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Abstract

A large number of research papers have examined the impacts of technology in education at different levels and contexts as well as from different perspectives. In this paper, however, the author reports on the ways in which technology can help Thai learners to enhance their English language learning. The author employs her five research studies undertaken qualitatively and quantitatively during 2013 and 2017 to support her arguments based on the grounds that new generations in the current era of digitization are deemed *Digital Natives* who identify themselves with teaching and learning technology. The outcomes revealed a consensus of importance of using technology in teaching English EFL in the 21st century.

Keywords: Technology in education; technology in teaching EFL; learning in the 21st century

Introduction

After the turn of the 21st century, which marks the era of digitization, it is evident that the Thai government has placed an emphasis on technology usage as part of developing the country. Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT), was then established in 2002 as a channel to develop the national economy and society, improve Thai people's quality of life as well as transform the country into a knowledge-based society (Koanantakool & Udomvitid, 2008). Under the administration of Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha, in 2017 MICT was replaced with Ministry of Digital Economy and Society with implementation of digital technologies to enhance Thailand's economy and society. Education thus plays a vital role in this respect, and teachers of all subject matters have been encouraged to incorporate technology in their classroom instruction.

A large number of studies into technology for teaching and learning EFL in Thailand can witness the incorporation of technology in classroom instruction. Deerajviset (2014) reviewed past research into technology, defined as anything available for use in teaching and learning including computers, multimedia, the Internet, or any other electronic or interactive media, in EFL education in Thailand during 2004 and 2013. She concluded some insightful aspects. Firstly, technology can be a great teaching tool because it can help enhance students' motivation, positive attitudes and language skills. Secondly, teachers used technology for language skills development in different areas, which included listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and integrated skills.

The Internet appears to be a prominent teaching and learning tool due to its easy access to information through mobile or portable devices. Smartphones in particular have played a vital role for most Thai people because they tend to use smartphones for a variety of online activities from games to information search (Panjakajornsak, 2017). However, the group of Thais that significantly has different characters from other groups is those of Generation Y or *Millenials*, born between 1980 and 2000 and made up of 32% of the population. They individualistic Meaning: acting according to their own goals and ideas Thai Translation: Learn more are passionate about being online, surfing the Internet for eight hours a day on average (Wangkiat, 2016) and sharing their posts on Facebook, Instagram and Lifelog (Kittikrairat, 2016).

Similar to the *Millenials*, Prensky (2001, p.1) coined *Digital Natives*, considered “native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet”. They were born into the digital era and grew up with digital technology whereas many teachers termed as *Digital Immigrants* (ibid, p.2) learned to adopt computer and smartphones late in life either by pressure or by personal fascination. It is then argued by Tananuraksakul (2014) that teachers should consider the use of technologies in their classroom so that young students as *Digital Natives* can relate themselves to teaching technology (Dalton, 2009) and in turn intrinsically motivate them to learn.

To shed light of the above arguments, this paper aims to report on the ways in which technology can help Thai undergraduate learners to enhance their English language learning. They are considered *Millenials* or *Digital Natives* who enjoy being online and search online information. The definition of technology in this paper thus refers to anything available for use in teaching including the Internet, social media and smartphone (Deerajviset, 2014), particularly Facebook group, dictionary online, blended e-learning and phonetics website that require the use of the Internet. The author employs five of her research studies (Tananuraksakul, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017) undertaken qualitatively and quantitatively from 2013 to 2017 to support the arguments.

Studies into Use of Facebook Group

Since Facebook has been one of popular social media among Thais, and there were fewer researches in connection with teaching EFL in Thai academic context back in 2013, I started exploring whether this social website could improvise a teaching tool. Past literature review indicated that Facebook was used and valued as a blended learning (BL) tool in tertiary institutions (Radel, 2011). BL is a hybrid model that encompasses face-to-face and virtual instructions viewed as good practice because it provides interactions and prompt feedback among users (Martyn, 2003, p.22). Facebook group has the potential to be used as a learning management system (LMS) for making announcements, sharing resources and virtually participating in weekly discussion and activities (Wang et al, 2012).

Based on the review, I investigated how Facebook group could be used as BL and LMS in a writing class at small-sized university in Bangkok using qualitative research method, interview.

The findings collected from 53 students revealed that: A Facebook group can be used as BL and LMS in writing for this group of students to learn with, not to learn from, as facilitated by the instructor. Most students regularly used Facebook and they obtained positive perceptions on the Facebook group usage in that it helped motivate them to learn virtually, develop their positive attitudes towards learning English and improve their English because it was a practical, trendy and beneficial teaching and

learning tool for them. Those students who encountered virtual communication apprehension felt unconfident and embarrassed, but had positive views on the Facebook group usage, suggesting that the Facebook group functioned as a booster neutralizing their attitudes towards English language learning. They possessed positive perceptions perhaps because they were able to identify themselves with Facebook as a social networking site prominently used among them. Teachers of English, who may be seen or considered as digital immigrants, may need to adopt learning technologies in their class since today's students grew up as digital natives. (Tananuraksakul, 2014, p.11-12)

One year later in 2014, I extended this Facebook group study for another English reading and writing class of 10 students whose English performance was poor and slightly motivated to learn. In fact, they all had failed this subject and re-enrolled it because of the curricular requirement. As the instructor, I investigated how Facebook group utilized as LMS could enhance their positive attitude and motivation, which are variables seen to influence learners' achievement in language learning and interdependently influence one another, in a medium-sized university in the vicinity of Bangkok.

The outcomes qualitatively garnered from ten participants revealed that: the Facebook Group used as an LMS, a pedagogical tool in an English reading-writing for professional purposes class, could enhance EFL undergraduate students' attitudes towards, and motivation in, learning ESP. The results positively illuminated that the students enjoyed learning English better with the use of Facebook Group and concurrently felt more enthusiastic to learn the language. The primary reason was that they could relate themselves to the Facebook Group usage as regular Facebook users. These outcomes go in line with Prensky's (2001) argument that young students of the current era of globalization acquire knowledge effectively through technology as they are digital natives. They also comport with Dalton's (2009) arguments that young students feel connected with learning technology, especially a social networking site (Srinivas, 2010), and that teachers can take on the role of trainer, not of engineer. The positive outcomes led to insightful suggestions as well. First, Facebook Group with its structures is a social networking tool that can facilitate teaching and learning of ESP. Second, it is a teaching tool to reduce PD between teachers and students as it could lower the latter's anxiety during their interaction with the former. As such, interaction between them tended to be promoted. Third, it constructs feelings of happiness and relaxation and senses of convenience and simplicity. Fourth, liking something or feeling happy with something can have positive impacts on learners' attitudes and motivation. Finally, convenience, simplicity and relaxation are features that characterize Thai EFL learners' learning behaviors. Unexpectedly, with time and space compression on the Internet, the use of Facebook Group additionally provided benefits to students to learning ESP as well as saving time and money. My error correction was seen to contribute to most students' language improvement. (Tananuraksakul, 2015a, p.242-243)

Studies into Dictionary Online, Blended E-Learning and Phonetics Website

My third study examined the ways in which the use of Cambridge Dictionaries Online affected 73 students' autonomy or self-reliance, attitude toward and motivation in learning English. The website was used as a teaching tool to promote their autonomy because they possessed ineffective learning strategies in writing, which reflected lack of learner autonomy, essential for their learning achievement and the dictionaries online appear to be comprehensive (Tananuraksakul, 2015b).

As the instructor, my role: was to guide them to develop their learning strategies and move toward learner autonomy during writing the assignments by giving them indirect feedback and having them check verb patterns and sentence examples with Cambridge Dictionaries Online. If they like to use the link as parts of their English writing, they will have positive attitudes towards the usage and learning and gain motivation in learning the language, which can concurrently encourage them to use the link as a tool to help them write better. (ibid, p.6)

The quantitative results from a questionnaire constructed “based on arguments that new generations or young learners can relate themselves to the link viewed as learning technology and in turn possess positive attitude toward and motivation in learning English autonomously” (Tananuraksakul, 2015b, p.3) supported three hypotheses to some extent. First, online dictionaries can help the students to learn English autonomously. Second, online dictionaries can promote the students’ positive attitude toward learning English. Lastly, online dictionaries can enhance the students’ motivation in learning English.

The fourth study involved the use of blended e-learning for all classes required by an institution. Two hypotheses: blended e-learning required by an institution can motivate learners extrinsically to learn EFL and can enhance learners’ positive attitudes toward learning EFL. Both were “constructed based on an implication that Thai students generally needed extrinsic motivation in learning driven by their authoritative teachers and past relevant studies that showed positive results” (Tananuraksakul, 2016, p.48).

The quantitative findings gathered from 56 students: were generally confirmed, [yet] the outcomes cannot be generalized because the sample was not representative of the population. In addition, required blended e-learning may not be the best teaching tool for new generation Thais since they appear to relate themselves to social networking tools such as Facebook better. (ibid, p.53)

The fifth study was conducted because Thai undergraduate students tend to have a foreign accent when speaking in English resulting from mother tongue interference, leading to unintelligibility and ineffective language learning. It therefore aimed to promote their positive attitudes toward their own non-native English accented speech with the use of Iowa’s *Sounds of American English*, a language model for pronouncing English consonant sounds systems in classroom, based on the assumption that the website is a kind of new technology that young people may identify themselves with or may motivate them to learn.

The quantitative results from 52 students from two different stages reflected: their perceptual non-native-like identity and desired native-like identity. In the second stage, after the use of the phonetics website in the classroom, the results indicated their better attitudes toward their non-native English accented speech due to their synchronous feelings of slightly decreased embarrassment and increased pride. It was therefore proven to some extent that the phonetics website could help build up Thai undergraduate students’ positive attitudes toward their non-native English accented speech. It may be the case that they were slightly motivated to learn through the use of the website. (Tananuraksakul, 2017, p.60)

Conclusion

This paper reports on the way in which technology, in particular Facebook group, dictionary online, blended e-learning and phonetics website, can help improve Thai undergraduate students' English language learning. These four kinds of technology need access to the Internet available throughout Thailand because of the government's recognition as a passage to develop the country socially and economically. Most Thais, especially *Millenials* or *Digital Natives*, have easy access to the Internet through their smartphones they carry with them. The five studies I conducted from 2013 to 2017 revealed a consensus of importance of using technology in teaching English EFL in the 21st century which marks the digital era and brings changes to Thai society basically because the students are *Millenials* or *Digital Natives* who identify themselves with teaching and learning technology.

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