Research Article

READINESS FOR ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG THAI EFL UPPER SECONDARY LEARNERS

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Kamonrat Dattibongs[1*] and Pornpimol Sukavetee[2]

[1,2]Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

*Corresponding Author, E-mail: Kamonrat.suva@gmail.com

Abstract

The digital era has led to an educational transformation from face-to-face learning to a more online learning approach. The readiness for Online Language Learning (OLL) is essential to determine learners' success and ability to achieve goals in an OLL course. This study investigated the readiness for OLL among Thai EFL upper secondary learners by using a survey method. A questionnaire included items about the respondents' attitude and motivation, self-regulated learning (SRL), English language self-efficacy, and technology literacy and access. It was translated into Thai and distributed online to 273 upper secondary learners in public schools. The study revealed that the overall readiness for OLL among respondents was relatively high. However, SRL was scored the lowest while technology literacy and access was scored the highest.

Keywords: Readiness for Online Language Learning, Upper Secondary Learners

Introduction

Due to the prevalent use of the Internet and technology, digital and innovative instructional platforms, for example, mobile learning, electronic learning, or online learning, now play a more important role in the educational field. They provide borderless and timeless education through online educational videos, applications, software, and websites.

Thailand has recently introduced the new economic model, Thailand 4.0, focusing on connecting innovation and knowledge through digital platforms, digital applications, Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to promote a higher quality of education (Ministry of Industry, 2016). High-speed Internet is to be provided to many schools nationwide to better facilitate instruction. Today,

online learning courses are more widespread in Thailand. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) in different subjects, as well as foreign language subjects, are being offered in several Thai universities, which is in alignment with the Thai National Education Act and the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) that strongly support the integration of digital tools and foreign language skills (Samudavanija, 2008).

Prior to developing online learning course, the readiness of learners shall be measured as it influences the retention and success rates of learners in online learning context (Watkins et al., 2004; Yu & Richardson, 2015). Currently, there are many available online English courses for Thai learners to enroll and enhance their English skills such as Coursera, Udacity, and EdX which is not limited to only university students (Manning et al., 2014). Hence, upper secondary learners should be equipped with success characteristics and be ready for online language courses.

Despite a great importance of readiness for online learning, the number of studies regarding the readiness for online learning in Thailand is very limited (Saekow & Samson, 2011; Ngampornchai & Adams, 2016) and even less research studied the readiness of Thai students for online language learning (OLL) (Vanijdee, 2003). As such, this study focused on the readiness for OLL of Thai EFL upper secondary learners to address the following question:

To what extent do Thai EFL upper secondary learners show readiness for online language learning?

Research Objective

The purpose of this research was to investigate the readiness for OLL among Thai EFL upper secondary learners through four components: i) attitude and motivation ii) self-regulated learning iii) English language self-efficacy and iv) technology literacy and access.

Literature Review

Online learning provides learning content through the Internet which relies much on online communication technologies. Despite the educational policy supporting on online language learning (OLL) environment, it is still doubtful whether Thai learners are ready to engage in such an environment. Thus, prior to the development of any OLL course, course designers and educational institutions should be able to examine the readiness of learners towards OLL by taking into account learners' attitude and motivation, self-regulated learning, English self-efficacy and technology literacy and access.

Readiness for Online Language Learning (OLL)

Readiness is defined as having the appropriate skills and behaviors leading to one's learning success (James & Christian, 2016). It demonstrates the level of engagement in an online environment (Watkins et al., 2004). The studies suggested four success factors which have relationship with the readiness for OLL i.e., attitude and motivation, self-regulated learning (SRL), English language self-efficacy, technology literacy and access (Andrade, 2017; Sun, 2014; Cinkara & Bagceci, 2013; Burrows & Stepanczuk, 2013; Yu & Richardson, 2015; Ilgaz & Gülbahar, 2015). Firstly, Distance Learning Theory suggests that learners must have positive attitude and motivation and confidence to become successful online language learner (Andrade, 2017). Secondly, learners should be self-regulated to achieve OLL goals such as time management, goal-setting skills, and utilization of appropriate learning strategies (Fadzil et al., 2016; Moore, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002). Thirdly, to be ready for OLL, learners should have English language self-efficacy. The lack of confidence in their English skills obstructs learners from the success in OLL (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Lastly, the learners should have technology literacy and access to ensure their readiness for attending online courses.

Attitude and Motivation

A "motivated learner" was defined as a person who (a) is excited to learn language (b) takes effort on the learning activity, and (c) prefers to carry on the learning activity (Gardner, 1985). Positive attitude towards language learning leads to higher tendency in learner's success rate as it increases learners' motivation, while a negative attitude hinders the language success. The previous research showed that learners' attitudes have positive correlation with the success in OLL (Cinkara & Bagceci, 2013). Motivated learners tend to do well in OLL and be able to control their learning even though they are mostly required to study by themselves. Lack of motivation, regardless of their intelligence level, might prevent them from persisting long enough to attain any useful knowledge (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, in order to increase and maintain learners' motivation, teachers or instructors should encourage the learners to set goals and actively engage in positive discussion (Andrade & Bunker, 2009).

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

Self-regulated learning has relationship with OLL as well as attitude and motivation. Learners with high motivation will be more self-regulated in terms of time management and goal setting (Andrade & Bunker, 2009). SRL refers to the amount of learners' willingness and ability to be involved in autonomous language learning and an ability to control learning factors and make choices during an OLL course (Ahmadi, 2012; Andrade, 2017). Moore's theory of transactional distance defined learner autonomy as self-direction or control of one's learning procedure, learning plan and self-evaluation

(Moore, 1997). SRL comprises four elements: cognitive (using strategies to understand and remember course content), metacognitive (planning, setting goals, monitoring and evaluating one's learning), motivation (taking full responsibility for one's successes or failures) and behavior (seeking help and creating a positive learning atmosphere) (Andrade & Bunker, 2009).

Ushida (2005) suggested that SRL leads to OLL success because learners must possess good time management skill and eagerly participate in the discussion among their classmates and teachers. As OLL offers more flexibility in terms of pace of learning and when/how to learn than the traditional classroom (Smith et al., 2003), the learners must be trained to manage their learning to achieve learning objectives. They should be encouraged to prioritize learning tasks, set goals, execute appropriate learning strategies, monitor their performance and progress, manage time effectively, and evaluate their successful learning methods (Smith et al., 2003; Vanijdee, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002).

English Language Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy plays a key role in self-regulation, motivation and the readiness for online language learning (OLL) (Burrows & Stepanczuk, 2013). Self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to achieve goals. It determines people's attitude, motivation and behaviour. People who have strong sense of self-efficacy tend to perceive difficult issues as challenges and maintain strong commitment to achieve personal goals (Bandura, 1993). Some studies (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005) suggested that learners' barrier to OLL is the lack of language skills, reading skills, writing skills and communication skills for online learning. OLL platform used English as the language for instruction. Hence, learners must be capable in all four English skills, especially in writing and reading, because instructions and the learners' responses are normally written. The Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE) of Wang et al., (2013) was adapted to measure the English self-efficacy of Thai EFL Upper Secondary Learners. Learners with high QESE scores tend to have high academic achievement in the context of learning English as a second or foreign language (Wang et al., 2013).

Technology Literacy and Access

In the world where technology has become a significant driver, technology literacy and access unquestionably becomes one of the success factors of OLL. Technology literacy has a positive correlation with online learning achievement (Whale, 2006; Hung et al., 2010) and influences learners' retention. The US Department of Education (as cited in Barrette, 2001) defined technology literacy as "computer skills and the ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity, and performance." Learners should be able to perform technology-related tasks, such as downloading or uploading files on the Internet, as well as effectively producing output, such as sending emails and

recording sound. Technology literacy allows introvert or shy learners to be more confident and more willing to interact with peers and instructors in the online environment (Shakarami et al., 2013). Consequently, the higher level of technology competencies the learners have, the higher test scores and more positive attitude towards OLL they acquire (Cinkara & Bagceci, 2013; Shakarami et al., 2013). Apart from technology literacy, success in OLL heavily relies on accessibility to both hardware and the Internet (Ilgaz & Gülbahar, 2015). A lack of access to technology prevents students from accessing online language classes at their preferred time.

Overall, to ensure the readiness for OLL among Thai EFL upper secondary learners, this study measured four readiness-related factors as detailed in the conceptual framework below.

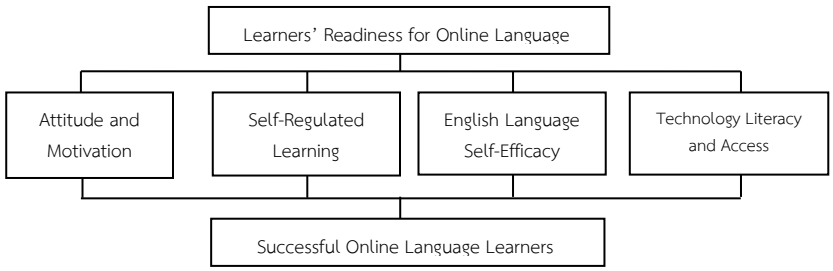

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Participants

The survey was distributed online to Thai EFL upper secondary learners in three public schools in Bangkok, one of which was a male school and the others of which were mixed-gender schools. The survey comprised a total of 273 respondents but only 270 sets of which were complete and applicable.

The participants were selected based on the convenience sampling as all of the three schools are public schools located in Secondary Educational Service Area Office 1. The majority of the participants are from middle-income family. The schools encourage the learners to apply technology for educational purpose, for example, the learners are allowed to use mobile phone during class, get free access to school WiFi or even a computer in a classroom. Apart from school support, most of them have mobile phones, tablets, computers, and other technology devices for their learning.

Instrument

A set of 5-likert scale questionnaire was distributed online to Thai EFL upper secondary learners in Bangkok. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: Part I Demographic Data (8 items) and Part II

Readiness for Online Language Learning (32 items) (attitude and motivation (11 items), self-regulated learning (5 items), English language self-efficacy (6 items), and technology literacy and access (10 items)). To avoid English language barriers and misunderstanding, the questionnaire was translated into Thai and reviewed by peers to ensure its accuracy. The items in Part II were measured on 5-likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). In comparison, the level of readiness was interpreted in a range: 1.00 - 1.49 = very low; 1.50 - 2.49 = relatively low; 2.50 – 3.49 = moderate; 3.50 – 4.49 = relatively high; and 4.50 – 5.00 = very high.

Validation of Instrument

The questionnaire was validated by using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) scores. Three experts in English language and online learning fields validated the questionnaire in terms of content validity, face validity and clarity of items. The overall IOC result was 0.92 which was greater than 0.5 and hence deemed acceptable. However, the items below 0.5 were revised according to the experts' suggestion. The reliability was measured based on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to measure the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability score was 0.95 according to the questionnaire result.

Results

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I displayed the demographic data of 270 participants. The participants, including male (56%), female (42.20%) and others (1.80%), were mainly from Science and Mathematics (37%), English and Mathematics (36.29%), Foreign Languages (26%) and others (1%), respectively. Most participants (47.80%) received grades 2.5-3.0 in English, followed by grades 3.5-4.0 (30.70%). The top three devices that most participants owned or had access to were smartphones (87.80%), Internet (70.70%) and headphones (63.30%). Almost half of the participants (42.20%) had experience of online English learning. However, most of them (64.90%) still had very limited experience (less than one year) in online English language learning. Other details are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographics Data

Demographics		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	114	56%
	Female	152	42.20%
	Others	4	1.80%
Field of study	Sciences and Mathematics	100	37%
	English and Mathematics	98	36.29%
	Foreign Languages	70	26%
	Others 2	2	1%
Latest English subject grade	Grade 0-1	10	3.70%
	Grade 1.5-2	48	17.80%
	Grade 2.5-3	129	47.80%
	Grade 3.5-4	83	30.70%
Digital devices (own or have access to)	Smartphone	237	87.80%
	Internet	191	70.70%
	Headphones	171	63.30%
	Desktop computer	143	53%
	Laptop	87	32.22%
	Printer	79	29.30%
	Tablet	77	28.50%
	Scanner	51	18.90%
	Webcam	20	7.40%
Experience in online English language learning	Yes	114	42.20%
	No	156	57.80%
Types of online English language learning	Website	69	60.50%
	Online books	24	21.10%
	LMS	15	13.20%
	Others	6	5.20%
Duration of online English language course	Less than 1 year	74	64.90%
	More than 1 year but less than 2 years	21	18.40%
	2 years and above	19	16.70%

The survey showed that the readiness for online language learning (OLL) of Thai EFL upper secondary learners was overall relatively high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.63). They had a relatively high level of attitude and motivation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.66), a moderate level of self-regulated learning (SRL) ($\bar{x}$ = 3.37), a moderate level of English language self-efficacy ($\bar{x}$ = 3.47) and a relatively high level of technology literacy and access ($\bar{x}$ = 4.04). Among the four variables, technology literacy and access ranked the highest whereas SRL ranked the lowest. The overall standard deviation is 0.96, including attitude and motivation (0.95), SRL (0.92), English language self-efficacy (1.03), and technology literacy and access (0.93). The details are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of four variables

	Mean	**SD**	**Level**
Attitude and Motivation	3.66	0.95	Relatively High
Self-regulated Learning	3.37	0.92	Moderate
English Language Self-efficacy	3.47	1.03	Moderate
Technology Literacy and Access	4.04	0.93	Relatively High
Overall	3.63	0.96	Relatively High

Discussion

The study showed that the overall readiness for online language learning (OLL) among Thai EFL upper secondary learners was 3.63, equivalent to the relatively high level. However, it should be highlighted that SRL ranked the lowest while technology literacy and access was ranked the highest.

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

The learners who have positive attitude and motivation are more self-regulated, able to better manage time and set their learning goals (Andrade & Bunker, 2009). However, SRL may be lacking among Thai learners as they rely heavily on teachers and lack independent decision-making skills (Moore, 1997). For example, the learners in this context are not required to write down objectives before class, leading to less independent control over their learning process. The learning grade depends on teacher only, so they lack experience in assessing their learning or their peers' progress. As such, their self-monitoring skill is low.

In order to increase SRL, the learners should be encouraged to prioritize their time, identify and execute appropriate learning strategies, set their learning objectives and identify their strengths and weaknesses (Dembo et al., 2006). Meanwhile, teachers should balance well between teacher control and

learner control by allowing the learners to monitor and rate their own or their peers' learning progress as well as learning methods (Zimmerman, 2002).

Technology Literacy and Access

The learners are surrounded by a technology-led environment and receive support from the Thai government, school, and parents (Ministry of Industry, 2016). The study showed that the learners had access to digital devices and the Internet. The schools in this study allow the learners to use mobile phones during class for educational purposes, such as surfing websites or looking up new words in online dictionary. Some schools also facilitate the learners with smartboards, computers with Internet access, WiFi and the like. Most of the learners are from middle-income family and receive good parental support and digital devices. As such, they normally use online platforms, e.g., Facebook and Line, to work with peers or communicate with their teachers online. They also utilize those devices to explore online information, complete their assignments or give presentations via Microsoft PowerPoint. According to the survey, most learners have around one-year experience in online English class because they attend online tutoring classes after school. Besides, the wide availability of WiFi in public locations such as restaurants, hotels, and coffee shops, allows the learners to get access to the Internet anytime.

Limitation

The sample size of the questionnaire was limited to only three public schools in Bangkok. As such, the results might be less generalizable to the overall population of Thai EFL upper secondary learners. In this regard, to generalize the result for the whole country, future research should study the readiness of learners' online language learning in both private and public schools in different locations.

Conclusion

Overall, the study showed that the learners' readiness on online language learning (OLL) was relatively high. Hence, they have a relatively high tendency to achieve OLL goals. In alignment with the government's foreign language expectations (Samudavanija, 2008), the learners tend to be able to apply online technology to improve their English communication skills, to understand different cultures and attend online English courses provided globally for the purpose of lifelong learning.

The participants' levels of attitude and motivation as well as technology literacy and access are relatively high, whereas self-regulated learning (SRL) and English self-efficacy are moderate. SRL was the lowest, potentially due to the learners' lack of control and decision-making opportunity in Thai

learning context. Owing to technology support from the government, schools and parents, the technology literacy and access received the highest score. The majority of participants have smartphones, Internet access and other digital devices. In short, in order to ensure greater success of learners in OLL courses, teachers and other stakeholders should provide the opportunity for the learners to enhance these four success categories, especially the SRL.

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