



# Teaching Practical Journalism Modules Online: a Blessing or a Nightmare to Teachers?

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**Abstract:** Throughout the semester, several courses would be offered in undergraduate journalism classrooms. However, by their very nature, half of the courses would be practical modules. Filmmaking, photojournalism, picture editing, news writing, and even graphic and information design, as well as other practical modules are some examples of these practical modules. Since traditional face-to-face instruction in a physical venue has been the standard form of instruction in most universities for the past few decades, the transition from these modules to online mode will strain the university's faculty members. Culling in-depth interviews with university instructors who primarily taught practical modules throughout the semesters during the Covid-19 pandemic, this study identifies various teaching strategies that were implemented to grab the attention of students and to accelerate their learning behavior. This posed huge difficulties to instructors who needed to teach practical modules as the face-to-face method of classroom teaching had almost vanished. More than that, it had been thought that teaching using communication technologies—such as a more direct contact approach through apps like WhatsApp and WeChat—was the best way to deal with such challenging circumstances. Last but not least, the majority of respondents came to the conclusion that teachers must adopt offline connection, even if it is only a brief face-to-face exchange, because insufficient online interaction may lead to many problems that are yet to be resolved. They also argued that, in the long term, it would take some time for online instruction to effectively replace traditional instruction in classroom settings since such circumstances still have to be overcome.

**Keywords:** online teaching, journalism modules, practical modules, pedagogical approaches, teaching approaches, traditional classroom

## 1. Introduction

As Covid-19 started to make waves worldwide in 2020, it gradually changed educational settings in many countries as well as educators' pedagogical approaches to teaching. The pandemic didn't only affect the junior level such as primary and secondary student which relies heavily on *in-person* classroom teaching—where teachers need to spend a lot of time taking care of their students' progress—it also changed the tertiary level's way of administering courses online. Still, it seems that the adverse effects of non-*face-to-face* teaching to the tertiary sector isn't much when compared to the junior education setting. For instance in Hong Kong, at the associate degree, degree or post-graduate level, courses immediately switched to Zoom teaching alongside a partial self-learning method through reading journals (i.e. asynchronous learning) which seemed to put the more mature students on the safe

side of things. Nevertheless, we might overlook that for journalism courses, education at the university level could not simply be switched to an online setting, especially since teachers who teach *practical journalism modules* must rely on face-to-face methods in order to move around gadgets for better demonstration. In other words, their *hands-on* pedagogy cannot simply be replaced by online means. The difficulties experienced by instructors are further explored in this study for a better understanding of their makeshift approaches in online teaching. This study also identifies the potential adverse effects posed on the students themselves in these scenarios.

The pandemic has presented difficulties for both professors/teachers and students alike. They are aware that industry-specific knowledge is becoming more and more challenging to impart virtually. Imagine a journalism student seeing their teachers working the camera while they are in the classroom, either using their own camera or one the studio has rented. The teachers' hands-on actions toward the things that the students have physically shared access to would serve as a practical lesson for the students. It is difficult to convey the same lesson to pupils through Zoom or other virtually mediated setting because using a camera and adjusting the lens in a face-to-face classroom environment should be more straightforward by way of observation. In contrast, theoretical classes and its two most important components, lecture content and theory illustration, could be effectively carried out through a short video and via Zoom or alternative videoconferencing platforms. Technical classes on the other hand, are deemed to be more challenging to deliver and accomplish than classes that merely focus on theories and the sharing of textbook knowledge. However, given how complex the subject matter is, much will depend on the abilities of the teachers and the learning environment which will have a direct impact on how engaged the students will be with the module's material. According to research that shows how attention spans have been declining during the pandemic (SCMP, 2021), people have been finding it difficult to even maintain their focus during a two-hour movie. This finding has been echoed by other media outlets that have shared similar observations and opinions (Psychology Today, 2021). As such, this study explores the dimensions of such problems in light of the online learning setting during the pandemic in Hong Kong. The practical modules offered in journalism degree normally includes *Newspaper Publishing and Practicum; Photojournalism; TV Production; Design and Publishing*, etc. The theoretical modules that are offered in Journalism degree module are commonly related to *Mass Communication Theory; PR Theory; Social Science Foundation*, and also *Research Methods*. As a number of teachers have come across difficulties in launching online classes, for instance, the technical problems for not being able to get access to the account, the volume problem, the setting in launching classes in a rather noisy environment, etc. Not only the teachers face such problems, likewise, students might also encounter similar situations. Apart from these, teachers who launch the practical modules, for example, teaching the students to use the cameras is hard to be explained in class. And, module like newspaper practicum, teachers have to demonstrate to the students how to launch the typesetting for a newspaper. In class, teachers could easily show how the materials could be arranged, however, if it is carried out online, the difficulty of displaying the skills is much higher. In light of this, this article is going to explore the difficulties faced by the journalism teachers during the covid time, and see if they have come up with any effective solutions in solving the problems ahead of them.

## **2. Literature Review**

Journalism education consists of two major parts (De Burgh, 2003; Steel et al., 2007; Murthy, 2011). As aforementioned, these are the practical modules and also the theoretical foundation courses; both are emphasized in the study so as to train media scholars and professional media practitioners. To identify the major debates that journalism programs all over the world face, the structuring and rethinking of the field is essential, such as focusing on a combination of practical and contextual training. For instance, journalism departments could choose whether to include liberal arts courses or not (Deuze, 2006; Josephi, 2019). In other words, while journalism education is expected to cover theoretical and philosophical thinking, it should also help students obtain hand-on skills in dealing with matters of the frontline. Mensing (2010, p.513) scrutinizes the future of journalism education, whether it shall stay within the notion of "industry-centered journalism education" to focus on teaching skills and techniques, while at the same time pushing forward the development of research. It is expected a well-design journalism module is a good mix of practical and theoretical modules. Therefore, a

journalism graduate is expected to be equipped with both skills in either pursuing further study or getting ready to work frontline.

However, as pointed out earlier, teaching practical modules online is never an easy task. Prior studies have highlighted the difficulties in teaching (Tso, 2019; Ma et al., 2020; Tso et al., 2022), which hint to the fact that it isn't only journalism education that is being affected by this phenomenon, but different disciplines at the university level as well. As such, journalism education, with its teaching of practical modules during the Covid-19 period, was expected to be hindered. Despite these prior studies discussing different pedagogical contexts, what is lacking is a fresh perspective on adapting journalism in online means, such as asynchronous or blended learning. Some most recent publications focused on teaching courses online (Hassan, 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021; Mendoza & Rodríguez, 2020; Unger & Meiran, 2020) but only few focus on practical journalism subjects (Fowler-Watt et al., 2020; Grabelnikov et al., 2020). Thereby, it contributes a research gap for researchers to further explore for journalism education, how the instructor combat with the adverse situations during the pandemic.

### *2.1 Definitions and of virtual teaching and the effects to the students*

People often define the virtual teaching as teaching online with aid of technology. Orhan and Beyhan (2020, p. 33) note how professors describe remote education as “needing technology, ongoing education, a callous education, and communicating with students,” hence providing impetus to define the concept. Due to such usage of technology to facilitate the learning process both by students and teachers, some people classify remote learning and distance learning as forms of e-learning (Hassan, 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2020; Safdar et al., 2020; Yu & Jee, 2020). Prior studies and academics state that there are challenges and barriers to communicating in a virtual setting which is relevant to teaching journalism online (Larrondo Ureta et al., 2021). They were also able to shed light on the challenges that can arise when using virtual platforms for communication and task coordination (platforms such as WhatsApp, Wix, Google Drive, and Skype, the last of which proved challenging due to time zone differences)—for instance, when conducting virtual collaborative learning in online newswriting (Larrondo Ureta et al., 202, p.25). According to the study by Sturgis and Lamb (2022), students were concerned that the online module transitions would negatively impact their grades. Meanwhile, in addition to the challenges that the students had experienced, the teachers had also been under a great deal of pressure to run classes and maintain engagement amongst the students. The aid of technology could only be an alternative in not affecting the class schedule, however, the possible negative effect brought to the students could not be under-estimated.

This study, however, demonstrates the benefits of online learning such as how students can get the chance to practice speaking a foreign language and continue their virtual conversations with teammates, among other things. Here are some thoughts from one of the instructors:

Squires' homebound experience from the previous spring came in handy. He taught remotely using Skype while he recovered from an injury. But when the school closed for the pandemic, he went on YouTube, and went through about three or four 10-min Zoom tutorials. “I was ready to go,” he said. Moreover, he said on Zoom that the experience was different than on Skype: (Sturgis & Lamb, 2022, p.134)

I'll give them questions to answer right there in the Zoom menu in the chat. So that can be responsive, and there are things that I can do and say to prompt everybody to respond. I let them know that if you don't respond, I can look at the chat later and see you and you will lose participation points (Ibid, p.134).

In light of this, it poses a question whether the online teaching would be a hurdle to the teachers teaching journalism, particularly if they need to demonstrate the use of equipment to the students. Or, will online teaching be a plus to the teachers and students in teaching the practical module?

## *2.2 Major Difficulties of Launching Online Teaching in the Past Decades*

There have been studies from the 1990s, one of which discusses the abundance of online tools for journalism and mass communication education (Hepworth et al., 2018). What can be learned from it was that despite the fact that the vast majority of institutions, as well as staff and students, adopting the use of online resources to conduct and participate in traditional classes, the use of Internet connections in distant education is still in its infancy and is being pioneered only by a small group of people. Only a small number of institutions acknowledged providing online education, and this general skepticism of remote learning could inspire innovative teaching strategies from traditional teachers (Arant, 1996). After 20 years of development on the Internet and the rapid expansion of social media networks, the maturity of online learning is still not very popular among classes held in schools, colleges, or even universities. We might need to ask the question of whether the teachers are well-trained enough to conduct classes online. It's easy to think that everyone is a 'digital whiz' since mobile device features available to the public have improved over the last ten years. However, while many teachers are trained to teach online or are accustomed to teaching online, they rarely had the opportunity to be completely online and manage a three-hour session prior to the pandemic. According to Delaney and Betts (2020), training opportunities, instructional design assistance, and consistent support from administrators and staff would all contribute to increasing the effectiveness of online learning in the future. In addition, Fowler-Watt et al. (2020) put forward the challenges of managing students during a lockdown when they had to gather news articles for their homework, "building the contacts from ground up" (p.5). When face-to-face classes cannot begin, it is assumed that the teachers lack the emotional facilities they need to deal with the well-being of students in addition to the practical knowledge that they need in order to teach. The study of the anatomy courses from the faculty of medicine by Zarcone and Saverino (2022), and they see issues caused by a decline in visual-spatial learning and a significant decline in student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions. Mendoza and Rodríguez (2020) also noted that educators do not adequately prepare for this and do not comprehend the advantages of an effective online course. As a result, not even the professors are given much information about starting classes that are entirely online. Yohannes et al (2021) also pointed out that specific topic in Mathematics course are hard to be taught online, for instance, geometry and trigonometry. On another note, Joshi et al (2021) shared some very common scenarios of conducting classes online/ at home, for example, some teachers may face family interruptions in home environment settings and a lack of technical assistance, training and instructions. This study also found a lacking motivation and course technology integration. These all will eventually reduce the students' participation in online instruction and testing. Thereby, Lestyanawati (2020) showed in their findings that different teaching strategies were applied by teachers for instance online chat, video conferencing, or a combination of it. Though the strategies might not be as effective as face to face teaching, but many teachers consider them a remedy in helping with the class.

Not only teachers are facing problems in conducting classes, we can see from the studies both the teachers and students also found difficulties in conducting classes and receiving information online especially they need to carry out practical lab work, and less interaction would create less capacity in problem solving skills from the students' perspectives (Alturise, 2020). Also, the mental status of the students is deemed less satisfactory and the experience score is much lower because of online learning experience (Walters et al., 2022). On the other hand, many students in the remote e-learning environment do not have access to enough resources and technology (Sturgis & Lamb, 2022). In addition, Unger and Meiran (2020) remark on parental involvement in the process of distant learning. They specifically note that parental involvement, student attitudes, and administration support would improve the satisfaction of students regarding an online learning environment. Abdullah et al (2021) also shared the difficulties in conducting classes online and highlighted the fact that teachers have to come up with solutions to handle the adverse situation during pandemic so as to make the students feel better during their classes online. In light of these, different teaching approaches were launched to combat with such situation.

### *2.3 Teaching Approaches Worldwide during the Covid-19 Pandemic*

In determining the ideal teaching strategies for a particular module, prior studies introduce several different teaching philosophies. Williams and Gil (2018) provide some advice on using videos to flip classrooms. For example, their videos should be brief and straightforward; they can be segmented to include the key concepts. Set up quizzes to prompt the students to think about the topics covered in the videos; and emphasize the concepts in order to use them in journalistic practices. One study (Grabelnikov et al., 2020) had students and teachers initiate “face to screen” interactions, which revealed difficulties with planning and participating in the online learning environment. They also emphasized the need for customized teaching methods in order for the programs to start off well. The benefits and drawbacks of using social media to introduce oral radiology lessons were observed by Pontual et al. (2020). For instance, Pinterest assisted in both disseminating case reports and offering a comprehensive repository of radiologic visuals.

Fowler-Watt et al (2020, p.11) has a specific insight, citing one of the educators to sum up his research on the students and teachers during the lockdown period:

At the end of the day, education is about forming personas. It is about integral, responsible citizens who, for sure, are employable, but more importantly are committed to their community and with a broad perspective on what happens in the world. (Francisco Marmalejo, 2020)

Fowler-Watt et al (2020) put forward the idea that we as journalism educators should reimagine pedagogical practices and learn how to adopt digital spaces to stimulate innovative thinking and care of our community.

Furthermore, Nambiar (2020) argues that with the quality of classes and interactions between students and professors, things like technical support and online delivery are all considered crucial antecedents. Mayo-Cubero (2021) pinpoints how instructors taught television journalism courses with Moodle. The study reveals how the instructors adopted Moodle as a teaching instrument for journalistic writing and also how they carried out the evaluation of grades achieved by the students. The students were satisfied with the module’s feature on Moodle, and the delivery of both practice and theory was well balanced. Although the feedback of the students are generally satisfactory, the study reinforced the idea that “professors should be the facilitators of scaffolding that guides students to achieve their desired goals” (Ibid, 2021, p.191). In Elhaty et al. (2020), observably second and third year students deemed watching practical lessons online more useful while first year students are somehow “behind in terms of skills” (Ibid, 2020, p.2871). Along the same line, there is a study (Fire, 2021) focused on the area of flipped classroom for teaching social media while the students and the teachers both faced similar obstacles regarding remote learning during the crisis. The students were not entirely welcoming toward the idea of using Instagram Live in order to carry out their work. Among these examples of online learning scenarios, we could see how there is a spectrum of feedback concerning online teaching environments during the pandemic.

For Ahshan (2021), the research model below shows which crucial matters reflect the success of remote teaching—with the three circles highlighting the subject matters of “learning, reinforcement, deepening understanding”; “summative assessment”, and “formative assessment”. In the model, it highlights the online learning platform, like Moodle is adopted to facilitate formative and summative assessments online and communication with the students. On the other hand, learners could launch oral presentations online. As for remote teaching, some key functional elements for instance the material delivery mechanism, and understanding deepening are emphasized. Therefore, we can see the model also sheds light on the student engagement. On another note, material delivery if put online as a live discussion between students and teachers which ensures student-instructor interactions. Based on this model, we wish to explore while the instructors maintain the functional elements will they encounter any potential difficulties.

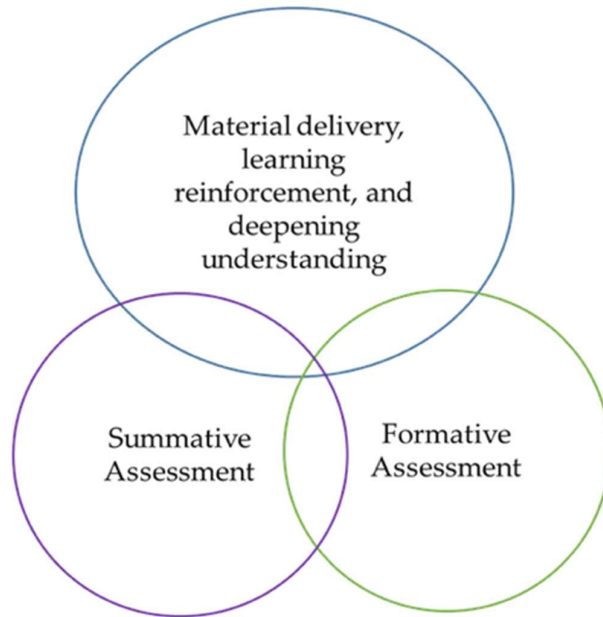


Figure 1. Functional elements of remote teaching and learning adopted from F2F teaching and learning (Ahshan, 2021, p.2)

Based on this model, and in view of the problems that online teaching has been known for, this study pursued the following research questions:

1. What are the dimensions of the difficulties that teachers in universities have been facing during the Covid-19 period concerning these three perspectives?
2. What teaching strategies did they apply in their practical modules to help students learn?
3. To what extent could traditional face-to-face teaching be irreplaceable by online modules from the point of view of the instructors?

### **3. Methods**

This research employed a purposive sampling of teachers from 6 universities in Hong Kong, where the education system blends high-tech and traditional approaches very well. Hong Kong's well developed media landscape is an ideal focus of this study as journalism instructors are not lacking the digital skills that are necessary in teaching practical modules, although their adeptness did not necessarily give them advantage during the very strict imposition of Covid-19 lockdowns across China. Purposive sampling is advantageous for a qualitative study such as this (Etikan et al., 2016), and it can be done with rigor appropriate to the key argument being made (Campbell et al., 2020). In this study, we are arguing that there is unprecedented pressure being imposed on instructors of journalism to teach practical modules online, which are not unfamiliar to other disciplines who experienced the same brunt of the pandemic. The qualitative and purposive method offered in this study can thus provide researchers with the justification to make generalizations from the study sample (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

While focusing specifically on the context of journalism education in Hong Kong, since it is a quintessential example of a course that is half practically driven and half theoretically oriented, we only invited teachers who teach practical modules. These include newspaper reporting and publishing, news writing, investigative reporting and digital photography, among others. Because these and many other practical modules are not always made available to students (each term the students are offered a different set), we tried our best to include most of the practical modules in the past semesters (the period which was affected by Covid-19 since 2021). To ensure the representativeness of the samples, we also

made sure that all the teachers who participated have had a rich teaching experience in the tertiary sector and were very knowledgeable and experienced in delivering journalism practical modules for 2 years or more (at least 4 semesters). This was to ensure that they were not new in conducting classes and that the difficulties that they had previously encountered are familiar to and solvable within prior traditional classroom teachings.

### 3.1 Selection Process

As aforementioned, this qualitative study was designed to explicate the phenomenon and the approaches to teaching by journalism teachers during the pandemic. The 6 journalism teachers were invited to take the in-depth interview starting from late August until the end of September 2022—which was right after the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Hong Kong. The purposive sampling entailed contacting the teachers via (email/phone/video chat) and explaining that their participation is key to sharing insights about their firsthand experiences. They were specifically selected because they have relatively similar number of years of teaching practical modules in journalism, while also demonstrating their adeptness in using online technologies.

Listed below (Table 1) are the participating teachers in code, the communication tools that they adopted, and also the subjects that they taught.

Table 1. Interviewees’ background

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	<b>Modules they taught during pandemic (2021 onwards: Autumn and Spring term)</b> Note that some modules are not opened for registration in every semester	<b>Face-to-face time-slot for some small groups of students (Yes/ No)</b>	<b>Social media channels as a way to communicate with the students (Yes/ No)</b>
C1	F	5 Years +	Newspaper Publishing Modules; Business and Financial News Reporting and Writing	Yes	Yes
D2	F	2-3 years	Investigative Reporting; Introduction to TV production	Yes	Yes
F3	M	5 years +	News Writing in Chinese	No	Yes
T4	M	2-3 years	Digital Journalism	No	Yes
E5	M	5 Years+	Digital Photography Digital Journalism	No (but have arranged some separate timeslots to meet students online)	Yes
S6	M	2-3 years	Design and Publishing; 3D Graphics (AI and Indesign)	No (but have arranged some separate timeslots to meet students online)	Yes

### 3.2 Specific Data Analysis Procedure

The research data collection process touched on a few key aspects, such as whether there are any motivating antecedents for students in online teaching environments, plus the difficulties encountered by module instructors in said environments, as well as the benefits when compared to traditional classroom teaching and learning. Semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed the participants to express their own thoughts. Probing was also carried out to ensure that they would delve into the contexts we wish to discuss in order to answer the research questions.

The interview questions were based on the constructs developed and validated by prior studies (Larrondo Ureta et al., 2021). The interview process targeted three main goals. First, it was intended that the interviews would provide insight into the instructors' experiences as they taught online courses for practical modules. Second, with sufficient probing, the interviews touched upon aspects that would not be easily explicated from general discussions of difficulties in launching the modules (such as the instability of networks and also the problems with online teaching tools), but more specifically the nature of incapability of practical modules when it comes to online teaching. Third, interviewees' personal opinions were accounted for as regards how online or hybrid teaching might be managed with specific strategies based on the firsthand experiences they had accumulated over the year.

The transcripts of the interviewees were analyzed through thematic analysis (Lochmiller, 2021) since the answers given by the interviewees were based on the context they faced. Hence, it can be foreseen that the more practical the module is, the more difficult it would be to launch the online class. The display of the findings below are context-specific, evidencing different dimensions of difficulties and the relative teaching strategies coping with the problems within online environments.

#### **4. Insights Gathered from the In-depth Interviews with Faculty Members in Hong Kong**

##### *4.1 Difficulties and Differences in Delivering Classes within the Online Setting vs the Offline Environment*

Most of the respondents have pointed out that students seem to vanish during online classes which was confirmed by the lack of responses and engagement from students during the online class. The teachers would observe the needs and the characteristics of the modules they teach in order to modify their teaching strategies and cope with the difficulties in launching practical module teaching. In modules requiring the usage of cameras, instructors would often need to exert extra effort in order to demonstrate to students how to utilize their cameras. Some respondents in the interview mentioned a few layers of difficulty when faced with a similar scenario when teaching journalism modules (Note that the quotes below have been subjected to minimal grammar correction and some details were removed for clarity, and only those interviewees who have 2 sessions of interviews will state interview part I and II):

When teaching the reporting and filming related modules, the instructors faced the below scenarios that might affect the class performance:

D2: Concerning the filming of videos, it relies much on the students to launch the research, and apply to the reporting. This process, if conducted on mostly online, the effectiveness is deemed weak. The interaction with teachers is bad, sadly speaking. (0:5:50)

E5: When teacher has to carry out the three-point lighting skills, it is hard to tell students how to launch it via Zoom/Teams. If it is launched in the classroom, I could easily demonstrate how to place the lighting equipment in the classroom. (Interview Part 1: 0:02:04)

Some teachers shared insights on how they practically approach difficulties they experienced in online teaching. These insights are course-specific; in other words, their approach depends on the practical modules they are teaching:

T4: At one time, I need to go to film myself about the chaotic situation I faced when launching the filming in a real-life setting. I reenacted the chaotic and weird gestures on the street to help students understand even better about the reporter's day to day work. (Interview Part 1: 0:10:56)

E5: I will help the students in telling them how to use their phone to take the photos. I also encourage them to use phone to take a natural photo without the step of post-photo-editing. I



asked them to mark down the shutter, aperture, and ISO numbers to me for showing the skills they obtained. (Interview Part 1: 0:24:28)

Not only filming classes encounter difficulty in the context of online teaching, instructors teaching writing classes also shared their rather adverse situations in conducting classes:

F3: As I am teaching the news writing and the module will touch on certain political issues. Most of my online classes will turn on the recording mode that I could feel the tense atmosphere among the students that they are more reluctant to express the political viewpoints. (0:03:15)

C1: I teach editing class, and sometimes I could discuss the news topic and angle together with the students, and the students could just knock on the door of my office if they have any questions. However, when it was done online, it is deemed much harder. (0:4:37)

In terms of asking the students for feedback, the insights demonstrate that it is not always easy to receive inputs from the students during class as compared to in-person settings:

S6: Some students did shy away from the online classes that they could not catch up with the progress of the class. But they did not respond very well in class when I asked them if they understand what I am teaching. (0:06:52)

E5: When I teach in person/in an offline setting, I could ask for the students' feedback easily (Interview Part 2: 00:00:45)

As illustrated, the respondents all agree on some common problems that they would come across when conducting lessons online. For example, the stability in Internet connection, the disappearance of the students who appear to be online but do not actually follow the lessons, and also the lack of responses when teachers ask whether anyone has any questions or concerns. Some instructors pointed out that this problem only seems to be getting more serious every semester that they teach in an Asian country and that there hasn't been much improvement regarding the lack of response and engagement from students. Among all the practical journalism modules, the modules that require the operation of gadgets face the most adverse situation, and then followed by the writing classes which requires the interaction between teachers and students to finalize the media angles.

#### *4.2 Social Media Becomes the Major Key Platform for Students to Interact and Ask Questions*

Some teachers have already been utilizing social media platforms to help their students learn better despite the fact that the students tend to be less focused on learning, as reflected from the observations shared by most of the respondents in this study. Because students do not interact much with each other on Zoom, the class cohesion is deemed weak in online settings. In cases like these, teachers think about ways of bringing the students together to better prepare for the assessment:

S6: I used free tools online to help students schedule meetings for their consultation and learning purpose. Some of them are too shy to ask questions online unlike in face-to-face settings where they could just ask after class. Now, students could WhatsApp me if they encountered difficulties. (0:03:54; 0:08:20)

D2: I also welcome WhatsApp to contact the student from day 1, or vice versa, let the students contact me. But I can see there is not much motivation from the students to reply to the message. (0:10:06)

C1: I also adopted WhatsApp, Teams, or some other online teaching platforms but seems that the interaction is still not comparable to the face-to-face setting. (0:12:00)

As shown, some instructors also introduced different strategies for the students to extend their learning experiences outside of online classes, albeit chat/messaging apps are still entirely online. These

strategies help inform the learning performance of students because it gives them a “second chance” to catch up with the progress of the class. Some of the professors give this opportunity to students who are considered “deadline fighters”, as they might need separate sessions for consultation. In an in-person setting, students would often talk to their teachers after class. However, in an online setting students are not brave enough to speak up because of various reasons. Hence, the module instructors need to spend more effort and time to address this.

#### *4.3 More Creative Teaching Strategies in Online Teaching Settings for Practical Journalism Modules*

The teachers all agree that online teaching also gives room for students to develop their computer skills. In the classroom setting, a lot of students might only focus on listening to the instructors instead of using their computers. However, in practical modules, the delivery of practical skills online is completely different when compared to an offline setting. The following are some of the major difficulties concerning the nature of practical modules that make it difficult to maintain teaching performance. For instance, S6 teaches both graphic design and AI, and here are some of his responses highlighting his difficulties in delivering classes:

S6 (re graphic design): I used a few cameras to film my class as topic involves a few moving parts, for instance, my students need to know every key that I pressed; each button that I click, and also the overall steps that go together with these actions. (0:05:15 on wards for this and below)

S6 (re AI ): I set three computers for my teaching. One computer is for demonstration; one computer is to check the interaction and questions raised by the students; and one computer/tablet is to show the overall setting/actions of myself when carrying out the procedures. However, the students when they listened to the approach, they would not have a spare computer to touch the software’s functions and followed the steps.

Other interviewee also shared the experience of capturing some data/ teaching materials before the online classes in order to demonstrate to the students:

T4: I taught a practical module related to photojournalism. Since I know it will be conducted online, so I filmed a few examples during my day to day frontline media work. (Interview Part 2: 0:13:14)

Concerning the participation and assessment of the performance, teachers adopted some different approaches:

S6 (re Participation): I will assign small tasks to them and leave “a tail” to them (my students). For instance, I might teach topics related to branding and logo, and then next week I will ask which branding did the students choose. They need to respond to my questions the following week. (0:15:38)

D2 (re Participation): I also added the numbers of tutorials for my group projects. I encourage the students to join as I can help with their filming tasks. Of course, it created pressure to teachers as well. (0:15:07)

Still, when asked about other creative approaches, some teachers focus on the difficulties rather than the solutions:

C1: In some scenarios, when we need to discuss the media angles for a specific topic, then I might require the students to come up with some ideas. However, unlike face to face setting, students and instructors might often face various distractions, for instance the technical issues. Some of their conversations are accidentally stopped because of internet instability. (0:03:17)

T4: Somehow when I played the video via online setting, the students claimed they could not hear the audio from time to time, the technical issues could not be solved in a short period of time. (Interview Part 1: 0:12:12)

E5: In the future development, I guess offline classes are more preferred by the teachers as we can actually see the direct responses from the students instead of students who only appear there but actually away from the online platforms (idling) (Interview Part 2: 0:09:40)

In light of the pedagogical approaches that were altered during the pandemic, we could see from the responses of the teachers that they have put in the extra effort to keep track of the learning progress of students. At the same time, the pedagogical approaches aided in helping the students feel like they are watching the teachers “perform” for them in classes. Nevertheless, as highlighted by some of the interviewees, the difficulties of conducting the practical modules in many circumstances cannot be ignored. They also mentioned that in the future, it would be very unlikely for face-to-face classes to be completely converted to online classes.

## **5. Discussions**

### *5.1 Future Challenges of Teaching for the New Normal Era*

Quite a number of teachers have mentioned the fact that their students are gradually losing the patience to listen to long lectures. This observation has been shared among the teachers after the post interview of this study—at the start of the autumn semester of 2022. The pandemic has affected us in many ways. It has not only affected the approaches to conventional teaching by many teachers, but also affected the learning intentions and attention spans of students (Kalloo et al., 2020; Nambiar; 2020). In the long run, it is expected that a hybrid mode of teaching might be the way to go for the learning and teaching community. One of the challenges that we came across in these past few years is the familiarization of the use of digital tools. However, given how we have progressed, if the pandemic makes a comeback in the near future, students can expect an improvement in both teaching and delivery from the teachers.

### *5.2 Teaching Strategies in Relation to the Online Teaching Setting in View of the Shifting Learning Expectation from Students*

According to Johnston (2010), students who finished the tutorial for the online information literacy module managed to actually grasp the topics better. The instructors also believe that students learn best when the captioned module is delivered in a flexible, self-paced manner. Students anticipate that in the post-pandemic period, there may be a greater use of digital technologies in face-to-face instruction. They have discovered benefits in using online e-learning tools to support learning during the pandemic. One of their findings is that students enjoy interacting with the e-tools, which can make the class more enjoyable. Since the pupils must focus throughout the class in a face-to-face setting, different uses of pedagogical approaches online will improve the quality of teaching and learning. Barbour et al (2020, p.3-4) mentioned the four phases in the new normal. Phase 1: Rapid Transition to Online Education and Instruction; Phase 2: (Concerning) The Fundamentals of Adding In emergency course transitions, institutions must (re)incorporate fundamentals: course management, equitable access to address the issue of unreliable computers and broadband, assistance for disabled students, and academic integrity; Phase 3: Extended transition in the midst of ongoing chaos. Schools need to be ready to support students throughout the entire school year and for online delivery; also, Phase 4: New Normal is forming. The adoption of online learning in this phase is unknown, but it is likely to be higher than it was before Covid-19. It is also pointed out in the study that (Rapanta et al., 2021) the experience of teaching with digital technologies can gradually give way to a harmonious combination of physical and digital tools and methods for more active, flexible, and meaningful learning.

### *5.3 Possible Way Out for a New form of Teaching and Learning in Journalism Classes*

In the long run, the pedagogical approaches of teaching and learning shall be partially shifted to the online setting. Badrkhani (2021) has mentioned how instructors adopt visualization tools to enhance the online educational environment while promoting a sense of creativity for teachers and a sense of elaboration. This helps boost the digital literacy in a faster pace. Despite there being causes of great disruption in the education system during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was confirmed by the respondents that they did better after two years of using e-tools online to conduct classes.

Most of the teachers shared the idea that face to face teaching shall be irreplaceable. Class effectiveness can be reflected from the real-time feedback from the students. This could not be all reflected from the online classes. On top of that, as pointed out by interviewees, journalism has quite a number of modules which involve face to face demonstration in class. Though assessments could be launched online, however, some of the instructor-student interactions on managing the cameras, studio equipment, and also typesetting are required. In the long run, it is expected a few strategies shall be prepared if pandemic affects the face to face teaching. The instructors might be advised to get themselves familiar with filming themselves for a clear demonstration of using the equipment. With today's advanced technology, the resolution shall not be a big problem but clarity has to rely on the camera angle and presentation skills the instructor adopted while filming. On the other hand, a better use of online platforms might be required. For instance, the instructors have to teach software skills to the students. It is advised besides filming the steps, a clear handout showing the steps shall be displayed, and it could be uploaded to the online platforms like Moodle in advance. This is to ensure the delivery could be helpful and reachable to the students. More than that, more subsidies from the university are expected to support the purchase of the equipment so that the instructors need not to rely on their own. It is expected that teachers are more mentally prepared for the online courses, and college are physically more prepared.

With concerted efforts, both from the cooperation and involvement of the students and also the devotion of the teachers, the experience of teaching would offer a leeway for teachers to further invent new ways to teach and come up with new strategies to contribute to the ever-changing learning and teaching environment. From the interviews above, the teachers and students seem to have gotten used to the online platforms to attend classes. And reflected by some of the observations from the students is that that they feel contented that they are able to save some time in their day as well as money in commuting.

## **6. Conclusion and Limitations**

This study aims to take an exploratory perspective to take into concern the perspectives of teachers in dealing with journalism-related modules online. however, giving a rather limited voice in the learning environment without the students. Further studies could take into consideration the responses of students in related studies. All in all, we can see that Covid-19 has brought educators into unprecedented territory. The pressure does not only fall on the teachers but also the students. The learning process shall go well if it balances the well-being of the students and the teachers. This study ably points out that the online learning environment has to be supplemented with face-to-face interaction or a separate small group online session in order to somewhat simulate the same effect that faculty members can achieve in face-to-face classroom settings. In a nutshell, it is foreseeable that online teaching cannot completely replace face-to-face teaching unless face-to-screen communication is able to remove some of the barriers it has when dealing with matters of practical modules. There are no responses from students included in this study, but in the future, their sentiments shall be taken into consideration so as to offer a more balanced perspective.

## **Research Ethics**

This study has obtained the research ethics approval in 2022 September (URC-RE-2122-035) from the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong.

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions: (Semi-structured interviews)

1. How did you launch the classes online? (And your module title is?)
2. When comparing classes in a physical setting to those that are offered online, what are the key changes in the classroom environment?
3. What are the major difficulties you encountered? Say, your course nature, the use of equipment, etc.
4. How did you solve the problems? Say, the teaching methods?
5. What are the motivational strategies did you apply to help encourage students to stay awake in the online classes?
6. What are the assessment methods, did you alter them when launching the online courses? What are the rationales?
7. What are the major communication platforms did you adopt to maintain communication with the students?
8. What is the technical support for the students? Any other forms of support?
9. Are there anything that you discovered, say in physical setting, they will not do this, but within the online platforms, they will react differently? Any examples?
10. In the online setting, in what aspects do you think help improve the teaching?
11. When teaching the practical modules online, what do you think traditional/ physical setting could not be replaced by an online setting?
12. Do you think one-day traditional teaching could be fully replaced by online teaching? Or do you prefer a hybrid setting in the future?

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