From Crisis to Hope: University Students' Construction and Implications of COVID-19 Discourses in Thailand Through English Essay Writing

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted educational institutions worldwide. This study aimed to examine how students constructed discourses about COVID-19 and related terms in their cause-and-effect essays. The sample consisted of 89 essays written by English majors at a large public university in Northern Thailand who completed the English Essay Writing course. This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main theoretical framework in which texts were analyzed by using a combination of corpus and content analyses. The findings revealed that students did not explicitly provide a definition of the term "COVID-19" in their essays at the lexical level, but the implications were inferred based on content word selection. The discourses surrounding COVID-19 were classified into four main categories: economy, health, government, and education. In addition to the main discourses, the essays

highlighted the concept of global citizenship, as students expressed their opinions about the government as citizens, calling for practical actions to address the challenges faced during the pandemic. In addition to describing these challenges, the essays also reflected a discourse of hope, implying positive psychological responses to the crisis.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, corpus analysis, content analysis, essay writing, COVID-19 in Thailand

Introduction

On December 31, 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China reported a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown etiology found in Wuhan, Hubei Province. In January 2020, the Chinese authorities made public that the outbreak was caused by the coronavirus genome (Plipat, 2020, p. 268). At the global level, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern" in January 2020 (Prieto-Ramos et al., 2020, p. 636). Since then, the health crisis has affected all aspects of life around the world. In addition to health issues, the pandemic has caused political, economic, educational, psychological, and socio-cultural changes.

The global pandemic significantly impacted educational institutions worldwide. In Thailand, the government encouraged distance learning to promote physical distancing and prevent the spread of the disease. Consequently, many schools and universities shifted from traditional face-to-face classrooms to online platforms due to the temporary closure of educational facilities. However, some researchers found that the guidelines for teaching and learning online in Thailand were insufficient (Wintachai et al., 2021, p. 51). Online platforms such as Blackboard, Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams were used instead of face-to-face communication for teaching and learning English (Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021, p. 1). The shift to these platforms impacted students, including access gaps to online resources and dropout risks due to financial constraints (Wintachai et al., 2021, p. 54).

Despite the effects on students, there has been limited research on students' reflections and perceptions of COVID-19, particularly through writing formats. Writing is a form of discourse, and discourse studies aim to establish relationships between different discourse components and their functions in communication (Merrita, 2020, p. 35). Furthermore, writing argumentative essays is seen as a key educational tool in higher education, particularly when writers address complicated and controversial topics.

Students engage in dialogues with other students and discuss their opinions and stances regarding social issues so that they can learn about a topic, develop knowledge, or solve complex problems. Argumentative essays also involve describing a strong viewpoint on a problem and using logical evidence and arguments to support the author's position (Noroozi et al., 2020, p. 698). Consequently, cause-and-effect essays written by participants of this study can provide remarkable data to examine how they construct representations of COVID-19 and related terms. This data can also reveal how they established cause-and-effect relationships regarding the pandemic, individuals, and society.

Theoretical Background

Language Phenomena During the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 has introduced a completely novel perspective to people's lives worldwide since its beginning. New words and phrases were coined to emphasize the cultural significance of imposed isolation and social distancing (Mweri, 2021, p. 45). The use of neologisms related to COVID-19, some of which are newly coined terms while others are existing terms with different definitions, has been widely investigated by several researchers. Muhammad et al. (2020) found that most neologisms are formed as nouns, adjectives, and verbs (p.5). Similarly, Nabila and Abdulrahman (2021) concluded that new terms popularly used on social media and in general conversation arise through processes such as blending, clipping, acronym, compounding, and others. Abdulloh et al. (2020) explored the use of loanwords and borrowed words by English-speaking Indonesians and the global public during the COVID-19 pandemic. These researchers observed that some English terms have been integrated into Indonesian through adoption, adaptation, translation, and creation processes (p. 29). Taylor and Kidgell (2021) investigated how metaphors were used to depict the COVID-19 pandemic as influenza or a flu-type disease. Furthermore, metaphor use also has been found in global public discourses about the COVID-19 pandemic. Since early 2020, several political figures, including Xi Jinping in China, Emmanuel Macron in France, Giuseppe Conte in Italy, and Donald Trump in the United States, adopted metaphorical descriptions of the pandemic as a war, for example, describing the virus as "enemy," and "alien invader," and describing preventative measures as "fight" (Semino, 2021, p. 50).

COVID-19 Discourses

Discourses in relation to the term "COVID-19" have been spotlighted in the academic arena, ranging from individual (Triana et al., 2021) to national discourses (Yu et al., 2021). At the individual level, Brookes (2021) investigated the discourses used by UK broadsheets and tabloids to represent obesity in the coverage of COVID-19 and found that obese people were more likely than others to be portrayed as being in danger of mortality from COVID-19. Regarding political discourses, Unuabonah and Oyebode (2021) examined Nigerian internet memes which revealed that the meme producers employed humor, irony, parody, contrast or sarcasm in their messages in order to expose the leadership failures of certain Nigerian politicians, their uncommon dedication to national development, the corrupt practices of some law enforcement agencies, and anti-welfare ideology. Furthermore, the study conducted by Rodrigues de Andrade et al. (2021) indicated that tweets propagating stigma, racism, and negative opinions against China were influenced by political speeches that revealed the more immense consequences of power, economy, and geopolitics.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The theoretical framework of this study was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is an interdisciplinary approach to studying discourse that considers language as a form of social practice. According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), CDA includes methodologies and theories for studying discourse and social and cultural changes in various social contexts. Discourse may be viewed as a two-way social constitution demonstrated by social practice and other social practices. Further, discourse focuses on "linguistic textual analysis," which investigates how individuals use language to interact socially (p. 62). In addition, Fairclough's three-dimensional model is a CDA approach to examining language as a social practice that constructs "social identities, relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning" (p. 66). Among several approaches within CDA framework, Fairclough proposes three dimensions of language use as a communicative event: texts, discursive practices, and social practices (p. 68). However, CDA is not adequate on its own. Therefore, the researchers in this study employed Richardson's method of linguistic analysis as put forth in his book *Analysing newspapers: An approach from critical discourse analysis* (2007) for linguistic analysis in this study.

Linguistic Toolkit

This study has applied a linguistic toolkit commonly used to analyze newspaper texts, since this genre shares some characteristics with argumentative essays. Argumentative essays describe facts or evidence to support the writers' opinion, while at the same time expressing the writer's opinions and experiences. With this similar characteristic of these two genres, the linguistic toolkit was used to analyze language construction in the data for this study. Richardson (2007) introduced several levels of textual analysis consisting of lexical analysis, sentence construction, presupposition, rhetorical tropes, and narratives. The initial stage of analysis in newspaper texts focuses on the lexical selection and the meaning of words. Words possess both explicit and implicit meanings that reflect social realities and judgments. It is important to note that nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs not only convey literal meanings but also carry connotations (Richardson, 2007, p. 47). In journalistic language, the central aspects of lexical analysis revolve around naming, reference, and predication. At the level of sentence construction, syntax, transitivity, and modality are key elements of investigation. Syntax and transitivity can help to understand the relationships between individuals mentioned in news reports and their roles within the reported events (p. 54).

Corpus Analysis and CDA

This study employed corpus linguistics to analyze lexical choice systematically. Corpus linguistics is a quantitative approach that utilizes electronically encoded text and frequency information to analyze real-life language examples (Baker, 2006, pp. 1-2). However, it is essential to note that both qualitative and quantitative analyses are crucial to corpus linguistics (McEnery & Hardie, 2011, pp. 1-2). The available software packages for processing corpus data provide ways of analyzing language including frequency, concordances, collocations, and keyness. With the aforementioned advantages of corpus analysis, some CDA studies have utilized corpus resources and methods (p. 134). Researchers used corpora to investigate the discourse styles of English learners and observed a high frequency of general lexis resulting in vagueness (Baker, 2006, p. 3). Critical linguists study texts in their social contexts, reveal implicit ideology, and challenge common sense (Hunston, 2002, p. 109). In the pandemic period, there were several corpus-based studies focusing on COVID-19 with different data types such as speeches of the WHO director-general

(Kheovichai, 2022) and the WHO's emergency press conferences (Laosrirattanachai & Laosrirattanachai, 2023).

With limited research examining the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the linguistic and discursive features of Thai students' writing, this study aims to bridge this research gap. It explores how students constructed discourses about COVID-19 and associated terms, using linguistic features in their cause-and-effect essays that reflect both personal and societal concerns. Furthermore, the implications of this study could benefit educational institutions or government sectors working with university students.

Research Questions

1. How were the term "COVID-19" and other neologisms related to COVID-19 constructed and defined through linguistic elements in students' cause-and-effect essay writing?
2. What other discourses were used in the construction of the implications of COVID-19?

Research Methodology

Participants

The target sample for this study consisted of 100 English majors at a large public university in Northern Thailand who had completed the English Essay Writing course. Volunteer recruitment was initiated at the beginning of the second semester. Notably, the English Essay Writing course was not offered during the semester of the recruitment period.

Procedure and Measures

Following approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee in May 2022, the announcement for volunteer applications was distributed among English majors in July 2022. Each student was provided with a hyperlink to the online form accompanied by documents explaining the details of the research project.

Upon receipt of the signed consent forms from 89 students who were willing to participate in the study, the students were provided with an online form to submit a cause-and-effect essay on the topic of "COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand" between August and September 2022. Access to the link did not require an email address or any identifying information for

authentication before accessing the writing part. Students could use dictionaries; however, plagiarism was strictly prohibited. They were also instructed to submit their essays as an MS Word document. Finally, the data of the research subjects and essays were reviewed to remove or conceal personally identifiable information. Each essay underwent a review using MS Word's editor function to verify its uniqueness against online sources. The essays were then stored in a cloud storage service that only the two researchers involved in this study could access. After completion of the research, all essays and consent forms would remain in the cloud storage service for a period of one year, after which they would be deleted from the system irrecoverably, and other identifiable documents would be destroyed.

Research Procedures for Data Analysis

To address the research questions, data analysis was conducted in three major steps. The first step focused on vocabulary usage. The AntConc software (Anthony, 2022) was employed to identify language patterns and grammatical characteristics used by students at the lexical levels in their essay writing. The corpus was compiled from essays submitted by 89 students. However, the corpus of collected essays only displayed absolute frequencies. To ascertain distinct linguistic features within the corpus, the data was analyzed with the concept of keyness. Keyness is a statistical measure that compares the relative frequency of a word in a target corpus to its frequency in a reference corpus. This comparison produces a keyword list highlighting how much more or less likely a word is to appear in the target corpus than in the reference corpus (Baker, 2006, p.125). Consequently, the reference corpus AmE06, developed by Potts and Bakers (2012), was utilized in the AntConc software. This reference corpus consists of American English usage in several writing genres such as press reportage and fiction, spanning the period from 2004 to 2008. The details of both corpora are shown in the following table. To better understand the use of some key words, word cluster and concordance were also employed in the data analysis.

Table 1

Target corpus vs. reference corpus

Corpora	Files	Types	Tokens
COVID-19 Essays	89	2,817	31,159
American English 2006 (AmE06)	500	52,456	1,017,879

Second, at the discursive level, Atlas.ti, a qualitative data processing software, was employed for content analysis. Adopting Richardson's technique, the collected data were coded within the Atlas.ti software utilizing two distinct sets of codes: one for linguistic analysis and another for content analysis. These codes were then organized into primary discourses based on their content. Coded texts within each discourse were subsequently interpreted through qualitative analysis. However, the sole analysis of texts does not adequately capture the connection between texts and society. To bridge this gap, Fairclough's three-dimensional model was adopted as a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The last step aimed to uncover the relationship between texts, hegemony, power, and social relations in discourse.

Results

The results of the data analysis are represented from two distinct perspectives: lexical analysis and discourses of COVID-19.

Lexical Analysis

With the utilization of AntConc (Version 4.2.0), the corpus access software, keywords and neologisms could be analyzed as significant linguistic elements in the dataset.

Keywords

Derived from 89 cause-and-effect essays written by students on the topic of "COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand," the following table lists the top 20 words (from a list of 100) most frequently used by the participants. Notably, the data indicated that function words such as "the," "to," and "of" ranked among the most commonly used words.

Table 2

Top 20 words most frequently used in the essays

No.	Type	Freq	Range	No.	Type	Freq	Range
1	the	2010	89	11	are	380	86
2	to	1066	89	12	has	356	84
3	of	942	89	13	it	351	86
4	in	894	89	14	have	345	85

5	and	837	89	15	that	332	83
6	Covid	714	89	16	pandemic	294	84
7	a	590	89	17	not	273	83
8	is	573	88	18	for	260	84
9	people	563	89	19	as	255	76
10	Thailand	493	88	20	many	222	73

However, this study primarily focused on content words, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, to investigate the structure and implications of COVID-19 discourse within students' writing. Obviously, absolute frequency as shown above may not offer a comprehensive analysis. Consequently, keyness was employed to compile a list with relative frequencies that underscores the prominence of specific words or keywords. It was observed that this list was predominantly characterized by content words. Table 3 presents examples of the top 20 keywords.

Table 3

Sample keywords when comparing Target Corpus (Tar) and Reference Corpus (Ref)

Type	Rank	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	Range_Tar	Range_Ref	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
Covid	1	714	0	89	0	5037.6	0.045
Thailand	2	493	7	88	5	3401.657	0.031
pandemic	3	294	4	84	3	2028.224	0.019
people	4	563	1093	89	329	1911.258	0.034
Thai	5	175	5	44	2	1186.344	0.011
epidemic	6	124	15	49	8	778.366	0.008
impact	7	168	157	60	71	741.678	0.011
economy	8	144	148	53	60	617.548	0.009
virus	9	119	74	41	12	584.855	0.008
affected	10	103	32	48	27	578.796	0.007
has	11	356	2350	84	411	540.899	0.021
country	12	149	317	57	161	483.585	0.009
many	13	222	947	73	370	483.14	0.014
situation	14	109	113	50	89	466.079	0.007
infected	15	82	34	36	11	438.626	0.005
effects	16	99	92	51	58	437.583	0.006
outbreak	17	64	10	31	7	392.232	0.004

Type	Rank	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	Range_Tar	Range_Ref	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
health	18	131	339	38	98	385.988	0.008
government	19	127	359	40	137	356.921	0.008
affects	20	62	18	34	16	351.946	0.004

Upon analyzing nouns exclusively as content words, it was evident that the term "COVID" emerged as the top keyword. Subsequently, "Thailand" and "pandemic" were ranked second and third, respectively. This distribution could be attributed to the assigned topic concerning COVID-19 in Thailand. Interestingly, the neologism "pandemic" also stands out as the third keyword. Additionally, the essays reveal keywords concerning disease (COVID, pandemic, virus, health, epidemic, vaccines, outbreaks), economy (economy, income, businesses, money, tourism, jobs), society (people, Thailand, country, government), and education (students, education, teaching, studying).

Table 4

Sample nouns found in the target corpus compared with the reference corpus

Type	Rank	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	Range_Tar	Range_Ref
Covid	1	714	0	89	0
Thailand	2	493	7	88	5
pandemic	3	294	4	84	3
people	4	563	1093	89	329
epidemic	6	124	15	49	8
economy	8	144	148	53	60
virus	9	119	74	41	12
country	12	149	317	57	161
situation	14	109	113	50	89
outbreak	17	64	10	31	7

In accordance with the assigned essay topic, the majority of verbs identified as keywords (e.g., impact, affected, infected, effects, and caused) in the data were employed to illustrate the causes or effects of COVID-19. When examining syntactic construction, the action verb "affect" was employed in both active and passive sentence constructions, as indicated in Tables 5 and 6. Typically, the primary agents of this verb were the nouns "Covid-19," "Covid-19 pandemic," or "the virus." Meanwhile, the objects of

the verb included "the livelihood of people in Thailand," "the lungs," "people," "Thai people," "Thailand," "educational personnel," "the economy of Thailand," and "many countries around the world."

Table 5

Sample concordance of the verb "affect" in active sentences

1	economy will not have to be powered. Second, COVID-19 can	affect	the livelihood of people in Thailand. Thai people have
2	in physical effect of the patient. Firstly, COVID-19 does not just	affect	the lungs, but it also interferes with the immune
3	Thailand, economic and social. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly	affected	the economy of Thailand. As we can see that

Table 6

Sample concordance of the verb "affect" in passive sentences

1	Thailand is the second country in the world to be	affected	by the COVID-19 outbreak. Even if the disease is
2	bankrupt especially tourism companies. Secondly, most educational personnel had been	affected	by the closure of the university. Sometimes, learning and

Analyzing only adjectives may not provide comprehensive insights for lexical analysis. Therefore, to better understand how the most frequently used adjectives are formed in conjunction with other lexical elements, an examination of word clusters as noun phrases was conducted, as shown in Table 7. When examining the most frequently used adjectives together with accompanying words, only word clusters that appeared more than five times in the data were analyzed. It was observed that these adjectives mainly served to modify nouns associated with social components directly impacted by the pandemic. Examples of such nouns included "people," "government," "education," "economy," "students," "businesses," "countries," and "patients." Interestingly, the writers also used adjectives with nouns to portray the effects of COVID-19 on their lives as university students, such as "Thai students," "many students," "online learning," "online class," and "mental health." At the social level, the consequences of the pandemic were reflected through word clusters such as "economic impact" and "social distancing."

Table 7

Sample word clusters with frequently used adjectives

Cluster	Rank	Freq	Range
Thai people	1	100	31
Thai government	2	35	10
Thai education	3	10	6
Thai economy	4	9	7
Thai students	5	6	4
many people	1	63	37
many businesses	2	21	15
many countries	3	16	14
many patients	4	8	3
many aspects	5	7	7
many Thai	5	7	5
many students	7	6	6
online learning	1	35	19
online class	2	8	3

Neologisms

Various neologisms have emerged during this health crisis. To identify neologisms present in student essays, this study drew upon findings reported by Muhammad et al. (2020) and Nabila and Abdulrahman (2021). In students' essays, the most commonly used term was the newly coined word "Covid," derived from "COVID-19," while "coronavirus" was also prevalent, referring to the official name "Coronavirus Disease 2019." Additionally, the term "pandemic" has gained widespread usage, including in these essays. Many students employed the compound noun "COVID-19 pandemic," while others utilized "epidemic," which possesses slight distinctions in meaning.

Table 8

Neologisms used by students in the essays

Word	Frequency	Range
Covid	714	89

Word	Frequency	Range
pandemic	294	84
epidemic	124	49
Coronavirus	42	26
social-distancing / social distancing	17	15
lockdown	16	11
new normal	7	4
quarantine	5	4
work from home	3	3

Discourses of COVID-19

Different essays in this study emphasized either the causes or the effects of the pandemic. However, the majority of the essays (83.15%) centered on the effects of COVID-19, while a smaller portion (16.85%) focused on the causes. Based on a content analysis conducted using Atlas.ti software for both quantitative and qualitative analyses, it was determined that the construction of COVID-19 discourse in the collected essays could be categorized into four main discourses: economy, health, government, and education. In addition to the main discourses, the essays also highlighted themes of global citizenship and hope.

Table 9

Main discourses and related discourses found in analysis of the essays conducted by Atlas.ti

No.	Code	Grounded
1	**Economy**	**207**
	Tourism	59
	Financial problems	42
2	**Health**	**110**
	Mental health	75
	Vaccine	58
	Healthcare system	32
	Symptoms	12
3	**Government**	**101**
	Measures	34
4	**Education**	**81**

Economy

According to the table above, it was evident that students' primary concern lay within economic discourse. Their writings shed light on the financial challenges faced by individuals and various business sectors, including service industries and tourism. In other words, the economy discussed in their essays could be examined from two perspectives: micro and macro. A significant number of essays presented the impact of COVID-19 at the microeconomic level, specifically focusing on individuals. The pandemic has resulted in income loss and unemployment, with lower-class families bearing the brunt of these consequences. The following table presents examples of coded texts.

Table 10

Sample texts coded with "economy" and "individual" codes related to microeconomics

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
4:2	It makes a significant impact on the *economy*, life, and increasing *poverty*.	Economy Individual
6:7	Many people go *bankrupt* or become *homeless* because they do not have work to do.	Economy Individual

The essays exhibited a sense of care and concern for vulnerable groups within society, such as children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, the poor, the homeless, patients, and immigrants. These challenges were portrayed through verb phrases with negative implications, such as "cannot," "lose their job," "have a huge impact," "lack," "don't have," and "isn't good," as well as noun phrases like "a lot of problems," "not all students," and "access." Children, senior citizens, and patients may have experienced physical vulnerability when they contracted COVID-19 with, while individuals' low incomes struggled to earn less money, with the situation being particularly dire for families relying on a sole breadwinner.

Additionally, the essays extensively discussed the effects of COVID-19 on the macro economy. The inclusion of words such as "the country," "Thailand," and "people" indicated the students' concern at the national level. The control measures implemented during the pandemic necessitated the closure of businesses, which had repercussions on trade, travel, and individuals within society. For instance, individuals might have faced unemployment or experienced a decrease in income. Furthermore, students emphasized that entrepreneurs had no choice but to downsize or alter their

businesses to survive. These ideas were conveyed through verb phrases such as "had to adjust," "had to shut down," "has to adapt," "has forced," and "make major adjustments."

Table 11

Sample coded texts reflecting macro economy

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
6:5	In terms of *economic* effects, tourists cannot enter the country. As a result, the hotels or tourist attractions lose *income* and must close down. For example, there are many *markets* in the country that must be closed down permanently.	Economy
20:5	the COVID-19 outbreak in Thailand has caused many *businesses* to adjust, from producing T-shirts to making face masks.	Economy

Health

The essays provided background information on the physical health aspects of COVID-19. Students accurately described the symptoms experienced by infected individuals, including "fever," "cough," and "headache." Furthermore, they demonstrated an understanding of the impact of the virus on physical health, differentiating it from the common cold and flu. This was evident through the use of noun phrases such as "mild to moderate indication," "the most serious symptoms," "mild symptom," and "a common cold." Additionally, some students mentioned post-COVID-19 symptoms observed in individuals who had recovered from the disease. The essays conveyed a sense of awareness and fear, as depicted by the use of predicative adjectives such as "life-threatening." However, there were instances of misunderstandings regarding the health effects, characterized by hyperbole or overgeneralization, such as the claim that "the virus quickly destroys the lungs and the patient soon dies."

Table 12

Sample coded texts regarding physical health effects of COVID-19

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
67:3	Most infected people have *mild to moderate indication.* For example, *fever, cough, fatigue, sore throat, headache,* loss of ability to smell and taste, and other.	Symptoms

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
77:9	has side effects for those who have recovered from COVID-19, such as *a decreased perception of taste and smell,* and *getting tired easily,* which are caused by inefficient lung function	Symptoms

In addition to physical health, the essays presented the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health, which was evident through the use of words such as "stress," "be stressed," "anxiety," "paranoid," "mind," "despair," and "mental health." Different factors were described as influencing mental health, such as financial problems, the need to adapt to online learning, and the fear of the virus. Phrases such as "lower income and higher costs," "unable to go to work to make money," and "the news of homelessness" were used to illustrate individuals' financial challenges. Despite anxiety related to contracting the disease, the essays recognized that staying at home and avoiding public gatherings to prevent the spread of the virus could also cause stress, as seen in phrases such as "cannot go out and do other activities" and "a worry of contracting COVID-19." The essays also highlighted the most severe scenario in terms of mental health by using phrases such as "commit suicide" and "suicide."

Table 13

Sample coded texts regarding mental health effects of COVID-19

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
13:11	More people have committed suicide as a result of COVID's impact. Whether because of the issue of lower income and higher costs, or as a result of the stress caused by COVID, people *commit suicide*.	Economy Mental Health
67:16	However, some people are still *stressed* about things like staying at home. They cannot go out and do other activities fully, because they must wear a mask and must wash their hands all the time	Measures Mental Health Way of life

According to the students' writing, the healthcare system was identified as contributing to the worsening health of COVID-19 patients. The essays emphasized several key factors, including the scarcity of medical supplies and equipment such as beds, personal protective equipment (PPEs), ambulances, medicines, and vaccines. Moreover, students expressed empathy towards the hardworking medical staff, as evidenced by verb phrases such as "are so tired" and "not get enough rest." Modal verbs were also used to describe the healthcare workers' dedication, such as "have to resign" and "have to work hard." On the other hand, phrases like "had to go to the

hospital by themselves" and "had to wait to get in the line" portrayed the patients' struggles to access the healthcare system. Some essays employed narrative techniques to visualize the shortage of healthcare staff and the resulting workload issues.

Government

Based on the data, many students expressed negative opinions about the government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis in Thailand. They believed the government failed to manage the crisis and thus exacerbated the situation. The essays that mentioned the government employed negative words reflecting the students' distrust, such as "cannot manage," "wrongdoing," and "incapable." Students frequently employed the rhetorical device of hyperbole to express their negative views on politics. For example, adjectives with negative implications such as "unfit," "greedy," and "selfish" were also found in government discourse, while "corruption" and "the worst management" were associated with politicians. From some students' perspectives, poor leadership qualities were attributed to the government, including traits such as "does not listen to opinions," "take advantage," and "has no knowledge." In addition, the essays highlighted the government's failures in administration and policies in response to COVID-19, including the vaccine policy. The vaccine distribution was characterized as "slow," "the worst," "very late," and "not enough." Some parts of the essays expressed distrust towards the government, with concerns that they might prioritize profit or create inequities in vaccine distribution.

Table 14

Sample coded texts reflecting students' attitudes about the government

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
25:6	Even though the *government* has dealt with COVID-19, I have not noticed any improvements until now. I believe that if Thailand has great and knowledgeable *leaders*, we will not be subjected to the effects of Covid 19 for nearly two years.	Government
38:9	unfit *prime minister* and greedy *politicians* be related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that they cannot handle it.	Government

Education

Based on the data, the discourse on education primarily revolved around the impact of COVID-19. Students were significantly affected by the shift to online teaching and learning, facing challenges such as a lack of

necessary equipment and reliable internet access. Furthermore, a significant relationship between the economy and education emerged, with many students addressing these two factors as the major effects of the pandemic. Consequently, students were portrayed as a vulnerable group in this crisis. For example, the term "poor students" was used to describe the unequal access to online classes among students. The data further revealed the chain of causes and effects of the COVID-19 situation. Specifically, the pandemic led to economic setbacks, which, in turn, worsened financial difficulties within households. As a result, families had to allocate additional expenses for their children's online learning, adding to their living costs. The essays also emphasized the long-term implications for education, including graduating students' quality and employability. The excerpts provided below illustrate these implications.

Table 15

Sample coded texts reflecting the relation between education and economy

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
41:11	The outlook for Thailand's *education* system is deteriorating, and the *economy* is sluggish.	Economy Education
70:4	Therefore, there are two main factors that are most affected: the *economic* recovery in the country has been delayed and the efficiency of *education* is still insufficient.	Economy Education
78:7	Firstly, *poor students* will be greatly affected.	Economy Education

Apart from the economic reasons impacting mental health, some essays argued that online classes also contributed to mental health problems. The terms "mental health," "stressed," "stressful," and "anxiety" were frequently collocated with "online learning" and "education." The experience of studying alone and the high volume of assignments were mentioned as factors leading to feelings of stress and depression. This suggests that education relied heavily on self-learning methods. However, it should be acknowledged that this learning approach may not be suitable for every student and can impose physical and mental pressure on them.

The effectiveness of online classes was also addressed in several essays. Some essays employed narratives to describe personal experiences with online learning. Pronouns such as "I" and "we" were utilized to convey firsthand experiences of the challenges and inefficiencies associated with online learning, particularly regarding students' learning environments and self-discipline. These narratives suggest that universities provide an appropriate learning environment where students can comfortably enhance

their academic and social skills. On the other hand, learning at home independently can pose difficulties related to access to equipment, facilities, and individual concentration.

In addition to the four main discourses above, two more discourses emerged that proved to be of interest when examined through sentence construction using specific modalities and verbs: students' voices as active citizens, and students' hope for the pandemic situation to improve.

Voices as Active Citizens

Based on the data, it was evident that modal verbs such as "must," "have to," and "should" were employed to offer suggestions and advice to both individuals and the Thai government. At the individual level, most essays focused on ways to mitigate the COVID-19 situation through collective efforts. Students used words such as "care," "careful," "take care," "protect," "aware of," and "adapt" to describe actions that individuals could take. Additionally, using specific nouns like "people" and pronouns such as "you," "we," and "everyone" reflected the writers' recognition of their role as active citizens who understood their responsibilities to society rather than solely relying on government assistance.

In addition to suggestions for individuals, students recommended government action by employing modal verbs such as "need," "should," and "must" in conjunction with the noun "government." This reflected the students' expectations and demands as Thai citizens for the government to take appropriate actions. Furthermore, they emphasized that the government's actions had the potential either to exacerbate or to improve the pandemic situation.

Table 16

Sample coded texts related to suggestions for individuals in the COVID-19 situation

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
15:14	People *should* be careful about living outside and doing activities safely.	Sentence Construction: Modality Suggestion-Individual
27:17	We *must* help each other to solve these effects. We can help in both large ways and small ways.	Sentence Construction: Modality Suggestion-Individual

ID	Quotation Content	Codes
79:11	The government *should* be careful about the decision to avoid a new pandemic in Thailand, and Thai people *should* be careful when they go outside. Moreover, everyone *should* be careful when going outside and going to crowded places.	Government Sentence Construction: Modality Suggestion-Individual

Hopes

Although the students, as essay writers, found themselves in a crisis an in unusual situations, they expressed a discourse of hope in their writing. They utilized verbs such as "hope" and "believe" in several essays to convey their positive expectations for a better pandemic situation. Furthermore, personalized pronouns such as "I" and "we" were used in conjunction with these verbs, indicating the writers' personal connection and their sense of being part of a collective society. Additionally, nouns such as "Thai people" and "citizens" were collocated with the aforementioned verbs to imply a shared hope and belief among people in society. Comparative adjectives such as "better" and "more" were also employed to modify nouns, further reinforcing positive implications. The essays primarily expressed hopes for sufficient vaccines, proper governmental management, and economic recovery.

Table 17

Sample concordances of the verb "hope"

problem can be solved for the better. Then we	hope	that Thailand will have better trends and will be
and going out to live a normal life. I sincerely	hope	that we can get through this crisis in the
help each other to get over it. At last, I	hope	the government will be able to solve the problems
a situation that no one wants to happen. However, we	hope	it will get better soon even if it is

Discussion and Conclusion

Essay writing serves as a means to convey the thoughts and opinions of the writer on a particular topic. Hence, it is crucial for students to present their arguments or opinions in a logical manner. In light of Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002), the 89 essays in this study focusing on the topic "COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand" can be considered

a form of language use that involves three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice.

At the level of discursive practice, students' essays contained the term "COVID-19" in conjunction with other linguistic elements. It was observed that students did not directly provide a definition of the term "COVID-19" in their essays. This implied that the term was widely understood and recognized without the need for further explanation or definition. However, readers could infer the meaning of the term through its association with other frequently mentioned content words. In addition to content words, neologisms were used in students' essay writings. This observation suggests that individuals tended to readily and swiftly accept and assimilate newly coined words when such terms were repeatedly disseminated through national or global media channels. This finding is similar to previous studies on neologisms, such as Mweri's work (2021) discussing the emergence of new words at the word level caused by social phenomena, and the work of Asif et al. (2021) who focused on lexical formation of neologisms including adjectives, nouns, and verbs on social media related to COVID-19.

Furthermore, discourses revolving around COVID-19 consisted of topics such as the economy, health, government, education, citizen voice, and hope. In terms of social practice, students' essays were influenced by different social contexts, thereby reflecting cultural, political, and social issues of that time. The essays also shed light on the concept of global citizenship. Compared to previous studies (Yu et al., 2021; Rodrigues de Andrade et al., 2021), China was not explicitly mentioned as the sole cause of COVID-19 in the essays. It could be inferred that students recognized the pandemic as a global issue that required collective responsibility from all individuals worldwide as global citizens rather than sought to blame specific countries for the origin of the virus. However, their writings also implied a sense of national consciousness, which tended to differentiate between "us" and "them" within the context of the pandemic. The measures implemented by Thailand and other countries suggested a focus on safeguarding national interests, thus creating a sense of borders and limitations aimed at protecting their citizens. During the pandemic period, students faced various personal challenges such as economic, health, and educational issues including the closure of universities (Wintachai et al., 2021) and learning via online platforms (Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021). The majority of essays contained suggestions and recommendations for governmental management, highlighting the students' realization of their role as active citizens within society. In other words, they experienced the impact of social issues that were too extensive or complex to be handled solely as individuals or vulnerable groups. Consequently, the government and associated social institutions were called upon to take practical actions in response to these circumstances

similar to the previous study on the Nigerian government (Unuabonah & Oyebode, 2021). Although the essays depicted several difficulties, they also reflected psychological responses to the crisis through a discourse of hope. In an unpredictable situation, students expressed their expectations of returning to university and anticipated a better future. This reflected the psychological resilience exhibited by individuals as they strove to navigate through challenging periods in their lives.

In conclusion, despite some improvements that resulted from the pandemic, rapid social and global changes continue to present challenges at various levels, ranging from the individual to the global. This study aims to bridge the gap by examining how linguistic patterns reflect the potential issues during a crisis, how individuals cope with these challenges, and how they perceive such problems at individual, national, and global levels. The findings of this study may prove beneficial for crisis management in social institutions when preparing for future crises.

Acknowledgements

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