THE USE OF INTERNET OF EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool among students at Bangkok University; students' expectation of social networks and search engines in learning English, as well as their perceived usefulness. It also examined their use of the Internet for learning English. The samples were 198 undergraduate students enrolled in Fundamental English course at Bangkok University. The instrument in this study was a questionnaire. Results from the study indicated that the levels of attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and Internet use for learning English in general were moderate. The students had positive attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool. The Internet was viewed the best method to communicate. There were no statistically significant differences at .05 level found in students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English as classified by gender, computer ownership, and monthly allowance. As hypothesised, there was a positive relationship between students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English at .01 level. Students having more positive attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool would use of the Internet for learning English more than those with less positive attitudes.

Keywords: Internet, attitude, EFL students

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The internet has a great potential to be an effective training tool in language learning. With its multi-dimensional uses, the internet can help educational institutions to facilitate cooperative learning environment, computer assisted courses and course offerings in distance education. Also, it has brought new dimensions and opportunities to foreign language learners in the aspects of communication. EFL learners can improve their language skills and reach real learning experiences. The Internet provides them with an opportunity to access useful language resources and communicate directly with native English speakers; they can learn listening, speaking, reading and writing English through real-world situations (Yang and Chen, 2007).

Related literature indicates that foreign language learners usually have positive attitudes towards the Internet (Aydin, 2007; Mahmud, 2011; Hong, Ridzuan and Kuek, 2003). Aydin (2007) found out that foreign language learners in Balikesir University had positive attitudes towards the Internet. Positive attitudes would contribute to foreign language learning via the Internet after overcoming some potential problems and disadvantages. Similarly, Mahmud (2011) investigated the attitude of private university students in Bangladesh towards internet.

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Results from the study indicated that students had positive attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool because it was viewed as a fastest way to reach knowledge. The study also indicated that there is no variation of attitude towards internet among students based on gender, which is in contradiction to most other findings.

Some studies have revealed that the attitude toward the Internet plays an important role in its acceptance and usage. For instance, Tsai (2004) examined students' perceptions towards the Internet of 322 high school students from six high schools in Taiwan. Their perceptions towards the Internet could be described as 4-T categories (technology, tool, toy and tour). The results revealed that the perceptions shape students' views and then their behaviors about internet-based instruction. Another example is the study done by Hong, Ridzuan and Kuek (2003). They investigated the success of a technology and Internet-enriched teaching and learning environment in molding positive attitudes among students toward using the Internet for learning at a university in Malaysia. They found out that students had positive attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool. Students with better basic Internet skills and who viewed the learning environment as promoting the use of the Internet favored using the Internet for learning. The university achieved its objectives of promoting the use of the Internet for teaching and learning purposes.

Gender difference was a significant variable that affected students' attitudes towards Internet use. Relevant studies have indicated that male students, in general, have more positive computer related attitudes.

For example, Wu and Tsai (2006) found out that male students from three universities in Taiwan expressed significantly more positive attitudes and self-efficacy toward the Internet than female students. In addition, students' grade level also played an important role in students' Internet attitudes; graduate students tended to possess more positive Internet attitudes. The results of this study indicated that students' attitudes toward the Internet could be viewed as one of the important indicators for predicting their Internet self-efficacy.

Tekinarslan (2009) investigated Turkish undergraduate students' perceptions of the Web as a learning tool and found out that male students indicated significantly higher scores on the self-efficacy subscale than the females.

Also, the students with higher Web experience in terms of usage frequency indicated higher scores on all subscales (i.e., self-efficacy, affective, usefulness, Web-based learning). Moreover, the students from higher socio-economic backgrounds indicated significantly higher attitude scores on the self-efficacy subscale of the Web attitude scale. The student's PC ownership has significant main effects on their Web attitudes and on the usefulness, self-efficacy, and affective subscales.

The literature review shows that the use of Internet in education is increasing day by day. The achievement in foreign language via the Internet is closely related to attitudes of learners.

As attitudes can affect learning level positively or negatively, the major purpose of the present study was to assess students' attitudes toward the Internet and their Internet using behaviors. The study explored the level of Internet use and examined whether the Internet was an effective learning tool for students.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

> ➢ To study students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English.
> ➢ To compare students' attitudes toward using the Internet as learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English with their background (gender, computer ownership, and monthly allowance).
> ➢ To investigate the relationship between students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Samples
The participants included in this study were undergraduate students enrolled in Fundamental English course at Bangkok University. These students have studied English as a foreign language. The samples were selected by the use of stratified random sampling technique. As a result, 198 students were participated in the data collection.

Research Instrument
In order to identify students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English, a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The first part gathered personal information from the respondents who were asked to answer the questions on gender, computer ownership, and monthly allowance. The second part was a survey of students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English. The questionnaire was prepared for rating in a form of five-rating scale.

Data Analysis
The acceptable statistical significance level was set at alpha (α) < .05. After the receipt of the completed questionnaires, the data were statistically analyzed by using SPSS/Window 12 through the following steps:

> ➢ The data of personal information were brought to calculate for average means.
> ➢ The data of students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English were brought to calculate for average means and standard deviation.
> ➢ The means of students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English were divided into three levels and interpreted in the form of range based on the criterion of $\bar{X} \pm .5SD$.
>> ▪ The average mean of attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool was 4.32 and standard deviation was .62.

Attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool	Mean Range
high	4.64 – 5.00
moderate	4.01 – 4.63
low	1.00 – 4.00

- The average mean of Internet use for learning English was 2.32 and standard deviation was .23.

Internet use for learning English	Mean Range
high	2.56 – 5.00
moderate	2.09 – 2.55
low	1.00 – 2.08

- ➤ The independent-samples t-test was used to test the mean scores of two groups of subjects concerning students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English.
- ➤ The One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare mean scores of three and more groups concerning students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English.
- ➤ The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used to investigate the relationship between students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English.

RESULTS

1. Results of Fundamental Analysis
1.1 Level of attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool

The study revealed that the level of students' attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool in general was moderate ($\overline{X}$ = 4.32). Among five items of attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool, the third highest means of attitudes were items no. 3, 4, and 1 respectively ($\overline{X}$ = 4.39, 4.37, 4.31). The lowest mean was item no. 2 ($\overline{X}$ = 4.21). The results were presented in Table 1.

Table: 1
**Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitudes toward
Using the Internet as a Learning Tool**

Attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level
1. The use of the Internet makes learning English more convenient.	4.31	.72	moderate
2. Using the Internet as a learning tool is acceptable now.	4.21	.83	moderate
3. The use of the Internet helps learners get information and news from around the world.	4.39	.79	moderate
4. The use of the Internet makes communication more accessible and convenient	4.37	.81	moderate
5. Using the Internet as a tool for communication is better than using former methods like sending letters , faxing and making calls.	4.30	.87	moderate
Total	4.32	.62	moderate

Level of Internet use for learning English

The study revealed that the level of students' use of the Internet for learning English in general was moderate ($\overline{X}$ = 2.32). Among twelve items of Internet use for learning English, the third highest means of opinions were items no. 12, 13 and 11 respectively ($\overline{X}$ = 3.20, 3.01, 2.73). These items were at a high level. The lowest means which was item no. 10 ($\overline{X}$ = 1.77) was at a low level. The results were presented in Table 2.

Table: 2
Mean and Standard Deviation of Internet Use for Learning English

Internet use for learning English	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level
1. searching information for doing learning tasks	2.55	.72	moderate
2. practicing listening skills	2.10	.78	moderate
3. practicing speaking skills	1.95	.74	low
4. practicing reading skills	2.19	.80	moderate
5. practicing writing skills	2.04	.70	low
6. learning grammar	1.85	.75	low
7. learning vocabulary	2.27	.83	moderate
8. practicing English exercises and exams	1.88	.77	low
9. communicating with classmates	2.62	.87	high
10. communicating with teachers	1.77	.76	low
11. reading course announcements	2.73	.83	high
12. downloading course materials	3.20	.82	high
13. uploading and submitting homework	3.01	.85	high
Total	2.32	.46	moderate

Results of Hypothesis Testing
Hypothesis 1 Compared Students' Attitude Toward
Using The Internet As A Learning Tool With Different Background

Hypothesis 1 was not accepted because none of the variables related to students' background affected their attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool. There were no statistically significant differences at .05 level found in students' attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool as classified by gender, computer ownership, and monthly allowance.

The overall mean score of female students' attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool ($\overline{X}$ = 4.40) was higher than that of male students ($\overline{X}$ = 4.21). Both groups had students' attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool at a moderate level. Due to the results obtained from the application of the t-test, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference found in students' overall attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool between two groups (male and female) at level of .05. This means that male and female students were not different in having attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool. The overall mean score of attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool among students who owned a computer was higher than that of students who didn't own a computer ($\overline{X}$ = 4.33, 4.16). Both groups had attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool at a moderate level. The t-test was employed to examine the significant difference between students who owned a computer and those who didn't own a computer on their attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool.

It was found that there was no statistically significant difference found in students' attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool between two groups at level of .05. This means students who owned a computer and those who didn't own a computer were not different in having attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool.

The results obtained from applying the ANOVA revealed that no difference in overall attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool among three groups of monthly allowance (less than 3,500 baht; 3,501-5,000 baht; and more than 5,000 baht) was found statistically significant at .05 level. This means that allowance received from parents per month had no impact on students' attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool.

Hypothesis 2 compared students' use of the Internet for learning English with different background

Hypothesis 2 was not accepted because none of the variables related to students' background affected their use of the Internet for learning English. There were no statistically significant differences at .05 level found in students' Internet use for learning English as classified by gender, computer ownership, monthly allowance.The overall mean score of female students' Internet use for learning English ($\overline{X}$ = 2.40) was higher than that of male students ($\overline{X}$ = 2.22). Both groups had Internet use for learning English at a moderate level. Due to the results obtained from the application of the t-test, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference found in students' overall Internet use for learning English between two groups (male and female) at level of .05. This means that male and female students were not different in using the Internet for learning English. The overall mean score of Internet use for learning English among students who didn't own a computer was higher than that of students who owned a computer ($\overline{X}$ = 2.32, 2.15).

Both groups had Internet use for learning English at a moderate level. The t-test was employed to examine the significant difference between students who owned a computer and those who didn't own a computer on their Internet use for learning English.

It was found that there was no statistically significant difference found in students' Internet use for learning English between two groups at level of .05. This means students who owned a computer and those who didn't own a computer were not different in using the Internet for learning English.

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Hypothesis 3 investigated the relationship between students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used to find out whether there was a statistically significant relationship between attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English.

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This hypothesis was accepted. Table 3 shows that there was a positive relationship between students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English at .01 level. In other words, students having more positive attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool would use of the Internet for learning English more than those with less positive attitudes.

Table: 3
Correlate Results for the Respondents' Attitudes toward Using the Internet as a Learning Tool and Their Internet Use for Learning English

VARIABLE	Attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool	Internet use for learning English
Attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool	1.00	
Internet use for learning English	.29**	1.00

** P < .01

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Internet is broadly used for educational purposes by educational institutes to enhance students' learning outcomes. It has the potential to create new contexts that increase students' motivation for learning. The results of the research have shown students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their Internet use for learning English. Therefore, teachers and institutions can take the results of this study into consideration when developing English courses with the Internet.

The students in this study did not seem to like using the Internet as a learning tool as much as we had expected. They realized that the Internet has a lot of advantages, especially for communication. However, they didn't fully accept the Internet as a learning tool.

Their overall attitude toward using the Internet was at a moderate level. In this study, the students were assigned to do learning tasks through using the Internet and work on their own. They hadn't been given any training on how to get the most benefits from the Internet to support their learning. Thus, more training on Internet usage for language learning should be provided.

If students know how to use the Internet to improve their language proficiency, they are likely to use it more for learning. Then, we can expect that they will have more positive attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool.

As shown in Table 3, there was a positive relationship between students' attitudes toward using the Internet as a learning tool and their use of the Internet for learning English. Unlike previous findings, the results of this study revealed that the students exhibited positive attitudes toward the Internet irrespective of gender, computer ownership, and monthly allowance.

Therefore, some other factors influencing students' Internet use as a learning tool should be highlighted by educational researchers such as technology readiness, Internet training, as well as teaching method and environment.

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