

Thai Efl Primary Students' Voice on English Online Learning in The New Normal Period

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate Thai EFL students' needs and problems on English online learning in the new normal situation. The participants are 50 Thai EFL primary students, who have experienced English online learning in the first semester of academic year 2021, from an opportunity expansion school in Thailand. A questionnaire was utilized as a main instrument to obtain students' needs and problems. The data was analyzed by using Mean and Standard Deviations. The results showed that the majority of students required needs and faced problems during an English online learning. The findings on students' needs revealed that majority of them highest needed more explanation from teacher. According to the problems that students faced during an English online class, students mainly agreed that they were unsure if their English pronunciation was correcta. The concluding remarks suggested teacher to fulfill students' needs and prevent problems that may occur in English online learning.

Keywords: online learning, needs, problems, new normal period

Introduction

Online learning plays important role in education and nearly replaces traditional learning due to the outbreak of COVID-19 or Coronavirus disease. COVID-19 is known as an infectious disease caused by a recently detected coronavirus that was first identified in the year 2020 (WHO, 2020). As the world approaches its second year of dealing with the pandemic, half of the world's student population, including Thai EFL students, are still impacted by partial or complete school closures (UNESCO, 2021). Students and teachers confront with learning and teaching challenges in a new normal way in order to prevent the spread of the disease and to maintain productive instruction. To increase the effectiveness of students' learning in this situation, an online learning method is developed and used as a main technological tool in language education because it provides access to information, communication, and greater students control over the learning process (Burns & Richards, 2009).

Online learning is defined as the use of internet to access learning resources; to interact with the contents, teachers, and other students; and to obtain assistance during

the learning process, in order to gain knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience (Ally, 2011). It converts traditional face-to-face learning in which students are instructed by teachers in a classroom to an online classroom in which students and teachers communicate through square screen devices, such as smartphones, computers, laptops, and tablets, via online social networks (e.g. Zoom, Google meet, LINE meeting, Facebook live). Many students claim to be capable of learning online and find it simple to access information (Imsa-ard, 2020). However, some problems may arise during an online learning session, such as an inconsistent internet connection, a lack of teachers' explanation and interaction, as well as potential distractions, which are all common challenges for students studying English online (Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021). These factors may have an impact on students' attitudes towards online learning in various aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to understand their attitudes towards the learning components.

As Thailand's current educational situation, many schools are unable to return to normal classes due to Covid-19 pandemic situation. The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) has provided five teaching and learning options - on site (learning at school), on demand (learning through the Distance Learning Television's (DLTV) website - www.dltv.com), on air (learning via TV from DLTV channel), online (learning through internet and video conference with teacher), and on hand (self-learning from textbooks and completing worksheets prepared by teachers). OBEC gives schools the authority to determine how to provide teaching to students based on the circumstances in each area (Bangkok Post, 2021). An online learning tends to be the most popular among other options. Many schools apply online learning instead of traditional learning to students at all levels, including primary, secondary, and higher education.

In past few years, many previous studies have been interested in students' perception of online learning during COVID-19, but the most of them primarily focused on examining university students' views (Farrah & al-Bakry, 2020; Imsa-ard, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Nambiar, 2020; & Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021). Therefore, young students' perception should be observed. Besides, It is intended that this study would assist teachers in designing and preparing for future online education in accordance with students' perspectives and requirements.

Research objectives

1. to investigate the needs of Thai EFL primary students on English online learning in the new normal period.
2. to explore online learning problems faced by Thai EFL primary students in the new normal period.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were selected based on convenient sampling technique due to the convenience and the availability of the students at hand. As a result, 50 EFL primary students who studied at an opportunity expansion school in Thailand were conveniently recruited. The participants' backgrounds in online learning were similar since they have been studying English online in the beginning of the first semester in academic year 2021.

Instruments

This study employed an online questionnaire as a main research instrument. The questionnaire was designed based on the relevant literature to draw what the students needs and problems related English online learning. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions that measured Thai EFL students' perception towards "needs" (7 items), and "problems" (6 items) of online learning. In order to collect information, the participants were asked to rate each item via an online Google form on a five-point Likert scale format with the following categories; 5 = strongly agree,

4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree.

Data collection

The researcher created online questionnaire by using Google form. The objective of the study were informed to participants before completing the questionnaire. Then, the link was sent to participants to complete it.

Data analysis

Data from the questionnaire would be analyzed quantitatively and presented in descriptive statistic with mean and standard deviation.

Results

In this study, the findings are demonstrated based on two major parts of questionnaire:

1) Students' needs on English online learning, and 2) Students' problems on English online learning.

Table 1 Students' needs on English online learning

Items	Mean	S.D.	Interpr etation
1. I want teacher to explain more for the topic being studied in learning online.	4.04	0.88	agree
5. I want online activities that allow me to practice English vocabulary and structure.	3.88	1.15	agree
6. I need more feedback for my assignments / homework from teachers in learning online.	3.82	0.92	agree
7. I want a variety of online testing.	3.62	1.23	agree
4. I want teacher to use more social media such as Instagram or Facebook to improve my English skill in learning online.	3.58	1.07	agree
2. I need more suitable online materials to improve my English skills.	3.50	0.95	agree
3. I want to improve my speaking and listening by using video recorded or youtube.	3.12	1.21	neutral
Total	3.65	0.14	agree

As shown in Table 1, the overall Mean score of students' needs on English online learning was marked agree (Mean = 3.65, S.D. = 0.14). It was found that six items (items 1, 5, 6, 7, 4, and 2) were required from majority of students during an English online lesson, while there was only one item (item 3) that neither needed nor wanted. Students mainly agreed that they needed more explanation from teacher on the topic being studied (Mean = 4.04, S.D. = 0.88). It was followed by the needs of online activities that would help them improving their English vocabulary and structure (Mean = 3.88, S.D. = 1.15). Moreover, the teacher's feedback was needed (Mean = 3.82, S.D. = 0.92). Besides, they wanted various types of online testing (Mean = 3.62, S.D. = 1.23). In addition, many students wanted to improve their writing skills via the use of social media, such as, Instagram or Facebook (Mean = 3.58, S.D. = 1.07) as well as online materials that related to COVID-19 situation

(Mean = 3.50, S.D. = 0.95). On the other hand, they felt neutral to improve their speaking skills by recording videos or voices in English (Mean = 3.12, S.D. = 1.21).

Table 2 Students' problems on English online learning

Items	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
10. I'm not sure if my English speaking is correct when I am taking an online class.	3.92	0.97	agree
13. It is difficult to understand reading text when I am learning English online.	3.84	0.98	agree
8. I am unable to effectively practice speaking activities online.	3.60	0.88	agree
11. I am unable to write English word by myself since my phone will automatically correct it.	3.48	1.01	agree
12. I am unable to write English sentences by myself since I always use a translator program when learning online.	3.42	1.13	agree
9. There is no movement or interaction with friends in English online activities.	3.30	1.04	neutral
Total	3.59	0.08	agree

From table 2, students have agreed that they had problems learning English online (overall Mean = 3.59, S.D. = 0.08). The majority of students had problems with five of the items (items 10, 13, 8, 11, and 12), while only one item was found moderate difficulty (item 9). Students mainly agreed that they were unsure if their English skill was correct or not when they pronounced it in English online class (Mean = 3.92, S.D. = 0.97), followed by the difficulties in understanding English reading texts (Mean = 3.84, S.D. = 0.98). Moreover, many students agreed that they were unable to perform effectively in online speaking activities, particularly conversation practice (Mean = 3.60, S.D. = 0.88).

Furthermore, the convenience of the applications provided may cause some problems after they were used. Since their online learning device, such as smartphone, would automatically correct English words. As a result, they were unable to write English words on their own (Mean = 3.48, S.D. = 1.01). As well as the use of translator program that made students unable to create English sentences grammatically when they were asked to write sentences by themselves (Mean = 3.42, S.D. = 1.13). On the contrary, students felt neither agreed nor disagreed with no online activities involving movement or interaction with their peers in an English online lesson (Mean = 3.30, S.D. = 1.04).

Discussion

The present study aimed to observe Thai EFL students' needs and problems on English online learning in the new normal situation. Therefore, this section comprise two main topics of discussion.

The first discussion is about students' needs during an English online lesson. Based on the findings, majority of students most required teacher explanation on the topic being studied. The result relates to Destianingsih & Satria's (2020) study that is students expected their teachers to provide more feedback for each assignment that they completed and to give more explanations for difficult topics being studied. Since teacher may expect that students will research for further information online on their own. However, in the online learning environment, teacher should not indicate that students have perception, knowledge, and learning techniques to learn by themselves. It can be said that before integrating students in the online learning component, teachers must ensure that the students are ready for doing the tasks and can complete them on their own (Lim, 2004).

The second topic of discussion regarding the problems on English online learning, the main issue is that students are unsure of their pronunciation because it is difficult for teachers to check students' pronunciation online. The result relates to students' needs of teacher's explanations or feedback. According to Lim (2004), the teacher plays a important role in the online learning environment. Therefore, teachers must understand their roles and employ the most effective strategies to improve the learning experience of students in such a setting. As a consequence, teacher should provide effective online activities beginning with lesson preparation, appropriate activities, and assessment methods.

Conclusions

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, many schools around the world including Thailand have been forced to give instruction online in order to stop the spread of the disease as well as to maintain the learning process. This highlights the aims of the present

study to investigate Thai EFL students' needs and problems on English online learning in the new normal situation.

The findings on students' needs revealed that majority of them needed more explanation from teacher, followed by the needs of online activities related to vocabulary and structure. Moreover, the teacher's feedback was required. According to the problems that students faced during an English online class, students mainly agreed that they were unsure if their English was effective, followed by the difficulties in understanding reading texts. Besides, they were unable to perform effectively in online speaking activities.

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