Exploring Lecturers' Perceptions of Virtual University General English Courses

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Abstract: This research explored the impact the thoughts and opinions of lecturers teaching university general English courses have on their virtual classes and discussed the differences and similarities in their perspectives. As a research methodology, the Q-method was used, which usually consists of five steps: Q-population, Q-statements, Q-participants, Q-sorting, and factor analysis using PQMethod, a computer software program. A total of 30 statements were finally selected and 26 people directly involved in teaching online university general English courses were selected as participants in this study. Based on the results of the factor analysis, this research discovered three different factors, which were interaction & content-oriented, online teaching favored, and content-oriented. The results of this study can contribute to developing the future directions of virtual university general English classes to help learners improve their English skills and prepare lecturers for the future.

Keywords: virtual class; university general English courses; Q-method; educational content; communication

1. Introduction

Will the virtual space be our new normal? If it is inevitable, how can we make it work? As the COVID-19 pandemic has spread throughout the world, almost all the countries have been under lockdown fully or partially, or their borders closed [1]. In Korea, the first confirmed case was identified on Jan. 20, 2020 and particularly the City of Daegu, became the first epicenter of the pandemic outside China [2]. Accordingly, the country went into strict staying-at-home and social distancing, and schools were not an exception.

As Daegu City was stricken with the outbreak, Gyeongsan, one of major satellites of Daegu, was seriously affected, and eventually designated as one of Special Disaster Areas by the government along with Daegu. Therefore, universities in Gyeongsan alone, thanks to having more than 10 colleges, known as a university town, and Daegu were forced to become the first schools deciding to postpone the first day of the new academic year of 2020 [3-5]. However, as the situation went worse, they had to move classes fully online for the entire spring semester 2020 and were not able to return for in-person classes.

Since it was the first time to switch in-person class to fully virtual one, there was not enough time for schools to prepare class perfectly nor accurate guidelines for that. Online class is not just about technology issues but more complicated problems because online class does not simply brining in-person class to virtual space as it is. Instead, a new approach is required, new content made and different evaluation needed. When it comes to university English courses, particularly, as communication-focused practical English gets more emphasized, speaking and listening skills have been a great part of class [6]. It naturally requires students to more involve in class activities. It also means that creating bonding or having a understanding between a lecturer and student(s), and among students is significant.

However, under limited circumstances, students started complaining about low quality of classes or lack of feedback. A survey with 6,281 students by National University Student Council Network also proves this, in part, showing while only 6.8% of students responded 'satisfied' or 'greatly satisfied' with online classes, 64.5%, 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' [7].

Against this backdrop, this research aims to explore instructors' perspectives of online university general English classes. More specifically, this study more focuses on the current trends of English education, communication-centered class, and has participants who have experience in teaching English at universities in Daegu or Gyeongsan to be detailed below. As a research method, Q-method is used, helpful for showing how different or similar thoughts stakeholders have on a specific subject. Based on this, the results can not only contribute to providing future directions of online class to ultimately help learners to improve their English skills but preparing for unexpected situations we might face again.

2. Background Information and Literature Review

2.1 University general English courses

Entering the late 1990s, the focus of general English courses at university in Korea started changing from reading-centric teaching to communication-centered classes [8, 9]. The trend has more accelerated since the late 2000s, practical English learning, listening and speaking centered, has been highlighted and become the focus of general English courses [6, 10, 11]. This process naturally has made lecturers prepare content of class to help students improve listening and speaking skills, and have future career-related abilities, besides academic English skills, which means it has been important to have them exposed to and voluntarily involved in various activities including group presentations or projects, discussions, or theme-based speeches.

However, stressing listening and speaking oriented classes does not mean other skills including reading and writing are not dealt with in class. In the process of preparing for projects, discussions or presentations, students are supposed to do research and brainstorm ideas, which means that the entire process of class eventually can improve their English skills such in an integrated way. In line with this, universities started changing existing classes to more practical ones or newly opened multiple English courses including English conversation, English for specific purposes classes, business English and so forth with the focus of listening, speaking, reading or writing skills a bit differently but in a balanced way depending on purpose of each class.

Based on this change in English education, this research targets regular general English courses of 7 four-year universities in Daegu and Gyeongsan, the first schools switching classes fully online as mentioned above. This study focuses on regular classes opened for freshmen because students of sophomore, junior and senior classes might already experience online classes, so they can be familiar with them, which can be biased in the research. The general English courses are searched from each university's website and re-organized based on types. As shown in Table 1, English classes are largely classified into four: English conversation, academic English, and English for professional purposes, and English reading & writing, whose credits mostly range from 2 to 3. In terms of skills focused, it appears differently depending on type of class but it is easy to recognize all the schools consider listening and speaking skills important by opening English conversation related classes. It also proves the current trends of university English education as reviewed earlier. Most English classes are considered as required subjects and sometimes one of graduation requirements, which means English subjects are still a big part of university education.

Table 1. Classification of university general English courses*

Types	Skills focused	Number of Universities**
English conversation	Listening and speaking focused	7
Academic English	Reading focused	2
English for professional purposes	Reading, listening, speaking, and writing focused	2
English reading & writing	Reading and writing focused	4

*Searched from course schedules (as of 2019-2020) of each university's website and reorganized by the researcher.
**Number of universities opening classes of each type.

As most classes highlight practical English skills displayed in Table 1, lecturers were concerned about how to take their discussion or presentation activities to virtual classes. Even some with experience of teaching online before have rarely had fully online classes. In addition, studies strongly supporting e-learning or cyber classes have admitted disadvantages or limits, for example weak interaction, low sense of belonging, or students' poor concentration in class, and for these reasons, some, proposed blended learning [12-14]. Nonetheless, the

unprecedented situation forced universities to have fully virtual classes, and there seemed to be no other option but making class work.

2.2 Literature review

The areas of relevant existing studies directly related to this research are mainly categorized into two: advantages or disadvantages, or improvements of online-based English courses, and learners' recognition of online English classes.

2.2.1 Online-based university general English courses

In terms of online English classes, first, [15] analyzes on- and off-line twofold English classes through interviews and a survey, and argues that the dual instruction has disadvantages both to students and instructors, including poor time management of students, no improvement of English ability and technical issues as well, except only increase of students' interest, and based on the results, proposes development of useful content, improvement of technical issues and reconsideration of class size. Similarly, [16] agrees with positive aspects of online English grammar classes, including time savings, easy control of level of difficulties and improvement of students' self-problem-solving ability. However, it admits students' easily being distracted from and decrease of interest in class, which means online-purposed content should be developed.

From a bit different perspective, [12] investigates university students' use of multimedia and their perception of online multimedia English classes, and argues that despite a great amount of learning infrastructure, outcomes turn out quite poor, pointing out low quality of content and lack of interaction not enough to make learners encouraged, and concludes that more active communication with students and frequent feedback are critical. Moreover, [13] analyzes obstacles in web-based English learning through semi-structured interviews, and indicates, specifically, difficulties of interaction and lack of students' self-directed learning ability, and suggests that real-time feedback system can be introduced and different approaches to encourage students are necessary. [17] also emphasizes the importance of interaction to encourage students' participation and improve their learning ability.

Putting the relevant studies together, it can be considered that most studies dealing with web-based university English courses agree with positive sides of virtual classes, including convenient digital tools, flexibility of time and space, or learning by repetition. However, they, at the same time, identify disadvantages including weak interaction, technical issues, limited content, or low self-directed students' being easily distracted from studying and decline of their academic performances. In sum, despite disadvantages of online classes, fortunately there seems to be room for re-directing the current system.

2.2.2 Learners' recognitions of virtual English courses

Since this study aims at investigating lecturers' perception of online English courses, it is natural to learn what students' thoughts on classes are because better both-sided communication by reducing a mismatch between two is eventually the most effective way of teaching and learning. As learned above, the existing studies on the online English courses commonly stress how important the interaction between a teacher and students is.

Taking a look at studies about learner's perception of classes, first, [18] investigates students' perceptions of online university English curricular of 57 universities and points out, specifically, lack of interaction, despite advantages of self-directed learning and learning by repetition. From a similar point of view, [19] explores cyber university students' perceptions of blended-learning based English classes, and demonstrates that interaction is significant even for students at cyber university mainly because it helps students have better understanding, show their best performances, especially in speaking skills, and grow intimacy with their classmates, which ultimately encourage them to actively participate in online classes. Moreover, [20] also explores cyber university students' perceptions of online English courses, and discovers that students are mostly satisfied with English classes, particularly, in terms of content, use of multimedia, self-motivation, and their achievements of improvements of reading and listening abilities. However, they agree that there are limits including lack of interaction between a lecturer and students and low learning effects in speaking and writing ability.

A bit differently, [21] analyzes online learners' motivation and de-motivation factors of learning English by conducting a survey with students at H Cyber University in Seoul, and discovers that motivation factors

include current or future career-related tools, and de-motivation factor, insecurity and uncertainty to the future, and based on the results, concludes that customized content and learning environment can be helpful for online learners. Similarly, [22] also investigates how to enhance online learners' motivation for studying tourism English by using Q-method, and discovers four different types, trip-abroad-purposed, self-motivated, career-related, and English-skills-improved, which proves the necessity of customized classes based on students' demands. Particularly, it applies Q-method which turns out useful for explaining deep insights of students.

According to the existing literature, it is revealed that general university English class is still playing important roles, mostly selected as compulsory subjects, in improving students' practical English abilities. Particularly, it is necessary to consider not only how to run class effectively such as through students' active participation or an objective evaluation system but also how to make content more efficient in an integrated way. When it comes to online class, there are already many studies stressing how effective virtual class is in terms of place, time or finance side. It is also true that useful English educational content is overflowing and everyone can easily get it from various online platforms even for free. However, even researchers strongly supporting online class seem to agree that virtual space can lack interaction with students as well as among students, which is extremely significant in English class for having various activities. Similarly, students also point out poor interaction with a professor during online class.

Leaving aside the unprecedented crisis, it is quite understandable that students are dissatisfied with ill-prepared online classes during the pandemic. However, students are not the only ones frustrated, worried or discontented with this situation, but so are lecturers. There is ambiguity about what content to use, how to teach more efficiently, or how to make students more motivated or encouraged to study in virtual space since it is the first time moving to fully online class. Considering what is learned from the studies and the huge mismatch between learners and lecturers, it is apparent that finding 'right' directions of online class is urgent. Accordingly, this research is to identify lecturers' perceptions of online university English classes, discover differences or/and similarities between perspectives, if exist, and ultimately contribute to developing 'correct' directions of online English class.

3. Research Framework and Q-methodology

3.1 Research framework

Since this study aims at investigating how lecturers perceive online university English class, how different or similar perspectives can appear, what insights the perspectives can give to the current system, and if possible, what directions our online courses should take, the Q-methodology can be useful especially in explaining how various views can exist even on the same online class targeted in this research. Particularly, this method begins with the participants' attitudes based on their own thoughts or opinions rather than researcher's hypothesis. This is what this research exactly intends to identify [23]. Moreover, figures alone in the quantitative method cannot fully explain what and how stakeholders think about. The Q-method, developed by William Stephenson in 1953, is one of research approaches integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. It uses factor analysis to explain patterns in the way stakeholders in relevant studies associate their thoughts by interpreting their subjectivities on a specific policy or issue [24, 25].

The Q-method usually consists of five steps which will be explained in detail in the next section: definition of concourse (Q population), Q sample (Q statements), P sample (Q participants), Q sorting, and factor analysis and interpretation. Applying the process to this study as shown in Figure 1, first, statements about online university general English courses are collected and the final 30, selected, in the Q population and Q sample step respectively. Next, in the P sample stage, stakeholders directly involved in the online university English classes are selected. Third, the respondents selected for the P sample sort each statement on a distribution board. Lastly, factor analysis is conducted by using PQMethod, one of computer software programs used for Q-Method. Finally, different or similar types of attitudes or thoughts of the respondents are interpreted; three factors, Type I, Type II, and Type III are discussed in this research.

When it comes to the participants in the Q method, in particular, they should be well aware of the relevant topic or policy. It is because the major purpose of the method is to help provide deeper insights on a specific subject, and contribute to making more proper directions or policies. Accordingly, the researcher selected lecturers with knowledge about English teaching method as well as teaching experience. Some also have online teaching experience, which is greatly helpful for giving meaningful interpretation by comparing between different types, for instance a group with participants having online teaching experience and another group with

no experience. In this research, the 26 lecturers finally selected have teaching experience from at least 2 years up to 10 years.

More importantly, since the participants sort statements given based on their own yardsticks rather than a researcher's hypothesis or structured categories created by the researcher, the Q-method is self-referential [24], [26]. In addition, in the Q sorting process, if they have specific reasons or want to add more explanations about their distribution, the researcher had in-depth interviews with them to give much deeper meanings to this study. Through this process, each type is analyzed based on the results, and similarities or differences between types are discussed. Furthermore, what makes the Q method distinguished from other methods is that the researcher can discover new ideas or information about the subject from the participants. Accordingly, this research carefully provides some suggestions based on the discussions. An overall framework of this study is shown in Figure 1. Particularly, for the interviews and Q sorting, it was conducted through emails from Jun. 19 – Jul. 18, 2020 since social distancing was still required.
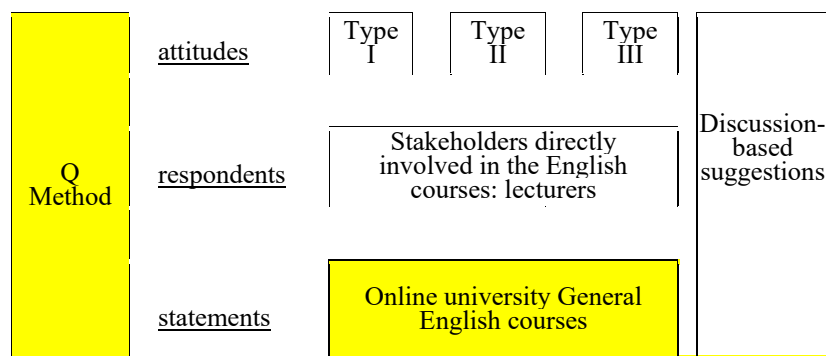

Figure 1. Research framework

3.2 Q-methodology

Based on the steps mentioned above, it is natural to connect the Q-method with the back ground information of this research. First, since this research targets online university general English courses, Q population can be created by collecting as many related statements as possible. In this step, it is also important to gather data dealing with the current trends of English courses, more communication-centered class, since the trend of English education has changed to practical English focused courses. Second, in the Q sample stage, the final statements are selected by removing unnecessary sentences, balancing categories or avoiding biases. Third, in the P sample step, lecturers actually teaching online university general English courses at universities in Daegu or Gyeongsan, the target of this study, are selected. Fourth, in the Q sorting process, the participants sort the statements on a distribution board based on their own subjective thoughts. Lastly, factor analysis is conducted by using PQMethod and the results are interpreted. Each step is detailed below.

3.2.1 Q-population and Q-set

Concourse or Q-population is data or materials related to research subjects collected from related literature, textbooks, government documents, interviews with participants in relevant fields, and so forth. In other words, Q-population can include a wide range of perspectives or views about relevant research topics. Since this research targets online university general English courses, Q-population covers online university general English courses related statements. The total of 96 statements about online university English classes was collected from related research, government documents, and interviews with participants in the related areas. In this process, the statements should not be facts but opinions or thoughts reflecting people's subjectivity. In particular, since this is the first time moving to teaching class fully online, the researcher tried to collect as many opinions of the participants in related areas as possible.

After that, to make Q-set or Q-sample, a group of statements to be used in this research, 30 statements in total are finally selected (Table 6 in Appendix 1). This process was done by removing statements which can be interpreted in more than two ways or ambiguously, balancing statements with negative and positive meanings, avoiding its categories to be one-sided or biased, having advice from experts, and conducting a pre-test with lecturers teaching online university English classes but not participating in this research [27].

Based on this process, the 30 statements turned out mostly related to technical issues or physical environment, learning content, communication or interaction with students, evaluation of students' performance, and influences on students or effectiveness of online class. First, the statements related to the technical issues or physical environment (S-No. 1-6, and 8) mostly deal with IT devices, access to various open-source platforms, or time saving. Second, when it comes to learning content (S-No. 7, 9, 11, 12, 16), the statements mostly contain developing online-class-customized content, having effective communication-focused classes or providing effective feedback. Third, the statements about communication or interaction with students (S-No. 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19) deal with concerns on lack of communication, limits on making bonding with students, or more active interaction by using digital devices. Fourth, for the statements related to evaluation of students' performance (S-No. 20-25), it mostly covers ensuring fairness, using standard English test scores, or introducing an absolute grading system. Lastly, influences on students or effectiveness of online class (S-No. 26-30), it includes whether online class can be effective for students or whether it can attract students' interest in studying English.

3.2.2 P-set

P-set or P sample is a group of stakeholders actually involved in a related policy or issue. Different from R-method considering the large number of stakeholders because of representation, whether the group of the participants is big or small is not important in the Q-method. It is because this method is interested in how deeply they respond to each statement to discover what their own subjective thoughts are [24]. Therefore, lecturers having some experience teaching university general English courses and actually teaching online English classes for the spring semester 2020 were selected in this research.

Before selecting P-set, the researcher asked for the participants' understanding that the sorting process could take time, and 26 lecturers responding positively were finally selected. After they sorted the statements, 19 were categorized into three types, 12 in Type I, 4 in Type II, and 3 in Type III. Particularly, the researcher selected participants teaching English courses in regular classes not extracurricular programs. This is to minimize impacts of biases the participants might have. This is because students in extracurricular programs normally participate voluntarily or they are mostly well-motivated or self-directed, different from those in regular ones. The participants range in age from early 30s to late 50s. Some even have already had experience of teaching online (Table 7 in Appendix 2).

3.2.3 Q-sort

In the Q-sort stage, all the respondents sorted each statement on a distribution board based on their own subjectivity. Importantly, in this step, whether respondents' thoughts on the statements are right or wrong cannot be judged. The researcher let them explain or express freely how and what they think about teaching English fully online while they were sorting the statements, which helps give much deeper and abundant interpretation to the outcomes. As mentioned earlier, this process can also help provide some proposals for the future directions of online English class. Taking an example from the in-depth interviews, some participants with online teaching experience actually mentioned level-based classes really worked despite taking much time at the beginning of class. They also added that some students less confident in speaking English in front of many people even showed good performances in class. When it comes to the distribution board, the range was set from -4 (for "I strongly disagree") to 4 (for "I strongly agree") along with 9 columns in total, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 4, 4, 3, and 2 blanks from -4 to 4 in order.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Three types of attituds

By using PQMethod, lastly, factor analysis was conducted through principal component analysis and varimax rotation. The final three factors with the highest in Eigenvalues were selected out of 8 whose Eigenvalues were over 1 (7.3196, 3.9119, 2.7684, 1.9142, 1.3408, 1.2258, 1.1407, and 1.0371). The reason why three factors are chosen is because in Q-method, factors whose Eigenvalues are over 1 are usually considered significant, but when more than 6 factors are rotated, differentiation between factors is difficult, so 3 to 4 are usually considered appropriate [28]. Based on this idea, even though this research has 8 factors with Eigenvalues of over 1, three factors were used. The biggest reason is to distinguish between factors, in other words, to show

how various thoughts or opinions on the virtual university general English courses exist rather than how many valid factors exist. To be detailed later, three factors, 'interaction & content oriented,' 'online teaching favored,' and 'content oriented,' appeared significant in this research. The results are quite distinguished between different types. It can also give more customized or organized directions of the future online English courses. When it comes to the correlation between factors, the highest appeared between factor 1 and 3 of 0.2633, and the lowest, between 1 and 2 of 0.0077, which means the factors are independent each other.

The final three types are described in Table 7 in Appendix 2 with the respondents' characteristics and factor weights. The percentage of the cumulative variables is 54% and each type includes 12, 4, and 3 respondents. Each distinctive factor is named by considering statements scoring 3, 4, -3 and –4, the highest and lowest two: 'interaction & content oriented,' 'online teaching favored,' and 'content oriented'. Each type is discussed below.

4.1.1 Type I: 'Interaction & Content Oriented'

Type I consists of 12 respondents, the biggest group out of three and is named 'interaction & content oriented', because the statements with the highest and the second highest z-scores (S-No. 16 and 15) directly tell how much this type believes in the importance of communication with students (Table 2). Moreover, this type also highlights content of class (S-No. 7). It was easily proved that, according to the interviews with the respondents in this group, most mentioned they struggled to figure out how to have close relationships with their students as well as make them interact each other. The reason is that as English classes have put more emphasis on teaching practical English as reviewed from the existing literature, discussions, or group presentations or projects become a big part of class. Therefore, to make students actively participate in class, making intimacy with a teacher and classmates is very significant. Without having bonds each other, even though students take class at home, they still feel uncomfortable or sometimes afraid of speaking English. Worse, some with low confidence in speaking English are barely willing to involve in those activities. In the same context, it is understandable that this type does not support that virtual space can encourage students to participate in class more actively than the in-person one (S-No. 19 and13).

In addition, this type also strongly agrees with the importance of content. Taking a close look at the respondents in this group (Table 7 in Appendix 2), most of them have little experience in teaching online, different from that in face-to-face teaching. Accordingly, it is quite understandable because teaching online does not mean that content at in-person classroom is simply uploaded on online one as it is. That is why the new term, 'panic-gogy (combination of panic and pedagogy)' has come out for digital learning [29]. Obviously, it cannot be addressed overnight because this is not simply about the quality or quantity of content itself considering various online educational materials out there, but more complicating. Moreover, university is not just the place giving as much knowledge to students, but helping them strengthen their abilities to think, have discussions and share their opinions with others. Despite some difficulties, fortunately, this type eventually seems to look on the bright side of virtual class by recognizing the effectiveness of virtual class (S-No. 30). Consequently, Type I tells that, based on the attitudes towards the statements, no matter how good educational materials or how convenient virtual class, integrating students into class and helping them build strong interpersonal relationships each other are the things to be considered important.

Table 2. Statements and Z-scores of Type I

Statement No.	Z-scores
16. The most important thing is providing effective feedback.	1.528
15. No bonding, negative influence to academic achievement.	1.446
7. The biggest challenge is content development.	1.326
3. More comfortable with videotaped than videoconferencing.	1.306
30. Now, no doubt about the effectiveness of virtual classes.	1.064
2. My online teaching experience was greatly helpful.	-1.287
13. Students, more involve in online discussions than in-person.	-1.487
19. Communication, more active than face-to-face classes.	-1.487
4. Easy access to various open-source platforms.	-1.629
1. The biggest challenge in teaching online is technical issues.	-1.650

4.1.2 Type II: 'Online Teaching Favored'

Type II is named 'online teaching favored' since this type seems to be confident enough to teach online according to the most statements it agrees with (S-No. 2, 17, and 18 in Table 3). First of all, this factor directly stresses that previous online teaching experience has greatly helped teaching fully online during this pandemic crisis. Particularly, taking a look at Table 7 in Appendix 2, it is relatively easy to recognize that the respondents in this group have already experienced teaching online relatively longer than those in Type 1 and 3. Accordingly, they might be able to help them prepare for class faster and easier without big concerns or frustrations, so based on their experience, they know how to manage time or how to communicate with their students more efficiently (S-No. 6, 17, and 18).

Moreover, their experience also indirectly interprets thoughts they disagree with (S-No. 7, 9, and 10). According to interviews with the respondents (No. 7, 14, and 17 in Table 7) in this category, they mentioned providing good quality content and having active communication with students can be easy. Specifically, class should not focus on teacher-led education by delivering knowledge in a one-sided way particularly in online class, but instead, class should make students create their own activities based on what they learn. For instance, learners can make and upload their own video clips, and discuss or share it with classmates; regardless of how interesting, or how difficult or easy content is, the whole process of class not only makes both-sided communication active but, more importantly helps students improve their English skills. Through this, students can be more encouraged to go to the next level, which can eventually create a virtuous circle of learning. This experience has made the respondents have confidence in teaching online.

However, this type was a little reluctant to admit but finally mention that distance learning is more efficient for fully self-directed or self-motivated students. Particularly, students who have never studied or had interest in English before can easily be discouraged. There could be various reasons. One of the biggest, according to the participants (No. 14 and 17 in Table 7), can be English itself; students who have hardly had a sense of achievement or confidence in studying English can have more difficult time in online class. Therefore, even though being strongly for e-learning, this type agrees that online English education cannot be a substitute for classroom learning. This can be a big part of reason why many related studies supporting teaching online propose blended learning.

Table 3. Statements and Z-scores of Type II

Statement No.	Z-scores
6. Online classes are better because of time savings.	1.699
2. My online teaching experience was greatly helpful.	1.442
17. I don't have communication problems with students.	1.400
18. Easy to interact with students via digital tools.	1.226
28. Online, the most effective method for self-directed students.	1.015
1. The biggest challenge in teaching online is technical issues.	-1.322
10. Talking to camera, back to a lecturer-centered teaching.	-1.634
9. The quality of online classes can decline.	-1.637
4. Easy access to various open-source platforms.	-1.674
7. The biggest challenge is content development.	-1.725

4.1.3 Type III: 'Content Oriented'

Type III is termed 'content oriented,' representing the perspectives of three respondents, whose positive responses with the highest two Z-scores (Table 4) are associated with class content (S-No. 7 and 4). This type has similarity with Type I in part; both consider content development as one of big challenges. Different from Type I, more interaction-centered content, however, this type strongly favors digital platforms-applied content and insists positive sides of open-source educational platforms. It is proved, according to the interviews (No. 19 and 23 in Table 7 in Appendix 2) mentioning that it was actually their first time using digital content for their class, and surprisingly they even witnessed outcomes in a relatively short period.

For instance, students majoring in nursing or health care related areas were supposed to do a job search project. After exposing the learners to multiple online education materials or short documentaries to help them brainstorm, about types of occupation, tasks, certificates required, even mock interviews, and so forth, the lecturers had them make a group presentation. Their performances were remarkable; they did not just obtain

knowledge but actually enjoyed the whole process of searching, discussion and sharing. Moreover, needless to say, English skills were considerably improved compared with that at the beginning of the semester. Based on this experience, despite taking much more time to prepare class than face-to-face one, the interviewees mentioned that they were very satisfied with the results. There are also international organizations recommending using open-source software or platforms for the pandemic crisis. Taking an example of UNESCO, they have introduced online educational software not only for learners but for instructors, including MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and OERs (Open Educational Resources) [30]. Based on this perspective, it is quite understandable that why type agrees with the effectiveness of online class (S-No. 30).

Along with this perspective, this type seems to even believe fully online class can work through disagreeing with Statement No. 11. This group actually mentioned that whether online class work or not, regardless of discussion- or lecture-centric class, depends on how to make content attract students' interest, and then how to connect it with their involvement. However, this type admits that encouraging students with low confidence or afraid of English itself is still challenge to them (S-No. 29). That is why this type is against replacing midterms or finals with standard English test scores (S-No. 24) by being concerned that, if students in low level or less confidence realize there will be little chance to get better grade, despite all their effort, they might never be interested in studying English.

Table 4. Statements and Z-scores of Type III

Statement No.	Z-scores
7. The biggest challenge is content development.	1.917
4. Easy access to various open-source platforms.	1.647
30. Now, no doubt about the effectiveness of virtual classes.	1.369
6. Online class, better than face-to-face because of time savings.	1.099
17. I don't have communication problems with students.	1.094
8. The biggest obstacle in teaching online is lack of digital tools.	-1.099
29. Online class, more helpful for students with low confidence.	-1.099
24. Standard English test scores can replace midterms or finals.	-1.102
10. Feel going back to a lecturer-centered teaching.	-1.917
11. Fully online classes are impossible.	-1.920

4.2 Interpreting 'the current' and envisioning 'the future'

It has been revealed that the lecturers' perceptions of online university general English courses are divided into three factors: 'interaction & content oriented,' 'online teaching favored,' and 'content oriented'. Type I, 'interaction & content oriented' stresses interaction with students and development of content, in particular, emphasizing content should be created in a way to maximize communication with students. Type II, 'online teaching favored,' different from other two categories, Type I and III, seems to be pleased with virtual classes mainly because of their experience of and confidence in teaching online. Lastly, Type III, 'content oriented' believes content should be the top priority in teaching online and supports the effectiveness of digital educational platforms.

Unluckily, there was no single statement all the three agree on, yet, there are four statements at least two types are strongly for or against at the same time as shown in Table 5 below. First, looking into statements positively answered, as Type I and III agree with their positivity on virtual classes after experiencing one semester (S-No. 30), it can be a good sign because online courses are not the thing lecturers can avoid but they should work together to come up with better directions. When it comes to communication issues (S-No. 17) Type II and III are strongly for, it is good to learn that a gap between students and professors are being narrowed down. However, more significantly, this perspective turns out completely opposite from learners' as mentioned earlier, which can help give future directions of online class.

Taking a look at statements negatively responded, Type I and II have agreed that they don't have technical issues (S-No. 1), great thanks to the development of technologies and our history of e-learning. Similarly, although Type III does not directly support Statement No. 1, their disagreeing with Statement No. 8 (Table 4) indirectly explains technical or digital related aspects are not part of their issues. Lastly, since Type II and III believe that they have well-interacted with students based on their experience and the application of online platforms respectively, a camera or webcam was nothing more than just one of digital tools (S-No. 10).

Table 5. Statements Type I, II, and/or III agreeing or disagreeing with

Types agreeing or disagreeing with	Statement No.
Type I and III agree with	No. 30. Now, I have no doubt about the effectiveness of virtual classes.
Type II and III agree with	No. 17. I don't have communication problems with students.
Type I and II disagree with	No. 1. The biggest challenge in teaching online is technical issues.
Type II and III disagree with	No. 10. Talking to camera, going back to a lecturer-centered teaching.

According to the results of this research, as we might have expected at the beginning of fully online class, there are some aspects appearing to be improved: better interaction, content development, and customized approaches to students with different level of English skills. It will take time to come up with relevant measures. In addition, it can be different depending on students, majors, or universities. However, what can be sure is that there should be 'right' directions to reduce the mismatch between students and lecturers, to help strengthen students' English abilities, and to support lecturers to prepare for better online class. Considering the main purposes of this research which are analyzing and discussing different perspectives of virtual English class, and displaying deeper insights into the current one, this research does not intend to propose solutions. Instead, it carefully suggests a few things appearing significant based on the results.

First, when it comes to interaction, already pointed out by many existing studies as challenges, it has been shown that one of the biggest difficulties in teaching online is making intimacy between a teacher-student relation, and among classmates. Especially, various activities are a huge part of English class, and more specifically, the key of group activities is to cooperate with classmates, not one-sided talking. While participating in those activities, students learn how to listen carefully to others' opinions, how to think about and explain logically their own ideas, and how to communicate each other accurately. Without having intimate relations between classmates, it can be difficult to have active class even in virtual class.

Another important matter is that content of class should be created efficiently to make students more actively involved. As mentioned, virtual class is not simply switching face-to-face classrooms to online ones. However, it is also not true that content should be completely changed in online class either. Considering the example given previously, applying various education-purposed online materials can be one of ways as most of students, in particular in their 20s, are well aware of digital devices or platforms. In addition, it can also be useful for lecturers to have workshops or seminars on developing content for online courses, which requires much effort. However, if it is one part of process to go to the next step, it can be worth enough.

Lastly, customized approaches are required for students with different level of English abilities. It is actually not a brand-new concept: level-based classes. Many universities have already used this approach to divide English class based on students' English levels. However, when it comes to virtual class, what should be more careful is that classifying students based on their English levels can bring unexpected results. In classroom setting, standardized English tests or placement tests prepared by university are taken and based on the scores, students are divided into different classes. Even though students' levels seem to be a little different from their scores in classroom, it is not that easy to control them in-person class. However, that cannot be the same thing in virtual world. Particularly, students with low confidence or poorly-motivated can easily be discouraged, which is also what Type 2 and 3 are concerned about. Therefore, it is essential to re-think about how to make our current level system work in online class. Lastly, it is obvious all these cannot be improved anytime soon. Nonetheless, it is time to work together to deal with this situation, and further to be well prepared for the future.

5. Conclusions

This study has attempted to explore and discuss how different or similar thoughts lecturers involved in online university general English courses have. Particularly, the Q-method has greatly helped display their deeper insights into the current beliefs about the online English courses. Based on the 30 statements, three distinctive perspectives, 'interaction & content oriented,' 'online teaching favored,' and 'content oriented' have been identified.

Unfortunately, there is no single statement satisfied with all the three types. However, there are statements at least two types agree with at the same time, lecturers' changing attitudes towards virtual class in a more positive way, making effort to narrow a gap between a professor and students, and lastly making the best use of advanced digital tools. Based on the outcomes, this research carefully suggests future directions: more active interaction with students, especially considering students' opposite opinions to lecturers', development of more

students' involvement oriented content, and level-based class but with different approaches from the current ones.

It can still be too early to define, in a word, what directions online university English courses should go to. Moreover, it is also critical to re-think how efficiently online class should be operated. However, the results of this research can still be meaningful by proving what the existing literature points out about virtual university general English courses; it is necessity to develop online-purposed content, have more active interaction with students, provide frequent feedback, and make students more involved in classes to help them improve their English skills. Taking a step further, from the lecturers' perspective where little existing literature deals with, this study shows that the lecturers already agreed with the effectiveness of online classes different from what they were concerned at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, they also had relatively active communication with students, mainly thanks to students' familiarity with digital tools and lecturers' previous online teaching experience, newly revealed in this research. This study also gives insights on the development of customized content, particularly, for less-motivated or low-self-directed students, which can be studied in follow-up research.

Lastly, despite some meaningful results, there are some limits along with challenges, specifically related to the participants, online English courses targeted, and comparison with students' attitudes. In terms of the respondents, the number of the participants in this research looks relatively small. However, since what matters in the Q-method is how distinctive attitudes appear, rather than how many participants belong to each factor, it cannot be a problem in this study [31]. When it comes to online English courses targeted, if this study is conducted through dividing the courses by students' majors or grades, the results will be able to provide richer insights. Furthermore, analyzing learners' perceptions and comparing it with the results in this study can offer more well-defined and clearer directions of virtual English courses, which hopefully can be follow-up studies. Lastly, despite some limits and challenges, this research can contribute to having better understanding about the current online university English courses and helping take a step in the right directions for the future.

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Appendix 1

Table 6. Q-statements (30)

Statement No.
1.   The biggest challenge in teaching online is technical issues.
2.   I am not worried about teaching online because of my online teaching experience.
3.   I feel more comfortable with video- or audio-taped class rather than videoconferencing one.
4.   The most useful thing to teach online is easy access to various open-source platforms.
5.   The reason why I prefer videoconferencing class over video- or audio-taped lectures is to make sure students follow class well.
6.   The reason why I prefer online class over face-to-face ones is time savings.
7.   The biggest challenge in teaching online is developing content of class.
8.   The biggest obstacle in teaching online is lack of digital tools.
9.   Since English class focuses on improving communication skills, its quality will decline.
10. I feel like almost going back to a conventional lecturer-centered teaching mode because all I do is talking to a camera.
11. Since I usually have discussion-centric classes, fully online class is impossible.
12. Whether students are easily distracted from class or not totally depends on lecturers' content.
13. Students tend to more involve in online discussions than in-person ones.
14. The biggest challenge in teaching online is interacting with students.
15. Since having bonding or belonging is significantly related to students' academic achievement, moving class fully online is impossible.
16. The most important thing in teaching online is providing effective feedback.
17. I don't have communication problems with students.
18. Since students are already familiar with technology, it is more convenient to interact with them using digital communication tools.
19. Communication in virtual class is more active than face-to-face classes.
20. The biggest challenge in teaching online is evaluating students.
21. There is no big difference in students' academic performance between in-person and virtual class.
22. Online exams cannot ensure fairness, so a pass/fail system is the best way.
23. To ensure online exams are fair, online standardized tests should be made at a university level.
24. Standard English test scores can replace midterms or finals of English class.
25. An absolute grading system or pass/fail system makes students discouraged from studying.
26. Online class only attracts students' interest in learning English.
27. Online class can make non self-directed students more discouraged from learning English.
28. Online class can be the most effective method for self-directed students.
29. Online class can be more helpful for students with low confidence in learning English than those with high confidence.
30. After finishing teaching the first semester fully online, I have no doubt about the effectiveness of virtual class.

Appendix 2

Table 7. Characteristics of the respondents and factor weights

Type	Variable	Respondent No.	Gender	Age	Teaching experience (yrs)	Online teaching experience before (yrs)*	Factor weight
Type I (N=12)	28	1	F	30s	4	1	0.7250
		3	F	30S	4	Non	0.8235
		4	F	30S	4	Non	0.6377
		5	F	30S	5	Non	0.7059
		8	F	40S	7	Non	0.7133
		10	F	40S	8	2	0.7608
		11	F	40S	8	2	0.7494
		12	M	40S	5	Non	0.6024
		13	F	40S	7	Non	0.6362
		18	F	30S	5	Non	0.6355

		24	M	50S	10	2	0.7333
		26	F	40S	7	Non	0.6668
Type II (N=4)	15	6	F	40S	5	5	0.8699
		7	F	40S	5	5	0.8067
		14	F	40S	10	2	0.8028
		17	M	50S	10	3	0.7502
Type III (N=3)	11	19	F	30S	2	Non	0.6278
		23	F	30S	2	Non	0.6112
		25	F	40S	5	2	0.6306

*Their online teaching experience is not from the regular classes but extracurricular programs.