

Attitudes Towards English ENL1007 Online Learning of First Year English Major Students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate first-year English majors' attitudes towards online English learning at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU). The sample, drawn using purposive sampling, consisted of 90 enrollees in the English ENL1007 course. The research instrument in the study was a questionnaire divided into 3 parts, including demographic, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. The data gained were then analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative research findings showed that the 90 SSRU students had positive attitudes towards online English learning, especially in terms of enjoyment. The qualitative research findings also revealed that the students were satisfied with online learning, due to its 24-hour access, flexibility, and convenience.

Keywords: attitudes towards online English learning, English majors

Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected educational systems worldwide, all students of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU) had to resort to studying online at home. As online students, they encountered many obstacles during their online coursework, especially the first-year SSRU English majors whose grades in the English ENL1007, an English paragraph writing course, were lower, compared to onsite study.

Based on the individual interview with a random sample of five enrollees in the English ENL1007 in the academic year 2020, it was found that their GPAs in the second online learning semester were substantially lower than those in the first onsite learning semester.

This phenomenon resulted from several factors, one of which was teachers' and students' unfamiliarity with the new method of education. According to Lee and Tsai (2010), online students need to prepare themselves by making sure that their internet connection is

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stable and that some necessary electronic devices are well equipped. However, some SSRU students did not have access to devices to attend online classes. Another factor was insufficient ICT skills of teachers and students which hindered their teaching and learning.

The sample mentioned not only their poor performance but also their negative attitudes towards online learning, or more precisely, they felt unsatisfied when they could not perform well in their online classes. Some students could not get thorough feedbacks or comments on the spot. Some even found asking impossible questions due to the overwhelming number of the students in one class. These barriers inevitably culminated in students' negative attitudes towards online learning as well as drove them to turn their backs on it. Similarly, the results from the study by Zabadi and Alawi (2016) and by Sanders and Shetlar (2001) revealed that learners' attitudes and perspectives towards online learning are a key factor for their learning outcomes. It is, therefore, possible to point out that the students' attitudes can affect their online learning and their performance.

In summary, the students' negative attitudes towards ENL1007 online learning made an impact on their grade drops. This sudden plummet in the students' grades is worth examining to shed light on its occurrence and underlying factors. Therefore, this research is conducted to investigate in details the attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning of first-year SSRU English majors.

Objectives

To investigate the attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning of the first-year SSRU English majors.

Research Framework

1. Online Learning and Teaching Method in a Language Classroom

In the 21st century, both students and teachers live in the age of digital technologies. With its rapid globalization-driven development of technology, the widespread use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a crucial role in many aspects, education in particular (Tezci, 2009; Warschauer, 1996). The use of the internet has become a vital part and is considered as an effective learning tool that has changed the traditional method. The internet is beneficial as it provides teachers and students with a wide range of

knowledge. Teachers can search from digital libraries for authentic teaching materials, engaging teaching activities, and deliver information to the online classroom (Balci et al., 2020).

In Chapter 9 of Thailand's National Education Act (1999), which concerns with raising the education standards and quality of all levels of education, it is provided that students are required to become autonomous learners, teachers to become learning facilitators, and learning resources to be more integrated with technology and not limited only to classroom. In addition, according to the Thai National Education Act of 2001, the principles of the educational curriculum emphasize learning anywhere at any time and lifelong learning. Teachers are also encouraged to construct their course by using technology instruction, such as e-learning, web-based instruction, and game-based learning. English courses in many universities require students to work on their own by using computer programs (Wiriyachittra, 2002).

2. Online Learning in English Classroom

According to the English curriculum in language classrooms, English is taught for communication through communicative approaches (Ministry of Education, 2001). With the rapid development of ICT, it is used rapidly in higher education and is considered as a new way of learning over the internet. Urdan and Weggen (2000) found that online learning constituted just one part of e-learning and defined it as learning processes that took place via the internet and in blended classroom contexts. Online instruction occurs when learners use the Web to go through the sequence of instruction, to complete the learning activities, and to achieve the learning outcomes and objectives (Ally, 2002; Ritchie & Hoffman, 1997). Davidson and Schofield (1997) stated that the replacement of traditional learning with online learning requires employing effective implementation plans and strategies. Therefore, the next topic is discussed towards key components of online learning that should be considered when designing online learning materials.

2.1 Components of Effective Online Learning

There are four main components to accomplish effective online learning which are discussed below (Anderson and Elloumi, 2004).

2.1.1 Learner Preparation

Several pre-learning activities can be used to help the learners prepare for the details of the lesson and motivate them to learn the online lesson. The instructors should give their learners rationale for directing them to the importance and benefits of taking

the online lesson. They should be given a concept map and informed of the learning outcomes of the lesson, so that they know what is expected of them and will be able to gauge when they have achieved the lesson outcomes. Furthermore, a bridge between what the learners already know and what they need to know should be provided. The learners must also be informed of the prerequisite requirements that help them check their readiness for the lesson and of self-assessment that helps them organize the learning materials and to recognize the important materials in the lesson.

2.1.2 Learner Activities

The online learners should be provided with a variety of learning activities to achieve the lesson learning outcome and to accommodate the learners' individual needs. The appropriate application exercises should be included throughout the online lesson to establish the relevance of the materials. The practice activities, along with feedback, should be included to allow the learners to monitor how they are performing and further improve themselves. They should also be able to generate a lesson summary to promote higher-level processing and to bring closure to the lesson.

2.1.3 Learner Interaction

As the learners complete the learning activities, they will be involved with a variety of interactions. The learners need to interact with the interface to access the online materials. The interface should not overload the learners and should make it as easy as possible for learners to sense the information for transfer to the sensory store and then into short-term memory for processing. The learners must interact with the content to acquire the information needed to form the knowledge base and have several interactions—learner-other learners, learner-instructor, and learner-experts—to collaborate, participate in shared cognition, form social networks, and establish a social presence. The learners should be able to interact within their context to personalize information and construct their own meaning.

2.1.4 Learner Transfer

The opportunities should be provided for the learners to transfer what they learn to real-life applications, so that they can be creative and go beyond what was presented in the online lesson.

2.2 Advantages of Online Learning

It has been evident that the use of online learning and teaching is growing rapidly and that it is widely integrated into the teaching and learning process of language learning (Kandasamy & Shah, 2013). It has been considered that ICT provides many benefits to students in learning English and that many educational institutions apply it (Joshi & Kaur, 2011). Evan (2004) and Wang and Chan (1995) suggested that there are four main advantages of online learning.

The first advantage of the internet is its effectiveness in conveying both images and sound presentations simultaneously. These presentations attract the students' attention and help them understand the text better. (Kandasamy & Shah, 2013). The second advantage of online learning is its autonomous learning. This characteristic allows the students to manage and control their learning by themselves while the teachers spend time guiding their student instead. Third, the learners can have a pleasant moment while surfing the internet. Congleton and Rajaram (2011) state that learning English online can be fun. The students can select online activities that fit their learning styles and learning goals. They can practice English by playing online games or other communicative activities that reduce anxiety and stress. Zhang (2013) indicates that the internet and new technologies offer independence to students in their learning in a flexible environment. Lastly, online learning can also reduce the gap and increase the interaction between teachers and students through online communication (Abbott & Cribb, 2001; Rhema's & Miliszhewska, 2014). Moreover, there are number of studies which reveal that online instruction provides students more chances to participate in activities with classmates (Voogt & Pelgrum, 2005). In other words, online instruction can enhance interaction and reduce the difficulties in communication with their peers, so that they can share ideas easier. In short, the use of online instruction provides opportunities for students to participate in learning activities with others.

2.3 Disadvantages of Online Learning

In spite of a variety of advantages and strengths, there are disadvantages of online learning (Annansingh & Bright, 2010). Knowing its disadvantages can help instructors manage and reduce problems in teaching and learning online. Three main barriers which are negative attitudes towards the use of ICT (Albirini, 2006; Shaw & Marlow, 1999), limited ICT knowledge (Tezci, 2009), and insufficient training of ICT (Lee & Tsai, 2010) will be discussed. The first barrier is a negative attitude to online instruction. There are many studies stating that negative

attitudes towards the use of ICT is one barrier that obstructs learners from learning online (Albirini, 2006; Shaw & Marlow, 1999). Another barrier is limited ICT knowledge. The students are expected to know how to use computer programs and to integrate themselves into online classes (Annansignh & Bright, 2010). Limited ICT knowledge can result in students' poor performance. The third barrier is insufficient training of ICT which slows online teaching and learning (Lee and Tsai, 2010). Since technology has been promoted in education, students are expected to be trained in order to acquire technology skills. In addition, Khamkhien (2012) points 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.

3. Students' Attitudes towards Online Learning

In recent years, many studies on student perceptions and expectations for quality online learning have been published. Brown (2001) and Spolsky (2000) define students' attitudes as feelings, fears and prejudices about learning English as a second language. Chamber (1999) explains that attitude in learning a language is crucial since positive attitudes towards language contribute to easier learning. Brown (2000) explains that positive attitudes contribute substantially to second language learners, while the motivation and attention to acquire language proficiency can be reduced by negative attitudes.

Although negative attitudes influence second language learners' opinions towards learning a language, such attitudes can be changed. Furthermore, many studies show that students' perception of online learning in university education may be influenced by several variables. According to Zabadi and Alawi (2016), key variables can be divided into two main categories which are demographic characteristics and technological skills. Liaw and Huang (2011) added that gender is an important part of variation in perceptions towards technology skills and attitudes towards online learning. Furthermore, the researchers proposed that experiences and skills in computer is an important indicator on learners' motivation towards online learning. Cheng (2006) believes that individual characteristics like gender and computer skills are not enough. Computer experience and skills play a primary factor in students' attitudes towards online learning. It is also mentioned that when investigating students' attitudes, it is important to consider different characteristics such as age, gender, computer experience, technology acceptance, and individual learning styles as principal factors.

4. Factors Affecting Attitudes towards Online Learning

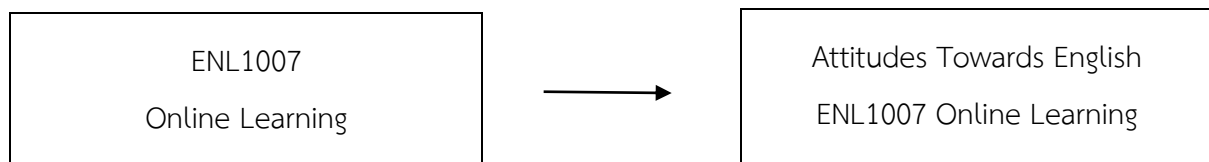
4.1 The Demographic Characteristics and Technology Usage and Skills

There are many studies about demographic characteristics that affect the use of computer competency (Saadi 2007, Ktoridou and Eteokleous 2011, Ajayi 2013) Baikady and Mudhol (2013) found that approximately 40 percent of respondents had adequate computer literacy skills, while nearly 51 percent possessed only average computer literacy skills. They recommended that it was essential to identify needs for information in electronic environments in order to develop plans for users' computer literacy instructions at higher studies levels. However, there is a significant lack of research on computer literacy with respect to student demographics. This present study, therefore, attempts to determine whether or not student demographics have any influence on attitudes towards online learning.

4.2 Online Classroom Environment

Knowles and Kerkman (2007) investigated students' attitudes and motivation towards online learning. Their study showed that online courses provided a sufficient amount of student to instructor interaction, a high amount of student to material interaction, and a low amount of student to student interaction. It also found that a number of students claimed they had to read and work more than expected, but they could still interact with their teachers and get feedbacks from them. Because of these reasons, this study aimed to investigate whether students' in-class interactions and online classroom environment affect their attitudes towards online learning.

Conceptual Framework



Methodology

1. Sample

This study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It aimed to investigate students' attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning. The sample was drawn using purposive sampling. The samples were 90 first-year English majors of

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University who enrolled in the English ENL1007 course in the academic year 2020.

2. Research Instrument

The research instrument was a questionnaire used to ask the sample' attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. It consisted of three distinct parts as follows:

2.1 The first part was a multiple-choice questionnaire, instructing the respondents to fill in the questionnaire about their demographic characteristics, which covered gender and age, and their computer skills. This study adopted a multiple-choice question, thanks to the study by Rhema's and Miliszhewska (2014) which reveals that the factor affecting student's attitudes can be divided into two main groups which are demographic data (age and gender) and computer skill (ICT training background, experience with technology, and frequency of using ICT).

2.2 The second part was Likert scale questions about attitudes towards online learning. Prior to the implementation, the four types of validity of the instrument which are content validity, construct validity, concurrent validity, and predictive validity were assessed. The obtained results from the three experts were evaluated using the index of item-objective congruence (IOC). More specifically, the experts will evaluate each item by giving the item a rating of 1 (for clearly measuring), -1 (clearly not measuring), or 0 (degree to which it measures the content area is unclear) for each objective. The results are as follows:

Item No.	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Total Score	The IOC Index Mean of Expert Scores
1	1	1	0	2	$IOC1 = 2/3 = 6.7$
2	0	1	-1	0	$IOC2 = 0/3 = 0$
3	-1	1	1	1	$IOC3 = 1/3 = .33$
4	-1	0	-1	-2	$IOC4 = -2/3 = -.67$

*The qualified items should have the IOC equal to or greater than 0.50.

2.3 The last part was two open-ended questions used to delve deeper into the respondents' response.

3. Analysis and Statistic Treatment

3.1 Data Analysis for Quantitative Data

The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Firstly, the demographic data of the sample were analyzed using frequency and percentage to interpret and display the overall picture. Then the 5-point Likert scale that contained 5 response options; strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree, was calculated to represent the sample's attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning. According to Zikmund (2003), Likert scale questions are considered as a reliable benchmark to direct respondents to some specific attitudes. A questionnaire was used in the study to extract the data on students' attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning. Above all, the study aimed at exploring whether the students underwent a change in attitudes towards online learning after taking the English ENL1007 course. The mean scores are interpreted as follows:

Scale	Levels of Satisfaction	Mean Range
5	Highest satisfaction	4.51-5.00
4	High satisfaction	3.51-4.50
3	Neutral	2.51-3.50
2	Low satisfaction	1.51-2.50
1	Lowest satisfaction	1.00-1.50

3.2 Data Analysis for Qualitative Data

The data from the open-ended question were analyzed and summarized alongside the quantitative data to draw the conclusions of the sample's verbatim response. According to Weber (1990), qualitative content analysis is utilized to analyze text data. It will classify large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that present similar significances.

4. Refinement and processing of the instrument

Refinement and processing of the research instrument included checking the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, administering the questionnaire to the sample, ensuring the sample's data in terms of personal data protection, and using the descriptive statistics. The obtained results showed that most of the qualified items have the IOC greater than 0.50.

5. Instrument

The instrument was a threefold questionnaire. The first part was demographic information. The second part was a Likert scale where the respondents were asked to rate ten statements, which are 1) *I feel comfortable in my ability to do with computer*, 2) *Online learning helps me to achieve the lesson learning outcomes and fits my learning needs*, 3) *I do not feel threatened by the effect of computer technologies*, 4) *Online learning makes teaching and learning effective*, 5) *Online learning is more comfortable and enjoyable to me*, 6) *Online learning helps me establish the interactions with teachers, friends, and contents*, 7) *Online learning allows me to manage and control my learning by myself*, 8) *Students need to be trained to acquire ICT skills before learning online*, 9) *Online learning increases access to content-rich learning materials*, and 10) *I think that online learning promotes my learning experiences, and I can apply it to my daily life*. The last part was two open-ended questions, which are “*In your opinion, what are the benefits of studying English online?*” and “*In your opinion, what are the major barriers in studying English online?*”.

Results

This study explored first-year SSRU English majors’ attitudes towards online learning. It focused mainly on students’ attitude towards English ENL1007 online learning. This section shows the results that answer the research questions. The results can be grouped into three main parts which are (1) general information (demographic characteristics), (2) students’ attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning, and (3) open-ended question.

1. The Results of the General Information Questionnaire

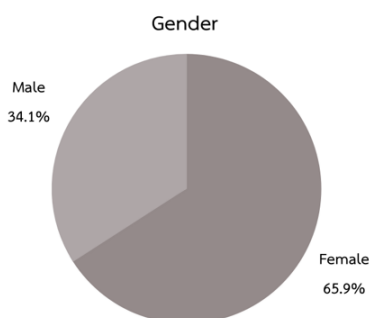


Figure 3. Distribution of the respondents by gender

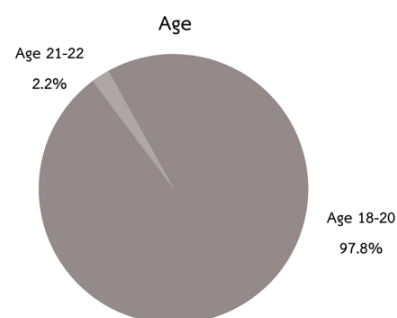


Figure 4. Distribution of the respondents by age

This section discusses the demographic information of the sample. The information was measured using percentage. Figure 3 indicates that 65.9% of the respondents were males

and 34.1% females. Figure 4 shows that 97.8% of the respondents fell into the age category of 18-20 years and 2.2% belonged to the age category of 21-22 years.

2. The Results of the Questionnaire about Students' Attitudes towards English ENL1007 Online Learning

The descriptive results of the students' attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning are demonstrated in the table below.

Table 1 The Rearranged Results according to the Highest Score

The students' attitudes towards English ENL1007 online learning	Means	S.D.	Agreement Level
5. Online Learning is more comfortable and enjoyable to me.	4.31	.60	Very high
6. Online learning helps me establish the interactions with teacher, friends, and contents.	4.22	.48	Very High
10. I think that online learning promotes my learning experiences, and I can apply it into my daily life.	4.18	.52	Very high
4. Online learning makes teaching and learning effective.	4.15	.45	High
9. Online learning increases access to content-rich learning materials.	4.13	.56	High
7. Online learning allows me to manage and control my learning by myself.	4.11	.46	High
2. Online learning helps me to achieve the lesson learning outcome and fits my learning needs.	4.10	.50	High
3. I do not feel threatened by the effect of computer technologies.	4.03	.63	High
8. Students need to be trained to acquire ICT skills before learning online.	4.00	.55	High
1. I feel comfortable in my ability to do with computer technologies.	3.98	.61	High

As seen in the table 1, the mean and the standard deviation of the students' overall attitudes are 4.12 and .54 respectively. The scores indicate that the students had a high level of attitude towards online learning. The finding is supported by the study of Chamber (1999) which found that undergraduates possessed positive attitudes towards online learning.

3. The Results of the Open-End Questions

Most of the students indicated that the use of online learning would allow them to improve English skills. The major advantages of online learning were flexibility and accessibility at any time. Some mentioned that online learning gave them more chances to improve their English skills. However, they also faced some major barriers—a lack of access to devices to attend online classes and unstable internet.

Discussions and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to investigate the attitudes towards online learning of first-year SSRU English majors. This study focused mainly on their attitude towards taking the English ENL1007, an English paragraph writing course, online. This section discusses the three parts of the questionnaire as follows:

The results of the demographic information showed certain similarities with the earlier studies conducted by various researchers. The findings of this study were similar to the previous study by Mutula (2008) that revealed gender differences in computer literacy between female and male undergraduate students in America. Apparently, gender and age did not significantly affect student's attitudes towards online learning. In other words, student demographics did not have a great impact on the students' attitudes towards online learning.

The main findings of the study revealed that first-year English majors had a positive attitude towards online learning. The findings corresponded with earlier research findings by Zhang (2013), Chung, Chen & Kuo (2015) and Ellis (2008). These researchers emphasized that positive attitude affected English learning. Similarly, Brown (2000) explains that positive attitudes encourage second language learners to acquire English proficiency. However, they also disclosed that students with poor internet connection had been left behind. This limitation appears in the work of Annansighn and Bright (2010). As suggested by Zhang et al. (2004), their findings prove that online learning contributes to the creation of student-centered learning, flexibility in terms of location and time, and encouragement of knowledge transfer.

In the open-ended question, they were asked *"In your opinion, what are the benefits of studying English online learning?"*. Eighteen students commented that they had more chances to properly practice English skills after attending the online learning course. This implies that online learning courses offered students opportunities to learn a language. Moreover, twenty-eight students expressed that learning English through online learning was more relaxing than in traditional one and that it assisted them to be more exposed to English. Their opinion parallels many researchers' same claim that online learning motivates students to use language skills (Abbott & Cribb, 2001; Zhang, 2013; Rhema's & Miliszewska, 2014).

In the second question *"In your opinion, what are the major barriers in studying English online learning?"*, five students said that they were not interested in online learning at all, while three of them highlighted they did not like the learning method because they lacked internet connection and a computer. Further, two of them added that they had far

fewer opportunities to practice English skills and sometimes could not catch up with their friends because of poor internet connection. Moreover, some students found online learning uninteresting. However, there is an explanation for their negative response. Those students were basically passive learners. They had low English proficiency and could not get the tasks done when they were assigned. Possibly, they had had negative attitudes towards learning English before they took the ENL1007.

The results indicate that online instruction could successfully enhance students' learning. However, there were some implications to consider. Teachers should bring new teaching techniques into online class, e.g., techniques that encourage students to communicate and use English in a real context. For instance, materials and activities need to attract students' attention. Finally, teachers should create a relaxing classroom atmosphere by using games, songs, or movies. A positive atmosphere can reduce anxiety and encourage students to acquire the language and increase positive attitudes towards online learning.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings, it is worth recommending that academic institutions provide ICT training for students to promote the use of online education course in the future so that they can make the best use of online resources. As this study is limited to only one university, further study should be undertaken in more universities to compare the different findings or compare attitudes towards online learning of English majors and non-English majors.

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