A Study of Thai EFL Learners' Perceptions towards the Educational Use of the Metaverse

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the attitudes of students from a Thai private university. 172 students participated in the research during the first semester of the 2022 school year. For data collection, a questionnaire with two primary sections was used: (1) the participants' basic information on their exposure to English, cohorts, ages, etc., and (2) their perspectives on the Metaverse. Using frequency, percentages, standard deviation, and averages, the data were analyzed. Means of 4.24, 4.16, and 4.15 were identified for the three highest rated levels of opinion about the usefulness of language learners' experience in the learning process, the range of successful resourceful subjects, and the advantages of having more discussions in the Metaverse, respectively. Hence, the Metaverse may be seen as an alternative that might be used in a variety of circumstances, including classroom and off-campus activities. In this regard, a digital technology added to conventional settings may be able to modify traditional educational elements in addition to other classroom forms in order to improve both group and individual learning.

Keywords**:** *English as a Foreign Language, Metaverse, Undergraduates*

1. Introduction

The English language is still seen as a vital asset for ESL/EFL students, since it may serve as the lingua franca of worldwide communication. This language is the native tongue of more than a hundred million people and the second language of more than 750 million people globally. Moreover, this official language, English, is spoken in over sixty states and territories worldwide. In terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, English is thus seen as a common language for the interchange of information between individuals from other nations. In addition to serving the purpose of communication, its significance in educational contexts is tremendous.

Approaches used in the development of skills have been widely studied in the literature throughout the years. Nonetheless, the Metaverse is one of the most upcoming, exciting theoretical frameworks. Consequently, it is vital to investigate how EFL learners might be developed most effectively in the Metaverse in order to promote optimum practice.

In higher education environments, metaverse-based technology is crucial to blended learning (Diaz et al., 2020). It enables students to socially communicate with one another (Puncreobutr et al., 2022). No matter where students are, the metaverse-based technology makes it easier for them to study, subtly encouraging their academic achievement together with pleasure and education (Li and Yu, 2022).

There are many ways in which Metaverse might possibly be utilized to assist English language learning. The capacity to construct immersive and dynamic learning environments that interest and encourage students is one of the primary advantages of using Metaverse in education. Students may, for instance, visit virtual museums, go on virtual field excursions, or practice practical skills in a virtual laboratory. Students may connect with each other and their professors in real-time inside a virtual arena, allowing for increased cooperation and communication among students.

Another advantage of the Metaverse in education is the capacity to customize each student's learning experience. Students may, for example, study at their own speed, review content as often as necessary, and choose learning pathways that best fit their interests and requirements. Despite the potential advantages of utilizing the Metaverse in education, there are obstacles to consider, such as the expense of

VR and AR technology, the need for specialized teacher training, and worries about student privacy and safety in virtual settings.

Regarding foreign language teaching or pedagogy, it may be determined that the Metaverse is unquestionably successful. Numerous notions and ideas have been presented as alternatives for EFL instructors.

Thus, the primary objective of this research is to investigate the perspectives of students at a Thai private university. In this case, a study of students' opinions would identify various advantages and disadvantages of the Metaverse, allowing teachers, students, and universities to revisit the concepts, comprehend the reality from the learners' point of view, and improve their performance.

2. Objectives

The objective of the study was to determine students' opinions about the educational use of the Metaverse.

3. Materials and Methods

In a mixed-method study with a large quantitative portion and a small qualitative element for gathering the participants' written responses, a survey research design was chosen. The added qualitative part enabled the researchers to investigate concepts that the questionnaire may not have adequately covered. Students' responses to the whole teaching process would be more easily comprehended if their perspectives were more complex. In this technique, a questionnaire was primarily utilized to characterize the attitudes, views, and actions of the participants in relation to Metaverse, the environment, and the investigating features. The tool for research was derived from the work of Tark Talan and Yusuf Kalinkara (2022). This version of the questionnaire was then evaluated by a panel of English-teaching specialists. Purposive sampling was used to recruit samples. Participants in the present study had a high degree of English proficiency for the online learning platform. 24 percent of the 172 students that participated in this study were male, while the remaining participants (approximately 76 percent) were female. This indicates that when questionnaires were distributed, only half of the individuals responded. The majority of the respondents (48%) were between the ages of 20 and 21. 62% of respondents belonged to the group of English learners who had been exposed to the language for more than 10 years. Regarding grades, around 71% of respondents have earned a grade between 3.00 and 4.00. The grade information would be irrelevant in a typical school situation. The information about grades would be meaningless in any normal educational setting.

The data, which were then interpreted and categorized, were obtained from the following parts:

Part I: The participants' background information was analyzed in frequency and percentage.

Part II: The participants' opinions was identified, categorized, and explored from data in a series of close-ended questions focusing on frequencies, the percentage, standard deviations, and the means.

Part III: Their feedback towards the Metaverse

4. Results

This section presents the analyses of data collected from the questionnaires.

4.1 General information of respondents

The data present those participants belonged to three different age groups, of which four-fifths of the population (48%) were from 20 to 21 years old.

Table 1 Age groups

Age groups	Number of Students	Percentage
18-19 years old	28	15%
20 -21 years old	83	48%
22-25 years old	64	37%
More than 25 years old	0	0%
Total	172	100%

According to Table 1, the most common age range was 20 to 21 years old, followed by 22 to 25 years old (37%, n=172).

Table 2 the exposure time to English learning

Exposure time to English learning	Number of Students	Percentage
3-5 years	19	11%
5-10 years	47	27%
10+ years	106	62%
Total	172	100%

Table 2 indicated that almost fifty percent of respondents had been studying English for five to ten years, followed by thirty-four percent of respondents who had been learning English for more than ten years.

Table 3 Grade Point Average

Grade Point Average	Number of Students	Percentage
0.00-0.99	0	0%
1.00-1.99	4	2%
2.00-2.99	46	27%
3.00-4.00	122	71%
Total	172	100%

In Table 3, the majority of respondents (almost 50%) obtained GPAs between 3.00 and 4.00. When students were able to attain specific accomplishments in an international course taught by instructors from various nations, the result indicated that their adaptation to the course was successful and evident for a good opinion aspect.

4.2 Opinions towards the Metaverse

Table 4 Respondents' opinions

Statements	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Order
The Metaverse can make the course content much more entertaining.	4.24	0.80	1
The Metaverse has pedagogical benefits.	4.17	0.84	2
The Metaverse will be used in classrooms in the near future.	4.16	0.85	3
I believe Metaverse can enhance my knowledge on this subject.	4.15	0.82	4
The Metaverse can increase motivation for the course.	4.11	0.85	5
The Metaverse can be used in any course at the faculty.	4.10	0.74	6

As seen in Table 4, the three levels of opinion with the highest ratings had the most common agreement. The highest rating was displayed by "The Metaverse can make the course content much more entertaining." (x = 4.24), followed by "The Metaverse has pedagogical benefits." (x = 4.17), and "The Metaverse will be used in classrooms in the near future." (x = 4.16). The lowest rating was displayed by " The Metaverse can be used in any course at the faculty." (x = 4.10).

Apart from the three highest-ranked responses, the majority of the participants' responses were scored pretty highly. The lowest mean, 4.10, suggested that learners' perceptions of their learning success during Metaverses were the greatest quality. In addition, the participants indicated that they learnt from the course materials with the lowest standard deviation (SD = 0.74), indicating that this criteria had more agreement than the others.

4.3 Respondents' feedbacks towards Metaverse

In addition to the quantitative findings, the open-ended questions were meant to investigate the participants' experience of the Metaverse. Many components of Metaverse environment were examined, and the comments centered on differing viewpoints on the efficacy of this learning architecture. With respect to the course contents, the efficacy of peer conversations, and the instructor's role, the participants reported an improvement in their learning. When students were well-prepared prior to class discussions, the online learning tools helped them cover and comprehend the lecture subject more effectively. This event also demonstrated the need of reading more about the issue from a range of sources, so that learners in the context of research were purposefully pushed to broaden their knowledge. In fact, the participants engaged enthusiastically in almost all classroom discussions. Some of the feedbacks are as follows:

"Make learning more accessible to students who live in isolated places.Students will have access to global study, communication, and friend networks. Without needing to venture outside of the virtual world." [Extract #1]

According to the first excerpt, the integration of high-tech equipment with good classroom activities wouldl improve students' and instructors' chances of working well in any environment. Appropriate selections of quality online instructional appswould provide superior solutions.

> *"The benefits of Metaverse in the classroom can make communicating with people from different cultures, languages, and places easier. Because exchanging knowledge with others has limitations in travel and time, if we have the Metaverse, we will maintain all the restrictions and access information more accessible and faster." [Extract #2]*

Several advantages were outlined in the second excerpt to illustrate the benefits of the Metaverse. The participants in this study praised the essence of creativity fostered by this style of instruction. Students love activities in which they may assist one another and discover new things. As a result, individuals were more engaged in studying and conventional education became less monotonous. Online learning in the form of the Metaverse may also generate more experiential chances for students and increase their exposure to diverse learning materials from which they can "open their minds" more easily. It also implies that studying inside defined borders would severely restrict students' ability to explore the incredible actual world.

> *"I disagree with the idea that the metaverse will improve the classroom experience, because of the many problems encountered in online classes through programs like Zoom or any other. Many students suffer from audio cuts, bad internet, back pain, no attraction force, and they can make their avatars not reflect their real-life identities. Just as many students choose not to turn on their cameras for online classes. Likewise, it is not fun or motivating to study because the Metaverse class is just an online class in a square room. Lastly, VR equipment is expensive, so poor families cannot afford it. Therefore, using the metaverse cannot be forced; it must be at the student's choice. However, with all the above, the advantages of learning in the metaverse are also numerous. Some subjects that are taught that require physical strength or something dangerous may help keep students free from dangerous accidents without worrying. Either way, I prefer being on-site in real life to meet friends." [Extract #3]*

Evidently, the participant enjoyed having something new and different in their learning environment. Similar to the third feedback, the negative aspects provided students with a variety of viewpoints. Because Metaverses may concentrate more on skill development for language acquisition, the fundamentals of content education have become outdated. Despite the fact that many individuals may not have enough circumstances for online learning or other kinds of the Metaverse, it is obvious that the Internet and online conditions sometimes make it the connection unstable.

In addition, learning with the combination of the Internet would introduce both instructors and students to a new universe of exercises, digital lectures, endless learning resources, and a streamlined communication process. This circumstance would need the simultaneous renovation of classroom teaching and the contact or relationship between instructors and students. However, the use of the gadgets for the Metaverse could be costly.

Overall, the participant's positive attitudes toward the positive aspects of the Metaverse were corroborated by their insightful responses and the aforementioned data from Table 4. Both qualitative and quantitative data have confirmed the participants' favorable views of Metaverse. Despite the three most popular viewpoints on this topic, learners may get more than they anticipate. Virtually all participants agreed that their evaluations of the course would be quite positive, given that they would be exposed to a variety of instructional methods that are both practical and successful.

5. Discussions

Some academics and instructors have proposed the use of the Metaverse as a guideline for structuring learning activities in an academic setting classroom. Johnson (2021) identified it as a plethora of new online collaboration and communication technologies, with the Metaverse playing a significant role. Kindness, compassion, empathy, positivism, the drive to create something, and the desire to inspire are at the core of every outstanding educator. Teachers should be as enthusiastic about the Metaverse as their students might feel thrilled in the virtual environment to interact with instructors in order to unleash the full potential of the great technologies at the disposal.

Young (2022) stated that virtual travels are not limited to schoolchildren, but learning a language is being immersed in the culture of its speakers. Spending time in a new nation is one of the finest methods to acquire a new accent, and the Metaverse makes this possible without the expense of airfare or lodging. Learners may converse with avatars or enter a shared area to practice with language instructors or native speakers who may be located in their own country.

Joehing (2022) stated immersion camps have assisted individuals in learning new languages by educating them about the habits and traditions of the native speakers' language. Not everyone can to attend this camp. On the other hand, the Metaverse is capable of doing so. The smartphone application resembles other mobile language-learning applications. Yet, the VR application immerses you in simulated social situations, allowing you to apply in a more realistic setting like as checking into a hotel and ordering a dinner in the target language.

The results revealed that the opinion levels of the participants increased in the Metaverse's learning environment compared to those of the conventional ones. In addition, the employment of technologically advanced visual classroom equipment would promote the development of a highly dynamic, renewable learning environment. (Mason, Shuman, & Cook, 2013) This objective would lead to improvements in students' real-like and real-life learning outcomes. In addition, the Metaverse has the potential to improve students' critical thinking abilities in higher education.

Despite the advancement of educational technologies, the Metaverse became useful in reinforcing English language skills for a number of reasons. However, it is recommended that the instructions with technological utilities be carefully designed so that the goal of enhancing the learners' learning experience can be properly achieved.

6. Conclusion

It can be stated that the future implementation of the Metaverse received excellent feedbacks from the students. The level of student views was fairly high, with the top three being. First, the findings suggested that the students found their language-learning process beneficial. They thought that they might be moreengaged in classroom activities if the course was redesigned using non-traditional classroom characteristics. Second, the preparation of useful materials must be acknowledged in the future. Students should be exposed to films, online websites, assessment tools, educational games, and other platforms in order to allow them to use more of the language learnt and facilitate the genuine learning process with heightened awareness and focus. Thirdly, the design of this particular Metaverse could give students greater opportunities to participate in further conversations and group works related to their practices. The instructors will therefore be able to simultaneously monitor their accomplishments and the results of their practices from many geographic areas. Furthermore, the Metaverse or a kind of online cooperative class

would provide educators with a clue for adapting to the present circumstances. In reality, in the future, the dynamic Metaverse may serve as an alternate type of teaching in a variety of circumstances.

Future proposals on this issue should place more emphasis on the metrics of the various Metaverses platform tools and the causes of their performance. Certain experimental investigations should include the benefits of the Metaverses to its primary designs, as opposed to the standard online education settings. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following suggestions for further research are given.

1. To maximize the generalizability of the research, it is advised to conduct a survey with a bigger sample size. Students majoring in different disciplines should be polled since each individual always has different qualities or viewpoints.

2. Further studies should employ inferential statistics to examine the given data in order to get more specific conclusions.

3. It is vital to evaluate carefully how students perceive the Metaverse, what they want to accomplish there, why they enjoy it, and how much importance they place on their virtual reality avatars. It is vital to investigate the activity patterns of students, their degree of immersion in the Metaverse, and its positive and negative consequences on their learning activities.

4. The fact that the Metaverse enables us to experience occurrences that would be impossible or constrained in the actual world is a practical and enticing feature. Yet, it is acceptable to accept without question the goals of content producers or service designers rather than the cognitive talents and creativity of students. Hence, instructional designers and instructors who wish to use the Metaverse for education must have a thorough understanding of the technological features and design classes of each kind of the Metaverse in order to cooperatively solve issues or complete projects .

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