

Thai University Students' Attitudes Toward the Use of the Internet in Learning English

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore Thai university students' attitudes toward the Internet use in learning English as a Second Language (ESL). The study also investigated the students' frequency of the Internet use in learning English, perceived computer skills, and factors affecting their Internet use. The participants in this study were 480 Thai English majors and non-English majors enrolled as full time students at eight large-sized universities--four in Bangkok and four in other regions of the country. Sixteen students were later selected for in-depth interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed by means, standard deviations, and qualitative data by content analysis. The quantitative results showed that the participants most frequently accessed the Internet at home and encountered limitation from too many users on the Internet and limited server capacity. They perceived themselves as good at basic Internet applications. Those interviewed participants reported three factors affecting their Internet use: *field of study*, *computer skills* and *geographical area*. Overall, the participants had positive attitudes toward the use of Internet in learning English.

Keywords: *ESL, Internet, learner attitudes, Thai university students*

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, both students and teachers live in the age of digital technologies. The use of the Internet has become a vital part of students' lives and the Internet is considered an effective learning tool that has changed the face of education (Yunus, Lubis, & Lin, 2009; Fuad Khassawneh, 2012). The Internet is beneficial as it provides a wide array of knowledge for teachers and students. Teachers can search from digital libraries for authentic teaching materials, engaging teaching activities, and other relevant information. In particular, the Internet offers to students an authentic learning environment to interact with others across the continents. The Internet cannot only play several instructional roles in helping students feel more relaxed while learning English, but also enhances student's autonomy (Amir, Ismail, & Hussin, 2011; Ibrahim, 2010; Yunus, Lubis, & Lin, 2009).

Recent international research-studies have shown that the Internet is a useful tool for students' English language learning in the areas of reading, writing, listening, speaking and especially vocabulary development (Baniabdelrahman, Bataineh, & Bataineh, 2007; Fuad Khassawneh, 2012; Igawa & Nuspliger, 2012; Zhang, 2013; Chung, Chen, & Kuo, 2014).

Although the Internet is useful in language classes, certain disadvantages should not be overlooked. Warchauer (2004) asserted that the Internet should not completely replace English teachers because disadvantages of the Internet do exist. FuadKhasawneh (2012) investigated EFL teachers' perceptions and perspectives on the use of the Internet in teaching process in a university in Jordan. In the Vietnamese context, Tri & Nguyen (2014) investigated the use of ICT in English learning among Vietnamese EFL university students as well as students' expectations of ICT and purposes of using ICT. They concluded that the use of ICT was to improve reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar and vocabulary skills. In addition, Chung, Chen, & Kuo (2015) explored factors accounting for Taiwanese EFL college students' behavioral intention to use mobile English vocabulary resources for English vocabulary development.

As for local studies on the use of the Internet in support of language learning, Khamkhien (2012) investigated the Internet implemented in the language classroom, and the needs to train teachers and students with basic computer skills. The researcher was well aware that the Internet might not be available to all schools because of the high cost of effective network systems at the classroom level. He noted that in Thailand, the use of the Internet and computer technology has been limited due to insufficient budget allocated to schools. Kleintien & Kammnungwut (2015) studied the impact of using electronic media software program in 100 schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission in Thailand. This software program was designed to help students in Grades 4-9 remember vocabulary more efficiently.

These reported studies—both international and local—have not covered the areas of the researcher's interest in ESL university students using the Internet as a learning tool in the Thai context. Although the Internet is common among ESL university students, the students' functional computer skills and Internet use, perceptions of the Internet, access to the Internet and factors affecting the Internet use still do not currently project a clear picture. There have been too few studies on the Internet use for educational purposes by ESL university students in Thailand. Particularly, there has not been a study to cover major learning aspects with the use of the Internet by English major and non-English major students studying in Thai universities. To the researcher, it is vitally important to study ESL students' attitudes to understand how and why they perceive the Internet as a learning tool, as well as other issues regarding place to access the Internet, skills for the Internet, and other relevant factors affecting their use of the Internet. The obtained information can give insights to ESL English teachers to effectively handle their Internet-based instruction to respond to their students' needs and characteristics.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews literature as background of the study in four aspects: (1) advantages of the Internet in English language teaching, (2) disadvantages of the Internet in English classroom, (3) learners' variables and the Internet use and (4) research on the use of the Internet in English Language Learning.

2.1 Advantages of the Internet in English language teaching

The Internet is defined as a network of computer networks (Dominick, 1998). Al-Asmari (2005) asserted that the Internet provides learners with numerous instructional tools. It enables students to search, retrieve data, and exchange digital files. While the Internet is a network of computer networks, website is a huge collection of digital files that can offer users unlimited information (Lin, Guiyang, & Winaitham, 2008).

The use of the Internet is growing rapidly and it is widely integrated into the teaching and learning process of language learning (Kandasamy & Shah, 2013). Quite a few researchers consider the Internet as an effective tool to help students learn English (Alduwairaj, 2014; Joshi & Kaur 2011; Rajaram, 2011; Traore & Kyei-Blankson, 2011).

The first advantage of the Internet is its effectiveness in conveying both images and sound presentations simultaneously. These presentations attract students' attention and help them understand the text better. The Internet in use is technically coined *Information Communication Technology (ICT)* which is integrated into teaching procedures and learning activities in reading, writing, listening and speaking (Traore & Kyei-Blankson, 2011; Kandasamy & Shah, 2013).

The second advantage of the Internet is its autonomous learning. Zhong (2008) emphasized that teachers in the 21st century need to help their students to become autonomous in their own English practice without limitation of time and place. Besides, the Internet provides authenticity of the learned material and communication (Cohen & Cowen, 2007; Zhong 2008).

Rajaram (2011) noted that with the Internet, learning English can be fun. Students can search for online activities that fit their learning styles and learning goals. They can practice English by playing online games or other communicative activities, which in turn reduces learning stress and anxiety. Zhang (2013) added that the Internet and new technologies offer independence to students in their learning in a flexible environment.

2.2 Disadvantages of the Internet in the English Classroom

Some disadvantages of the Internet use in English learning and teaching were identified in three local studies. Kerdboon (2004) reported that Thai adolescents were likely to use the Internet for entertainment like online games, not for educational purposes. In particular, large class sizes were not adequately equipped due to insufficient budget allocation. Kanoksilapatham (2009) asserted that the Internet should not totally replace English teachers, but should serve as a supplementary tool in their language learning. Khamkhien (2012) pointed out that both teachers and students need to be trained with basic computer knowledge and skills to feel comfortable with teaching and learning via online activities. An important concern was to have well-trained personnel as support staff to facilitate teaching and learning activities with the use of the Internet at the classroom level. It was therefore important for schools to handle identified shortcomings of the Internet use.

2.3 Learners' Variables and the Internet Use

Students' Attitudes

Van der Heijden (2003) investigated factors influencing the use of websites by Internet users in the Netherlands and found that the users' attitudes can affect the use of the Internet. Biding, Shamsudin, Hashim, & Sharif (2011) also explored factors influencing students' intention to use Internet for academic purposes. They found that the more positive attitudes toward the Internet, the higher the intention to use the Internet.

Gender

Odell (2000) found that male university students used the Internet more than female counterparts. However, Hong Ridzuan, & Kuek (2003) reported no impact of gender on students' use of the Internet. The issue of the impact of gender on students' use of the Internet was not conclusive.

School Year

Baniabdelrahman, Bataineh, & Bataineh (2007) reported significant differences among school years on the use of the Internet for general and EFL learning process. A survey conducted in India by Maroof, Parashar, & Bansal (2012) revealed that the first year students were using the Internet more than their senior counterparts. The researchers explained that the first year students had some computer training while they were in high schools.

Field of Study

Hong, Ridzuan, & Kuek (2003) conducted a survey at the university level in Malaysia and found the students' attitudes toward learning on the Internet being affected by their major subject or field of study. They reported that those students in Engineering, Information Technology, Resource Science and Technology had more positive attitudes toward the Internet for learning purposes than those in Cognitive Sciences and Human Development.

2.4 Research on the Use of the Internet in English Language Learning

Klentien & Kamnungwut (2015) studied the effect of using electronic media in teaching English to students in primary and secondary schools in Thailand. The electronic lessons were more interesting for numerous presentation techniques used in delivering contents in the classroom. The researchers concluded that electronic media and teaching materials would help students broaden their concepts of knowledge and understand the lessons better.

Tri & Nguyen (2014) investigated the use of ICT in English learning among Vietnamese EFL university students and their expectations of ICT in use. They found that the students spent more hours per week using ICT for general purposes. They pointed out the use of ICT for improving language skills, grammar and vocabulary. They emphasized that the students should be trained to use ICT in learning English effectively.

Alduwairaj (2014) studied 50 ESL university students' attitudes toward the use of technology in language learning. Both male and female college students enrolled in three

different ESL classrooms in a university in the U.S. The results showed that the students viewed the use of technology as an effective way of learning English especially technological tools, such as electronic dictionary, movies, and videos. Zhang (2013) investigated Internet use in EFL learning and teaching in universities in Northwest China. The results showed that teachers and students had positive attitude toward the Internet in English teaching and learning. Both teachers and students knew much about the use of blogs and email in information exchange. Zhang suggested that both teachers and students should help each other develop English teaching and learning websites and that they should be familiar with the abundant resources on the Internet and share them with each other.

Kaewwit (2007) studied factors influencing the Internet use by Thai university students in Bangkok and suburban areas, and found that most private university students used the Internet for education, entertainment, and communication purposes whereas public university students mostly used the Internet for business. The results showed that the variables like *field of study*, *school year*, and *regions* had no effect on the students' Internet use.

3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to explore Thai university students' attitudes toward the Internet in English learning. The study also investigated the students' frequency of the Internet use in learning English, perceived skills on Internet, and factors affecting their Internet use.

4. Research Questions

The researcher posed four research questions:

1. What is the frequency of Internet use of Thai university students as a language learning tool?
2. What factors limit their access to the Internet?
3. What are their perceived skills on the Internet?
4. What is their perception of the Internet?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study used quantitative and qualitative approaches. Both approaches were chosen to holistically accommodate data collection in response to the research questions in the study.

5.2 Setting

Eight universities participated in the study on a voluntary basis: four in Bangkok and four outside Bangkok. They shared common variables: having a large size of the student body, and offering both ESL major program and other discipline-major programs.

5.3 Participants

There were two groups of participants in two stages of data collection: a survey and in-depth interviews. As for the survey, there were 480 students from public and private

universities in and outside Bangkok--240 male and female ESL majors and 240 male and female other-discipline majors. The participants were 60 in each year, from years 1-4—making 240 for each of the two groups. Their age ranged from 17-25 years, with an average of 20. The participants were evenly distributed in demographic variables and geographical location for their acceptable representativeness.

In the interview stage, eight students each from the two groups were invited for in-depth interviews—making 16 from 480. The researcher first contacted the interviewees by phone, explained the purpose of the interview, and requested an appointment date and time with each interviewee.

5.4 Instruments

There were two research instruments: a survey and a semi-structured interview. The survey carried 19 items on the Internet use and 23 questions on perception on a scale of 1 (high) to 5 (low). The survey questionnaire consisted of five sections: (1) background information, (2) the number of hours on using the Internet for learning English, (3) perceived factors limiting access to the Internet, (4) perceived skills on the Internet, and (5) perceptions of the role and effectiveness of the Internet in learning English. The researcher calculated the alpha coefficients of sections 2-5 as: frequency of Internet use = .86, factors limiting access to the Internet = .72, Internet skills = .86, and perception of Internet use = .89. Time for questionnaire completion was 10 minutes. (See Tables 1-4 for items in the survey.)

6. Data Collection

The researcher distributed copies of the survey questionnaire to the participants in eight universities and retrieved them with assistance of student affairs coordinators. As for the in-depth interviews, the researcher interviewed each participant individually by appointment for one hour and all interviews were audio-taped. The participants were asked two guiding open-ended questions on (1) their use of the Internet for English learning, and (2) their perception of the Internet as a tool in learning English. All participants were able to use either English or Thai or both during the interviews. The obtained data were then transcribed, categorized, analyzed, and interpreted.

7. Data Analysis

The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 to analyze quantitative data. Quantitative data were collected from the survey questionnaire in order to answer Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. The researcher used frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, and content analysis to describe and analyze the obtained data.

The researcher carefully checked all returned survey questionnaires to make sure that there were no missing answers. As for the interview data of 16 participants, the researcher first created profiles of individual questions and group them in relevant categories. Then the researcher screened individual data-texts, grouped them by coding in categories for thematic connections within and among them.

After coding the data, the researcher grouped them by related quotations (exemplified responses) for English translation by three research assistants. These translated texts were verified by an experienced bilingual translator. It should be noted that the participants' names were kept confidential and therefore labeled by figures. Quantitative data from the survey projected a big picture of the answers to five research questions under investigation, while the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews provided understanding of a number of concerns that require explanation for the participants' responses to the survey questionnaire.

8. Results of the Study

This section reports the results in the order of four research questions: (1) frequency of Internet use, (2) factors limiting access to the Internet, (3) perceived skills on the Internet, and (4) perception of the Internet. The results were presented in two parts: quantitative and qualitative.

8.1 Quantitative Results

8.1.1 Frequency of Internet Use

Frequency of Internet use was measured by the number of hours the participants spent on the Internet in learning English and the location of access, i.e., home, a classroom, a computer lab, on campus and internet café. Table 1 shows the participants' frequency of Internet use on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Table 1: Frequency of Internet Use by Place of Access

Frequency of Internet Use	Mean	S.D
Home	2.64	.938
Classroom	2.01	.262
Computer lab	2.06	.331
Campus	2.49	.646
Internet café	1.63	.556

The results pointed to *home* as the most frequent place of access to the Internet (mean 2.64, S.D. .938) for learning English, followed by *campus*, *computer lab*, and *classroom*. It was noted that *Internet café* was not a preferred place of access (mean 1.63, S.D. .556).

8.1.2 Factors Limiting the Internet Use

The participants were asked to identify factors limiting their Internet access. Their responses were on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Factors Limiting Access to the Internet

Factors Limiting Access to the Internet	Mean	S.D.
Hardware not working	2.91	.525
Too many people using computer	3.04	.598
Server down	2.62	.641
Slow connection	2.95	.611
No connection	3.01	.554
Lack of time	2.71	.547
Cost	2.51	.646

The participants identified “*too many people using computer*” (mean 3.04, S.D..598), followed by “*no connection*” (mean 3.01, S.D..554) as two dominant factors limiting Internet access. Interestingly, cost was reported as a relatively weak factor.

8.1.3 Perceived Skills on the Internet

The participants were to report on how they perceived their skills for eight types of online tasks, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Perceived Internet Skills

Perceived Internet Skills	Mean	S.D.
Email	3.16	.532
Search	3.40	.579
Upload	2.98	.655
Chat	2.91	.733
Instant message	3.32	.535
Music	2.70	.600
Forum	2.47	.632
Web creation	2.36	.580

As shown, the participants perceived themselves as quite good at search skills (mean 3.40, S.D..598), followed by Instant message (mean 3.32, S.D..535). It was surprising that the participants put email in the third rank (mean 3.16, S.D..532) for their perceived skills despite the fact that email skills should have preceded other computer skills. The participants found “web creation” (mean 2.36, S.D..580) as the lowest skill due to its requirement of technical knowledge in application.

8.1.4 Perception of the Internet

The participants were to identify their agreement to 23 perception statements on the scale of 1 (least agreed) to 5 (strongly agreed) regarding their use of the Internet in general and as a tool to learn English, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Perception of the Internet Use in English Learning in Rank Order

Perception of the Internet in EFL Learning	Mean	S.D.
14. The Internet use fits my learning styles.	4.31	.544
11. The Internet use fits well with my learning goals.	4.30	.528
6. My friends currently use the Internet.	4.23	.579
7. The Internet has the potential to enhance my English language learning.	4.23	.517
8. EFL students should be trained to use the Internet for English language learning.	4.22	.587
20. The Internet can be used to learn reading and writing.	4.20	.505
1. Use of the Internet increases my English language learning opportunity.	4.18	.502
13. The Internet can be used to learn pronunciation and speaking.	4.18	.483
19. I will use the Internet in my English learning in the future.	4.18	.419
9. EFL teachers should be trained to use the Internet for English language learning.	4.15	.454
17. The Internet use fits my level of Internet expertise.	4.14	.436
15. Class time is not enough to include internet use.	4.14	.501
5. My university provides the opportunity to learn about the Internet.	4.14	.560
12. The Internet can make learning English easier and more efficient.	4.13	.549
18. Using the Internet makes learning more interesting.	4.11	.462
3. Use of the internet increases my access to information.	4.10	.496
2. Use of the Internet increases my English skills.	4.06	.487
16. The Internet can be used to learn grammar.	4.03	.633
10. Using the Internet saves time and effort.	3.98	.609
4. The Internet is easy to understand and use.	3.97	.489
22. My friends recommend me to use the Internet for English language learning.	3.50	.804
21. My English teacher recommends me to use the Internet for English language learning.	3.04	.330
23. Self-access Language Learning Center plays a role in my Internet use.	2.90	.628

As shown in Table 4, the participants put Item 14, "*Internet use fits my learning styles*" (mean 4.31, S.D. .544) and Item 11, "*Internet use fits well with my learning goals*" (mean 4.30, S.D. .528) at the top of the list. They identified the other 16 statements in the range of means from 4.03 to 4.23 with narrow standard deviation of .419 to .579. Since most participants appeared to agree upon the use of Internet for learning English, it was a surprise that they put Items 21 and 22 at a relatively low level in agreement: "*My English teacher recommends me to use the Internet for English language learning*" (mean 3.04, S.D..330), and "*My friends recommend me to use the Internet for English language learning*" (mean 3.50, S.D..804). It should be noted that the majority of the participants supported the use of the Internet as a learning tool for their learning styles and learning goals.

8.2 Qualitative Results

This section presents interview responses to four research questions: (1) frequency of Internet use, (2) factors limiting access to the Internet, (3) perceived skills on the Internet, and (4) perceptions of the Internet.

8.2.1 Frequency of Internet use

The interviewed participants reported that they most frequently used the Internet at *home*, followed by *on campus*. Ten of 16 students (63%) elaborated that they had a chance to use the Internet to learn English at the university computer lab once a week as a compulsory requirement. All rarely used the Internet at internet cafés. However, some of them used the

Internet on public transportation like the sky train BTS or subway MRT. One participant said she used the Internet both at home and on campus to practice English.

I often use the Internet on campus and at home. On campus, I normally log on to YouTube to listen to my favorite music videos. You have fun and you learn English at the same time. Youtube is useful because I can learn new English vocabulary from the lyrics. At home, I often log on to the Internet to practice English. It is practical to learn English online. I use it a lot.

(Fourth-year female, English major, private university, Bangkok)

As shown in the given example, the Internet provides learning opportunities in English which will help students improve English proficiency in the long run.

8.2.2 Factors Limiting Access to the Internet

As reported in the quantitative results, most participants identified two factors limiting their access to the Internet: "*too many people use the computer*" and "*Internet connection is too slow*." In two interviews, the participants illustrated similar viewpoints.

I use the Internet on campus and at home but sometimes, there are *too many students using the Internet* and therefore, the connection is too slow. I remember I handed in my work late and the teacher was not so happy. When I told her that the Internet was too slow, she said it was an excuse.

(First-year female, non-English major, private university, Bangkok)

I would say that *no connection* is the main problem limiting my access to the Internet. As you can see, I live in the Eastern part of Thailand where there are so many mountains. I would like to tell you not to believe the T.V. commercials when they say the Internet connection is excellent. I totally disagree. The connection is not reliable and it is killing me. When I listen to YouTube, I have to wait and wait. It's so upsetting. I really hate that.

(Third-year male, English major, public university, Eastern Region)

These examples show that inadequate infrastructure, especially capacity of the Internet and network connections posed a technical problem to users in learning.

8.2.3 Perceived Skills on the Internet

Interview data revealed 14 of 16 participants (88%) mentioned that they were computer literate in that they were able to handle the Internet and online functions. Two participants in Computer Science were able to create their own WebPages. Below are two participants' comments.

I think I am an intermediate Internet user. I feel comfortable learning English using the Internet. However, I cannot create my own webpage. I think it will be interesting to know how, but right now, I don't.

(Second-year female, English major, private university, Northern Region)

I think today students are computer literate. They know the basics. However, I don't think they are computer expert. I, for one, am able to create my own webpage because I took some courses. When I have these skills, I feel comfortable learning English using

the Internet. It also fits my learning styles. In addition, I am sure that my computer skills are much better than my English teachers.

(Second-year male, English major, private university, Bangkok)

As seen, these students had sufficient computer skills to deal with their Internet use.

8.2.4 Perceptions of the Internet

All of the participants said they had positive attitudes toward the use of the Internet as a learning tool in learning English. Their comments reflected their positive viewpoints, as illustrated below.

The Internet is *an effective way to learn English*. For example, I was assigned to do a report about Lord Tennyson and I had no idea about his life, or his poems. After logging onto youtube.com, I can both read, and listen to his poems. It makes more sense because I can hear the voice and tone of the speaker.

(Third-year female, English major, public university, Bangkok)

I like *the independence of my learning*. For me, it is like the window of opportunity is everywhere. It's up to me whether I want to learn or not. I downloaded BBC news applications on my Smartphone and therefore, I can practice reading the news anytime I want. So you learn the language and you know about everything around you.

(Fourth-year female, non-English major, public university, Bangkok)

When you log on to the Internet especially the news websites such as CNN or the BBC, you can read world news; business news or even entertainment news and these *news articles are authentic*. I remember watching news about a Hurricane in Louisiana or Alabama. At first, I didn't understand what they were saying. Later, after watching many clips for years, I understand them more and more.

(Second-year male, non-English major, private university, Central Region)

I usually log on to mastermovie-hd.com and watch Hollywood movies. *I learn new English idioms and everyday expression from these movies*. I really like it. Instead of studying these idioms from books, you can listen and watch it used by real people.

(Second-year male, English major, private university, Bangkok)

With the Internet, *learning is so easy*. For example, if I want to practice listening, I just log on to ted.com. I can find many video clips with English subtitle. Other two websites that I log on to very often are engVid.com and dailyenglish.in.th. The first one is very interesting; it provides you with many exercises and the topics are very interesting. It's so easy, so convenient.

(Fourth-year female, English major, private university, Bangkok)

The examples revealed that the Internet can be used as an effective tool for students to learn and access supplementary language materials or activities as preferred.

8.2.5 Additional Viewpoints on the Internet

It was interesting that some participants were well aware of the positive and negative sides of the Internet. The Internet was perceived as beneficial to English language learning, yet considered harmful or addictive if not properly managed by users. Here are two good examples of such double viewpoints on the Internet.

I agree that the Internet is a useful tool in helping me improve my English especially for reading and writing skills. However, I want to say that *my friends use the Internet for entertainment purposes*. They log on to the Internet to watch video clips on youtube. Some of them are garbage. The worst thing is that *some of my friends are addicted to online games*. It's fun and exciting. Some of my friends ignore their homework. They don't have a life. I sometimes get carried away by its features. I have to tell myself to get back on track. To me, *the Internet is a doubled-edge sword*. You need to know how and when to use it.

(Third-year male, English major, public university, Eastern Region)

I told you earlier that with the Internet, learning is so easy. It is so fast and easy to use. Consequently, it is possible that we forget our teachers. I used to think teachers are not necessary anymore. Now I have changed my mind. English teachers are still needed. They can guide me to which websites I should log on to, which activities fit my learning styles. What I appreciate most is that teachers can give you immediate and detailed feedback. When I don't understand, they can help me right away. This is the thing that the Internet or the computer cannot do. I mean, *my concern is that other students might think that the Internet can replace English teachers, which is not true*.

(Fourth-year female, English major, private university, Bangkok)

As illustrated above, the participants were well aware of the Internet as a two-edged weapon that can support their learning as well as occupying their mind to the extent of obsession or addiction by online games.

8.2.6 Factors Affecting Internet Use

The researcher would also like to know about possible factors that might affect the participants' use of the Internet. Sixteen participants (8 majoring in English and 8 in other disciplines) were interviewed on this point in question. Their interview responses indicated that *gender, school year and university ownership* (public or private) did not affect their Internet use. However, the participants pointed to three factors affecting their online learning, namely *field of study, computer skills and geographical area*.

8.2.7 Field of Study

Eight English majors said that they spent more than ten hours per week to learn English on the Internet, both at home and on campus. In contrast, eight from other disciplines reported that they spent less time learning English on the Internet, and allocated more time to their data search for homework and other online activities like entertainment (music, movies, and online games) and social media (Facebook). Here are examples of their comments:

As an English major, I must be good at English. Therefore, I spend a lot of time online in order to improve my reading and writing.

(Third-year male, English major, public university, Eastern Region)

Normally, I log on to the Internet to play online games and watch movies. I don't really log on to the Internet to learn English in particular. Sometimes, I look up words in a dictionary. However, I use it a lot to finish my course assignments. There are so many economic theories that I don't understand, so Google and YouTube really help.

(Fourth-year male, non-English major, public university, Bangkok)

As seen, the participants of different majors spent their time on the Internet to serve their learning, study, and personal/ social purposes.

8.2.8 Computer Skills

The interviewed participants said they had functional computer skills to handle emails, data search, data-file downloading/uploading, online chats/forums. Fourteen participants admitted that they were not up to the stage of creating a webpage. There were two participants—one English major and one Computer Science major reported that they created their own webpage. Two examples are to illustrate this point below:

I can do only basic applications such as sending emails, doing some basic search and basic troubleshooting. However, if you ask me to create my own webpage or fix some difficult computer problems, I don't think I can do it.

(First-year male, English-major, public university, Bangkok)

You look surprised when I told you I am very good at using computer and making webpages. Yes, I am an English major but I majored in Computer science a few years ago. That's why I said I can create a webpage and do some complicated applications.

(Second-year male, English major, private university, Bangkok)

As seen, the participants' computer skills tended to determine their activities on the Internet.

8.2.9 Geographical Area

All of the interviewed participants reported that Bangkok eased up their Internet connections and online activities. Eight participants were pleased with the Internet services in Bangkok and only mentioned some minor problems about connection speed and server stability. Five interviewed participants who studied outside Bangkok said that they often had access problems with the Internet, ranging from low speed connection to no connection. One participant commented:

I think students who live in Bangkok are lucky. They have sufficient infrastructure. As I live in the upper Central part of Thailand, I cannot compare myself with those living in Bangkok. Last week, I visited a tourist attraction and I wanted to search for something on the web. Unfortunately, there was no connection. Without a good connection, my Smartphone is useless.

(Fourth-year female, English-major, private university, Central Region)

It can be concluded from the exemplified interview data that the participants perceived three factors as affecting their use of the Internet, namely *field of study*, *computer skills* and *geographical area*.

9. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the attitudes of Thai university students toward the use of the Internet. The researcher also looked at *frequency of Internet use, factors limiting access to the Internet, computer skills, and perceptions of the Internet*. This section discusses the results of the study accordingly.

9.1 Attitudes

It was found that the participants—both English or non-English majors—were positive to the use of the Internet for language learning as well as for other purposes like data search for homework, entertainment and communication/ social media. The findings of this study corresponded with earlier research findings by Joshi & Kaur (2011), Zhang (2013), Tri & Nguyen (2014), Chung, Chen, & Kuo, (2015), and Kleintein & Kamnungwut (2015). These previous researchers emphasized that the Internet was a useful tool for ESL/EFL students, and mobile vocabulary learning apps helped develop English accuracy. Particularly, Kleintein & Kamnungwut (2015) supported electronic media in teaching English for students at different levels in Thailand.

Despite the participants' positive attitudes toward the use of the Internet, they also acknowledged limitations in their online activities. They reported *limited access* and *server capacity* as affecting their use of the Internet. Such limitations were also identified in the work of Alduweirej (2014).

9.2 Field of Study

The qualitative results pointed to the impact of *the field of study* on the participants in their use of the Internet as a tool for learning English or other purposes like entertainment and socialization via Facebook. Yunus, Lubis, and Lin (2009) and Tri & Nguyen (2014) also reported similar findings in that students tended to use the Internet for academic, personal and social purposes, depending on their assigned work or free time to surf on the Internet.

9.3 Computer Skills

The quantitative results revealed relatively high score-points of second-year students. This perhaps suggested that these students became more experienced with the Internet after their first year at university. Similarly, the qualitative data obtained from the in-depth interviews pointed to computer skills developed over the years of use. This was in accordance with the study by three researchers Baniabdelrahman, Bataineh, & Bataineh (2007) who reported the use of the Internet for general and EFL learning process by students in different years at university. Maroof, Parashar & Bansal (2012), however, reported that first-year students in India had training in computer skills and thus used computer more frequently than their senior cohort groups.

9.4 Geographical Area

The results from quantitative analysis showed that the participants in this study from different regions--North, Northeast, East, Central, and Bangkok—varied in hours spent on the Internet. Those from Bangkok had the highest mean score-point on hours spent on the Internet for learning English. The participants from other regions were affected by factors

limiting their Internet access like limited access or server capacity. As earlier reported in the work by Alduweirej (2014), *access* was an influential factor for the Internet use. Therefore, it was vitally important for colleges and universities to provide good access and high capacity Internet for their students in support of learning and data search for academic assignments.

9.5 Advantages of the Internet

The participants acknowledged advantages of the Internet for their English learning, academic work and personal/ social online activities. The findings of this study corresponded with the results of Joshi & Kaur (2011) and Kandasamy & Mohd Shah (2013) who highlighted the use of the Internet for students' English practice, as well as teachers' tools in support of their teaching.

As shown in the participants' interview responses, they valued the use of the Internet for their own learning pace, acquisition of authentic materials and provision for a variety of resources. Quite a few earlier researchers pointed to such advantages of the Internet and appraised it for providing learner autonomy and a non-threatening learning environment in which students can develop a sense of ownership and readership with the use of authentic materials and a variety of resources (Zhong, 2008; Wang, 2008; Razak & Sanmugam, 2010; Amir, Ismail, & Hussin, 2011; Rajaram, 2011; Zhang, 2013).

9.6 Disadvantages of the Internet

The findings of this current study did not really point to disadvantages of the Internet. However the issue of its overuse for entertainment, online games and social media should deserve attention from users and educators. As some participants put it: the use of the Internet should be well balanced in terms of time allocated for online activities—be it for learning or entertainment or socialization. Users were to keep in mind of what should lie in priority when it comes to learning specific knowledge or entertaining themselves. Kanoksilapatham (2009) in particular asserted that the Internet should be for both learning and teaching, and yet it should not substitute teaching. It would be best to use it to reinforce what is taught in the classroom.

10. Conclusion

The main findings of the study revealed that both English and non-English major students were positive to the use of the Internet in learning English and other academic/ personal/ social activities. They perceived the Internet as providing speed and autonomy in learning, authentic materials and a great variety of resources. Most participants preferred the Internet access at home and were confident in their computer skills. They acknowledged their limitations in the use of the Internet due to limited access in geographical area and insufficient server capacity.

Pedagogic implications of the study could lie in how teachers and students collaborate their teaching and learning with facilitation of the Internet. Lesson plans on specific data search and data sharing in presentations and project tasks could be devised for students to focus their learning effectively. With the participants' positive attitudes toward the use of the

Internet as reported in this study, there should be no doubt that the Internet be taken as a major tool for learning for the two parties concerned—both students and teachers alike.

11. The Author

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