

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

People now live in the age of computers. People use computers more frequently to get such benefits as searching what they want to know with the World Wide Web (WWW), sending an e-mail instead of sending a letter, and chatting with their friends via the Internet instead of calling them on the phone. The Internet has become an important element in most of our daily lives. With a click of the mouse, we are in the world of virtual reality and information, with no concept of time or space, who you are or where you live. However, the Internet, while offers a vast array of information, can also be very distractive and destructive. Those who use the Internet and are capable of communicating through it are the ones who benefit most from the Internet, but they are also at risk of many dangers and traps that the Internet offers.

The Internet is very interesting because there are varieties of pictures, images, descriptions, animations and information that have made up global cyber systems. The Internet has become an important part of human community. It gives people a chance to meet each other, send all kinds of information, exchange ideas, and discover new friends or knowledge. Now, the Internet is not only a device to communicate, but has also become the next hangout place for cyber addicts. (Kurland, Sharp, M. and Sharp, F., 1997).

Over the past ten years, the Internet has become a prominent new technology that has spread to all fields of education, business, economy and society of the present world (Singhal, 1997). Many fields are getting onto the Internet because it seems to be a magnificent global network with millions and millions computers and people connected to one another. Daily people in the world exchange an immense amount of information globally via the Internet: electronic mails, news, pictures, resources, and ideas (Sperling, 1998).

For the educational field, the Internet has become an important tool in helping students to develop higher order thinking skills and in helping teachers to enhance instruction (Donaghy, 2005). According to Sperling (1998), the Internet contains a large number of resources available for students to improve their skills in reading, writing, grammar, listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, idioms, slang, test of English as a foreign language/second language and conversation.

Another advantage of the Internet is that the Internet contains a vast reservoir of outstanding educational sites. People sometimes do not need to wait their turn at the local library to get information because they have the resources of the Internet at their fingertips. It is a simple matter to visit the Louvre Museum, which has an outline exhibition of the museum's most celebrated artwork. When people surf the Net, they can find an analysis and discussion of the works of Shakespeare, visit NASA and find spectacular satellite photos of outer space. Furthermore, people can visit virtually any country in the world and find out more about its history and culture. People can also access the latest weather reports worldwide, find lesson plans on any subjects, get the statistics they need for their research report, and obtain historical information on famous mathematicians (Kurland, Sharp, M. and Sharp, F., 1997). Students can also use the Internet to view an extraordinary array of current information resources. Such access to the information superhighway is likely to be of value to students because school library resources are both limited and out-dated, and textbooks are commonly out-dated as well (Berenfeld, 1996).

As generally known, English is the universal language on the Internet. When people use the Internet, they are forced automatically to learn English. Both teachers and students can start using the Internet as a source of material for learning and teaching in the same way as they use books, magazines, newspapers, television, and media materials. In fact, access to the Internet will lead to changes in the way languages are learned. The Internet provides a faster and more convenient alternative to conventional communicative writing. It also allows audio and video communication in ways that have never before been practical (Maley, 2000).

The Internet will also lead to more cross-curricular works. Skills needed to use the Internet for language learning will be similar to those needed in other subjects in the curriculum, while Internet resources found in the language classroom will often

be relevant to other subjects. Students may find that the information they need for other subjects is mostly available in English, so they may be able to practice their language skills at the same time while studying other subjects (Schofield and Davidson, 2002).

Meloni (1998) views that when students use an e-mail in writing activity, language is authentic. In addition, as much of the information on the World Wide Web is in English, the Web is a rich source of authentic reading materials in English.

According to Dunn and Occhi (2003) the Internet increases the necessity for people to communicate with people in other countries and learn about other cultures. It allows students to become more aware of the variety of experiences and opinions within each society, to counter each other's overgeneralizations and idealized images, and to find a common ground with someone in another society.

In addition, Barenfeld (1996) pointed out that students could use the Internet to share the products of their work with a large, geographically diverse audience outside the school. This is a practice many believe will increase the effort students expand on their work.

Kokkas (n.d.) argues that ESL/EFL teachers can possibly use the Internet in their teaching professions in a number of ways. For example, the Internet-based instruction can contribute significantly to experiential learning, motivation, achievement, authentic materials, greater interaction, individualization, and global understanding. Teachers should also be one of the first to tackle students with the subject of healthy Internet usage. The teaching faculty should also supervise and educate students while they are on the Net. They should try to depict healthy Internet usage scenarios as opposed to the unhealthy usage. Students should be aware of the danger that cloaks itself within the cyber world.

Hence, the Internet offers a wide range of opportunities for the English language education. It can generate the students' motivation, assist them to learn and acquire language knowledge and communicative competence, and can help them to communicate better in English. The Internet is a kind of learning resources at your fingertips. Information along with many illustrations can make learning easy with visual representation of how things work, not to mention that there are many helps and hints to assist a surfer in the cyber world.

However, the teaching faculties' supervision is also an important element in educating students in the way of the Internet use. In order to take full advantage of the Internet, the students need to be aware of some of the dangers present in the cyber world.

Statement of the Problem

Because of the advantages of the Internet use in learning and teaching English, there were many research studies related to the Internet and learning and teaching English. However, not much Thai research in this area has been studied. Regarding Jantima Jinwuth study (2001), a study is about "A Study of the Use of the Internet by Upeer Secondary Level (Mattayom 4) Thai Students who are High Achievers in English Language." The research studied only the use of the Internet. Furthermore, in 2005, Thidakul Boonraksa studied "The Relationship between Internet Usage and English Reading Achievement." The results of the study showed the relationship between the Internet usage and English reading skill and there was no statistically significant relationship between the Internet usage and English reading achievement. It could be said that Thai teachers and students have not yet taken much benefit from the Internet in teaching and learning English.

As a teacher of English, the researcher sees that the Internet can be of great benefit to students if they know how and where on the Internet they can access knowledge and information that enhance their learning. Thousands of English teaching and learning websites are already available, and there are many more to come everyday, to support English learners. Thus, opportunities are spread to students worldwide to strengthen their classroom knowledge, almost without any limitation of time and place. As for Thailand, schools and teachers are encouraged by the government to facilitate and educate students to use the Internet, with the national objectives of reaching the state of e-Education, e-Government and e-Society, for instance, in the very near future.

However, some researches did not show a great benefit related to the Internet use and English learning. There is doubt whether a relationship between the Internet use and English proficiency exists. Thus, the researcher is interested in studying the relationship between the Internet using behavior and English proficiency. The focus is

on the Internet using behavior of Mathayom Suksa 5 students in Muang District, Nakhon Sawan Province. The information obtained from the study can indicate the relationship between Internet using behavior and English Proficiency. The results of the study can lead to discussions for the use of the Internet for teaching and learning English.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were to investigate the Internet using behavior of Mathayom Suksa 5 students in Muang District, Nakhon Sawan Province and to investigate the relationship between the Internet using behavior and the English proficiency of Mathayom Suksa 5 students in Muang District, Nakhon Sawan Province.

Research Questions

1. How did the students use the Internet?
2. Was there a relationship between the Internet use and the English proficiency?
3. Was there a relationship between the length of time of the Internet use and the English proficiency?

Significance of the Study

The study was intended to investigate the relationship between the Internet using behavior and English proficiency of Mathayom Suksa 5 students in Muang District, Nakhon Sawan Province. The findings of this study will be useful to clarify the role and importance of using the Internet in learning and teaching English in schools. The results of this study can be a guideline for teachers to give advice to students about the internet use and to be a reference for concerning people or organizations.

Scope of the Study

This study was limited to study 316 Mathayom Suksa 5 students in Muang District, Nakhon Sawan Province. Mathayom Suksa 5 students were expected to have more skills in using the Internet for their study than lower level students, as seen in computer and Internet related courses appearing as the standard in the core curriculum of the Ministry of Education. Also, Mathayom Suksa 5 students were expected to be more co-operative with this study than Mathayom Suksa 6 students, who would be busy with several kinds of tests, preparing for their further education.

Nakhon Sawan Province was chosen in this study because it is a big province in the lower-northern region of the country, with most schools well equipped and therefore suitable for a study concerning Internet use. Only students in Muang District schools were selected due to the fact that Internet access is, in general, more available in Muang District than in other districts where telephone services may not yet cover all geographical areas.

Definition of Terms

To clarify particular terms used in this study, the following definitions are provided:

Internet using behavior: refers to habits of using the Internet such as kinds of the Internet services use, places of use, time of use, frequency of use and purposes of use.

English proficiency: refers to the ability of an individual to do the English test of Mathayom Suksa 5 and get the test scores.

The Internet: refers to a network of people and information, linked together by telephone lines or wireless equipment, which are connected to computers.

The World Wide Web (WWW): refers to a hypermedia information storage system which links computer based resources around the world.

Electronic mail (e-mail): refers to the messages that are sent via a computer network.

Chat: refers to a way to communicate in real time with other users on a computer network

Weblog, Diary, Blog: refers to a place on the Internet for a user to keep his personal journal or share his ideas and information on any topics with other users

Download: refers to the electronic transfer of information from one source to another on the Internet

Electronic book (e-book): refers to an electronic version of a book that is found and read on the Web

Electronic learning (e-learning): refers to training or learning that takes place via the Web. Training programs can be conducted partially or fully using the Internet

BBS (Bulletin Board System): refers to a computer system used as an information source and forum for a particular interest group.

Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI): refers to a teaching process in which a computer is used to enhance the education of a student in any subject.