rules in the two countries. Some lessons that can be taken from this experience are: international programs require sufficient time and careful preparation, it needs language mastery for facilitators according to the language of the trainees, and the rules and culture of the partner country or school need to be understood so that there is no misunderstanding between the organizer and the partner.

**Keywords** : international program, electronic portfolio, training for teachers, challenges, lessons learned

## INTRODUCTION

Technology has always played a significant role in the educational setting (Ahmadi, 2018). It is a crucial component of their work as educators since it allows them to use it to help students learn. From the start of planning learning experiences to the teaching and learning process, technology has become an essential component of the learning process and a major concern for teachers.

Massive technological advancements are occurring in the sphere of education, particularly in the formal and informal learning processes (Widi et al., 2022). Because today's pupils are digital natives, they must utilize new technology. They were born and raised in the current millennium, traveling through life in tandem with technology virtually all the time. As a result, using digital tools like programs and websites in the classroom to enhance students' understanding of the topic might be beneficial.

Language teaching methods have also changed because of technology. Students can learn based on their interests when technology is used (Ahmadi, 2018). Additionally, it fulfills the learners' auditory and visual senses. Technology helps students modify their learning process and gives them access to a wealth of material that their teachers are unable to deliver. Among many uses of information technology in learning, electronic portfolio or eportfolio or e-portfolio is believed to provide many benefits and is appropriate if it is applied in learning at colleges and schools. Eportfolio at least has two purposes (Silvestro & Nadir, 2020).. They are to showcase accomplishments and serve as a platform for reflection and learning documentation. The true worth of an eportfolio lies not only in the compilation of work but also in the reflection and learning that is recorded inside it.

According to a study by Ali (Ali et al., 2021) in Indonesia, teacher's digital literacy, including in developing portfolio, is still lacking. The same is the same with that of schoolteachers in Thailand. There are two main problems found in the school in Thailand, like in Indonesia, especially in terms of learning, namely:

- (1) lack of understanding of teachers about the importance of developing effective, efficient, and interactive online learning,
- (2) teachers' lack of skills in developing effective, efficient, and interactive student learning models using internet such as eportfolio.

Based on the two issues above, a number of lecturers in Indonesia held training on eportfolio development for schoolteachers in Thailand. The program is intended to provide an understanding of the importance of online learning in the digital age as well as to improve their skills in developing e-portfolios for learning. This kind of international program is also intended to increase networks at the international level for lecturers and promotion for higher education institutions.

The program's activities are carried out with two models, namely online and offline. Online activities are carried out through the Zoom platform and offline activities are carried out by means of Indonesian lecturers coming to a school in Thailand. The training activities carried out across countries did not go completely as planned. Therefore, this article is intended to explain the obstacles that occur and what lessons can be drawn from this international experience.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **e-portfolio**

Owing to the term's expansiveness and complexity, it is challenging to describe an e-portfolio because the idea is so broad and can be used for a variety of settings and goals, depending on the needs of the user. As a result, no single, comprehensive definition has been found in any literature (Grant, 2005). E-portfolios are student-made collections of digital artifacts that demonstrate learning, experience, and accomplishment (Sutarno et al., 2019). However, the majority of definitions agree that an e-portfolio is an assortment of digital objects and artifacts chosen and arranged by the owner (Ciesielkiewicz, 2019).

A modern e-portfolio is a platform that can be used to collate, organize, and develop digital presentations that can be updated and customized for different purposes and audiences. Eportfolios provide benefits in several disciplines, not just in visually oriented ones such as studio art. E-portfolios can be used by teachers, fellow students, or prospective employers and clients according to set objectives.

The e-Portfolio has numerous benefits for both business and educational environments (Ciesielkiewicz, 2019). Students' abilities, qualifications, diplomas, and a variety of formal and informal experiences are presented, documented, and fostered. It is an extremely effective instrument for reporting and reflection. The ePortfolio can be used as a job search tool in addition to being utilized by various educational institutions across the globe as a learning and assessment tool.

E-portfolios have several advantages over paper-based portfolios, such as being easier to use, less complicated, easier to manage with flexible access, and easier to maintain content (De Swardt et al., 2019). Supervisors can regularly evaluate the development of students from any irreversible internet connection. E-portfolios facilitate reflection in a readable style and are more effective at providing feedback. The drawbacks of e-portfolios over paper-based portfolios include the requirement for users to possess sufficient skills, solid, high-quality, and expensive technological infrastructure, and reliable internet access.

## **Training for Teacher**

One of the current educational issues facing teacher training is the development of teachers' digital competency as a result of the introduction of information and communication technology into the classroom (Garz, 2020). The need for highly qualified, competent teachers who possess digital and educational technologies professionally and are prepared to execute versatile pedagogical activities within the current trends of society's digitalization of education is driving the relevance and demand for teacher training (Konopko et al., n.d.)

Training is considered necessary to improve the competence of all employees in any field, including hotel employees. The importance of training for hotel managers to improve their skills, knowledge, behaviors, self-esteem, and communication, and argued that the absence of training resulted in them being inefficient, in addition to lowering their self-confidence (Masadeh et al., 2020).

In China, online training has emerged as the main paradigm for extensive in-service teacher preparation (Guo, 2009). The training utilizes the asynchronous online course format that is popular in America. The course was meticulously created concerning its content, learning activities, assessment, course management system, and feedback policy. It also produced highly satisfactory training performances.

The goal of advanced training courses was to raise participant's level of competency in the area of using information communication technologies in professional activities, to form new knowledge and skills, and to create subject-specific educational environments using contemporary information technologies, such as cloud and remote computing (Konopko et al., n.d.).

Training also needs to be evaluated so that we know the level of effectiveness and efficiency as said by Saminathan (Saminathan & Mohd Suaib, 2021). Over the past few decades, a variety of techniques have been created to do training evaluations of software or systems. However, although not yet using a specific evaluation model, reports on the implementation of a training program, obstacles faced, and things that can be learned are also considered important to report.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative approaches with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. The respondents of this study are the teachers and students of a private school in Southern Thailand. Some of the teachers are English and Arabic teachers and the rest are teachers of various subjects taught at the school. The data are taken from questionnaires, interviews, documentation, and observation. The questionnaires are distributed via Google Forms to teachers and students. Interviews were conducted in an unstructured manner with teachers, students, and school managers. Part of the interview was taken from conversations via WhatsApp. Observations were made either when online training through Zoom or when researchers visited schools. The participants are 15 teachers and 20 students as well as the manager of a school located in South Thailand. The

qualitative data are analyzed as follows: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The quantitative data are analyzed by simple statistics using SPSS program.

## RESULTS/ FINDINGS

Before starting program activities, the training facilitators held discussions with partners represented by the School Manager. Among those discussed were: the time of training, the number of teachers who will attend the training and from what educational units, as well as technical training which includes determining activities which will be done online and which activities will be carried out offline, technical training, etc.

In determining the time of implementation of the training, it was not easy to get an agreement between the facilitator team and the school manager. In the initial discussion, it was agreed that the training would be conducted offline first, namely, the facilitator (Indonesians) would come to the school located in Pattani, Thailand, and then after that follow-up activities would be carried out such as mentoring, providing feedback, etc. However, then there was news from the school manager that he would leave for Umrah to the holy land of Makkah so that offline activities could not be carried out as originally planned.

Facing this situation, the facilitator team tried to find a solution by changing the sequence of activities, which was originally an offline activity, and then online activities, reversed the order being an online activity precedes an offline activity. So the activity began with the delivery and discussion of online learning and e-portfolio concepts through the Zoom platform and after that, it was continued with offline activities at partner locations in Thailand, in the form of practical training on electronic portfolio development, mentoring (phase 1), and discussion on the application of e-portfolio in learning. Then the program is continued with online activities for mentoring (phase 2) and providing *feedback* on the e-portfolio that has been developed.

Likewise, in terms of determining the days and hours of online training is also not so easy. The facilitator team needs to understand the culture and habits of the school in Thailand. The facilitator team for the training hoped that most of the teachers could attend the sessions. However, the School Manager stated that it is not easy to find a special time for the teachers to attend the training. The teachers cannot leave the students in the classroom. While the number of teachers is also limited, it means that almost all full teachers are in class throughout the day at learning time. What is possible is if teachers and students attend training together. With such conditions, there is no other choice but to include students with teachers to attend training, especially junior and senior high school students.

The second challenge is that the school does not provide the teachers and students with a computer laboratory, while this e-portfolio development training requires a computer/laptop and an internet network. Most students have smartphones and not all teachers have laptops. Even the facilitator team said that it would be much more helpful if each participant used two devices during online e-portfolio development training, as suggested by the Team. In reality, only some teachers use laptops, the rest use smartphones. It is only a small percentage of students have laptops and most of them use *smartphones*.

Another obstacle is the language problem. Teachers and students use Thai Malay or Thai to communicate. On the other hand, the facilitator team cannot use the language spoken by the trainees. This is a problem because it turns out that teachers and students also do not understand much English. Facilitators sometimes speak Malay, sometimes English. Although there are alumni who help translate what the facilitator says, this remains an obstacle because not everything conveyed by the facilitator can be fully understood by the trainees.

The training stages include five stages, namely: (1) presentation and discussion on online learning and the concept of e-portfolio, (2) practical training/practice of electronic portfolio development, (3) assistance in e-portfolio development, (4) providing feedback/feedback on the e-portfolio that has been developed, (5) discussion on the application of e-portfolio in learning. The following is a description of each stage of activity:

- a. The theoretical understanding is intended to provide an overview of the importance of developing effective, efficient, and interactive online learning as well as the importance of teachers having the ability to develop an electronic portfolio.
- b. Online electronic portfolio development tutorials and practices (practice stage 1). This online tutorial and practice is intended to provide participants with an introduction, knowledge, and initial skills about e-portfolio development using Google Sites.
- c. Practice and assistance in developing an offline electronic portfolio. Representatives of the facilitator team came directly to the school located in Pattani, Southern Thailand.
- d. Providing feedback on e-portfolios that have been developed. Some teachers have been able to develop their e-portfolio very well, and most teachers and other students have been able to create the main parts of the e-portfolio, such as the cover, meetings, inserting text, images, YouTube links, uploading pdf files, etc.
- e. Discussion of the application of e-portfolio in learning. This activity is carried out after the activity on the second day. In this activity, the experience of the facilitator team in implementing e-portfolio in learning was conveyed, starting from socialization to students, e-portfolio development training for students, monitoring Student e-portfolio development, discussion forum development, and portfolio-based assessment development.
- f. Assistance in e-portfolio development (phase 2). Because the facilitator team sees that more assistance is still needed in developing e-portfolios, the Facilitator Team provides opportunities for students, and especially teachers, to continue to try to practice eportfolio development and invites them to consult to get online assistance, both via zoom and Whatsapp.

However, this training still has quite a positive impact on the training participants, both teachers and students. Of the forty trainees consisting of fifteen teachers and twenty-five students stated that their average understanding of eportfolio has increased. before attending the training their understanding on eportfolio was 3.00 (medium) (score range: 1 (very low) – 5 (very high)). After attending the training, their average comprehension rose to 4.09 (high). All participants (100%) stated that the application of eportfolio in learning is important and on average expressed optimism (score: 4.09) that eportfolio can be applied in their classes. Some of the advantages of implementing eportfolio according to them include that eportfolio is beneficial and educative, can be applied immediately, and very good tool for organizing student's score.

## DISCUSSION

From the findings described above, we see that several problems arise in this training program that may be a lesson for anyone who will conduct training with those carried out abroad with participants who live in the country with different cultural and language backgrounds with the facilitator team.

It was acknowledged by the facilitator team that in general the implementation of the training was not as originally planned. This is partly because the preparation time is too tight. Several preparatory steps must be carried out before the implementation of training activities. Some of these steps include finding suitable partners, conducting initial discussions, determining training times, training models, trainees, training places, and others. The facilitator team already has references in the form of several schools in Thailand that are partners and have collaborated with universities where the facilitators work. The cooperation has been going on for several years, especially in terms of recruitment of university alumni to become international teachers at these Thai schools.

Of the four schools contacted by the facilitator team, three responded directly. But the one who is ready to become a partner of this training program within the time set by the college is only one school. Due to limited time, the facilitator team had no choice but one school that was ready to become a partner, although in terms of resources and facilities, the school was not ideal as a training partner. The number of teachers who can attend the full training is limited and the school does not have a computer lab that can be used for training. This teaches us that training programs conducted abroad require sufficient preparation time to get the ideal partner, which matches the characteristics of the training.

Another obstacle faced in this training program is the problem of language. As the results of research conducted by Masadeh, et al that main barrier that occurs when conducting training abroad is the language barrier. In this training, the participants used two languages, namely Thai and Malay typical of Southern Thailand. Only some have good English skills. Meanwhile, the facilitators speak Indonesian and English. Of course, this is a serious obstacle for facilitators in delivering training materials and obstacles for participants in understanding training materials, especially in online training using Zoom. The facilitator has tried to use Malay according to the facilitator's ability. However, it does not help much because the facilitator's Malay language skills are not adequate. Another step taken is that the facilitator uses English and then the school manager who has good English skills forms by translating into Thai and then conveying it to the participants. However, in reality, this is still ineffective.

As stated by Volodymyrovych (Volodymyrovych et al., 2023) that training involving participants with different languages requires an adaptation process and adequate support, including in terms of language. It is necessary to find more effective ways so that this language

problem can be resolved so that participants can still understand what is conveyed by the facilitator optimally.

The third obstacle is the different rules or cultures between schools in Indonesia and Thailand. It is because of the differences of school in different countries (Kong, 2018). The custom in Indonesia is that if teachers join training from a foreign expert, schools will condition them in certain ways so that teachers can attend full training. Among them are students are given independent controlled activities so that teachers do not have to teach in class because students are given other activities or school leaders will take policies so that training is carried out after normal class hours or other times that allow teachers to attend training without having to leave students alone in class.

What happens in partner schools is different from what school leaders in Indonesia usually do when teachers attend training. Most school leaders in Indonesia will condition how teachers can attend training, especially if the training facilitators are from abroad. Researchers do not know exactly whether the attitudes or decisions taken by partner school managers also apply to other schools in Thailand. Of course, this does not mean negative or bad. In some ways this shows something positive. For example, that the teacher is responsible and must be fully present in class when learning takes place. Another thing, that the school manager really does not want to violate the teacher's working hours so as not to make activity hours outside the predetermined working hours.

What happens is that teachers and students attend the training simultaneously. This is beyond what was planned by the facilitator team and this changes the scenarios and targets of training results, both for online and offline training as stated by Ziyang Li (Li, 2021). The number of participants is too large and even the teachers who are the main target of training are not optimal. This can be a valuable lesson for anyone who will carry out training abroad to understand how the culture or rules apply to teachers if they will invite them to attend training.

## CONCLUSION

Mastery of digital literacy by teachers is needed for effective learning in this digital era. Teachers in Thailand are still very lacking in understanding the importance of online learning, especially about developing eportfolios for learning. To contribute to overcoming this problem, a number of Indonesian lecturers held training on online learning and eportfolio development in learning for school teachers in Southern Thailand.

Conducting training abroad in fact faces several obstacles, such as the need for a long preparation time, different language barriers between facilitators and trainees, and differences in school rules and culture in Indonesia and Thailand. From this experience, there are several lessons that can be learned, namely: the need for sufficient time for coordination with partner schools abroad, the need for a strategy so that the problem of language differences can be overcome, and the need for an understanding of the culture and school rules in different countries. However, this kind of training still provides many benefits for participants and



facilitators, including increasing understanding and skills about online learning and eportfolio. For the facilitators who are lecturers of university, this kind of international training program will increase academic and non-academic networks, and can increase promotion for universities.

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