ONLINE LEARNING READINESS OF THAI EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the unprecedented closure of universities and schools has revived the application of fully online teaching and learning. This study explored the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL university students during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants were 62 fourth year Business English major students under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand. The readiness for online learning in this study was divided into five dimensions: self-directed learning, motivation for learning, computer/Internet self-efficacy, learner control, and online communication self-efficacy. The research instrument was the Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS) survey questionnaire with a five-point-Likert scale. The obtained data were analyzed by mean and standard deviation. The results showed that Thai EFL university students entered the level of "ready and go ahead" towards online learning in the dimension of computer/Internet self-efficacy while the rest dimensions were at "ready but needs a few improvements" level. The implication of this study has great importance for Thai EFL teachers who are struggling to teach in this new medium and teach to the needs of their students to aid in their planning and will contribute to future teachers who will teach online platforms.

Keywords: Online learning, Readiness, Covid-19 pandemic, Thai EFL university students

INTRODUCTION

Thailand reported the first domestic case of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on January 13, 2020, after a laboratory-confirmed infection of a traveler. The number of cases started to jump by mid-March 2020 and increased continuously, which was attributed partially to nightclub and boxing stadium clusters. Responding to the surge of cases, the Thai government followed the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation for mitigating COVID-19 outbreaks by implementing aggressive measures to halt the infection. A curfew was imposed nationwide, starting on March 28, between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. (Katewongsa,Widyastari, Saonuam, Haemathulin &Wongsingha, 2021). Non-essential businesses were shut down to encourage people to remain in their home neighborhoods and limit social contact. Public facilities that normally also serve as venues for education, including schools, colleges and universities were closed, and mass gatherings were prohibited.

In addition to adapting to these stringent measures imposed by the government, the emergence of COVID-19 in Thailand imposed a strain on the entire society. It results in the emergence of the petition of work from home to minimize the spread of the Covid-19 virus. All sectors that can work from home are expected to do so, including the education sectors. The teaching and learning process should be done online, where the students must learn from home, and teachers teach from home. In online learning, the course is done through web-based learning and text books. Besides, the teachers still teach the students via online conferencing systems or email (Cheawjindakarn, Suwannatthachote & Theeraroungchaisri, 2012). Online learning is learning supported by the Internet where the Internet

provides the learning material including YouTube, videos, PowerPoint, e-books, audio, etc. (Jeffrey et al., 2014), as well as the access for the interaction of teachers and students (Bakia, Shear, Toyama & Lasseter, 2012).

However, a sudden change from face-to-face learning to online learning does not give students time to adjust to online learning, so not all students are ready for online learning. The fact is that online learning is different from face-to-face learning in which face-to face learning allows human psychological contacts in the learning process and from direct social interaction which is happening in the classroom that helps students to build their knowledge in learning (Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013). Although online learning has the advantage of providing flexible learning in terms of time and place as long as they are connected to the Internet, online learning cannot provide a sense of this direct psychological and social interaction (Vanslambrouck, Zhu, Lombaerts & Philipsen, 2018; Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik, 2020).

The current curriculum at all levels in Thailand emphasizes student-centered learning, where students become the center of learning activity and the teacher only acts as a facilitator. Online learning requires students' independence in learning and structured learning materials to easily understand the lesson (Damayanti, Fauzi & Inayati, 2018). Therefore, the students' readiness to take an online learning class is crucial for the success of online learning. Besides, it is agreed that students' readiness to participate in online learning affects their academic success differently. Students' satisfaction and motivation on online learning are affected by their readiness toward e-learning, self-efficacy, Internet self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, and motivation towards e-learning (Hung, Chou, Chen & Own, 2010; Yılmaz, 2017).

Some studies (i.e. Hung, Chou, Chen & Own, 2010; Ngampornchai &Adams, 2016) had been done to explore students' readiness in online learning in primary, secondary, college and university settings. However, a few recent research studies have explored the readiness in online learning during pandemics (i.e. Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik, 2020; Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Imsa-ard, 2020). Accordingly, this study examines the students' readiness, which was seen from the five dimensions, namely self-directed learning, motivation for online learning, learner control, self-efficacy of the computer and internet use, and self-efficacy of online communication and the level of online readiness. It is hoped that this study will be beneficial for university lecturers and policy makers to prepare for the future educational disruption that may occur, and to fulfill and design learning that responds to students' readiness.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to explore the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL University students during the Covid-19 pandemic in five dimensions: namely self-directed learning, motivation for learning, computer/Internet self-efficacy, learner control, and online communication self-efficacy.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants were 62 fourth year Business English major students, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand in the first semester of academic year 2021. They were selected by purposive sampling technique since all of them were taught by the researcher himself via online platform.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was the Online Learning Readiness Scale: (OLRS)" questionnaire adapted from Hung, Chou, Chen & Own (2010), and Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik (2020). There were eighteen statements in the survey: three statements for measuring the students' readiness in terms of Computer/Internet self-efficacy, five statements for measuring the students' self-directed learning, three statements for measuring students' online learning control, four statements for measuring motivation on online learning, and three statements for measuring students' online communication self-efficacy. The five-point Likert type scale was employed for the scoring. The scales consisted of "Strongly Disagree (1)", "Disagree (2)", "Neutral (3)", "Agree (4)", and "Strongly Agree (5)". Moreover, the statement items of the OLRS were translated into Thai version and then were validated to ensure the readability and face validity by three experts. After that, the validated questionnaire was tried out with 32 third year Business English major students and calculated for the reliability.

Data Collection

The data were collected via online survey in Google Form to gather the 5 dimensions of online learning readiness as the variables: self-directed learning, motivation for learning, computer/Internet self-efficacy, learner control, and online communication self-efficacy. All Google Form answers were returned to the researcher within three days.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed in a descriptive quantitative analysis by using SPSS Program. Mean (X) and standard deviation (S.D) were used to investigate the students' online learning readiness. The following criteria were employed for interpretation suggested by Aydın & Tasci (2005, p.250) as follows:

1.00 – 2.59	means	Not ready and needs a lot of improvements
2.60 – 3.39	means	Not ready and needs some improvements
3.40 – 4.19	means	Ready but needs a few improvements
4.20 – 5.00	means	Ready and go ahead

FINDINGS

The online learning readiness of Thai EFL university students which is divided into five dimensions, namely self-directed learning, motivation for learning, computer/Internet self-efficacy, learner control, and online communication self-efficacy is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Online learning readiness of Thai EFL university students

Dimensions	X	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Computer/Internet self-efficacy	4.67	0.64	Ready and go ahead
2. Self-directed learning	3.79	0.79	Ready but needs a few improvements
3. Learner control	3.78	0.72	Ready but needs a few improvements
4. Motivation for online learning	3.58	0.74	Ready but needs a few improvements
5. Online communication self-efficacy	3.71	0.92	Ready but needs a few improvements
Total	**3.91**	**0.82**	**Ready but needs a few improvements**

As shown in Table1, it was found that the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL university students was at 'Ready but needs a few improvements' level (X=3.91, S.D.=0.82). When considering each

dimension, it was found that 'Computer/Internet self-efficacy' was at 'Ready and go ahead' while the rest dimensions were at ''Ready but needs a few improvements.'

The following are the details of each dimension.

Readiness for Online Learning on Computer/Internet Self-efficacy

The findings in terms of computer/internet self-efficacy were displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: **Online learning readiness on computer/Internet self-efficacy**

Statements	X	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I feel confident in performing the basic functions of Microsoft Office programs (MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint).	4.72	0.67	Ready and go ahead
2. I feel confident in my knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning.	4.53	0.62	Ready and go ahead
3. I feel confident in using the Internet (Google, Yahoo) to find or gather information for online learning.	4.75	0.65	Ready and go ahead
Total	**4.67**	**0.64**	**Ready and go ahead**

Table 2 revealed that the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL university students in the dimension of computer/ Internet self-efficacy both in each item and in total was at 'Ready and go ahead' level (X=4.67, S.D.=0.64). The highest mean score was item 3. "I feel confident in using the Internet (Google, Yahoo) to find or gather information for online learning." (X=4.75, S.D.=0.65), followed by item 1. "I feel confident in performing the basic functions of Microsoft Office programs (MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint)." (X=4.72, S.D.=0.67), and item 2. "I feel confident in my knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning." (X=4.53, S.D.=0.62), respectively.

Readiness for Online Learning on Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning is defined as student independence in their learning. The findings on self-directed learning are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: **Online learning readiness on self-directed learning**

Statements	X	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I carry out my own study plan.	3.60	0.82	Ready but needs a few improvements
2. I seek assistance when facing learning problems.	4.08	0.75	Ready but needs a few improvements
3. I manage time well.	3.68	0.84	Ready but needs a few improvements
4. I set up my learning goals.	3.72	0.80	Ready but needs a few improvements
5. I have higher expectations for my learning performance.	3.86	0.78	Ready but needs a few improvements
Total	**3.79**	**0.79**	**Ready but needs a few improvements**

Table 3 displayed that the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL university students in the dimension of self-directed learning both in each item and in total was at 'Ready but needs a few improvements' level (X=3.79, S.D.=0.79). When considering each item, it was found that the highest mean score was item 2. "I seek assistance when facing learning problems." (X=4.08, S.D.=0.75), followed by item 5. "I have higher expectations for my learning performance." (X=4.72, S.D.=0.67), and item 4. "I set up my learning goals." (X=3.72, S.D.=0.80), respectively. In contrast, the lowest mean score was item 1. "I carry out my own study plan." (X=3.60, S.D.=0.82).

Readiness for Online Learning on Learner Control

Online learning requires self-learning control from the students since the teachers cannot control the students directly. The result of the dimension of learner control is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Online learning readiness on learner control

Statements	X	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I can direct my own learning progress.	4.04	0.92	Ready but needs a few improvements
2. I am not distracted by other online activities when learning online (instant messages, Internet surfing).	3.68	0.64	Ready but needs a few improvements
3. I repeated the online instructional materials on the basis of my needs.	3.62	0.68	Ready but needs a few improvements
Total	**3.78**	**0.72**	**Ready but needs a few improvements**

From Table 4, it depicted that the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL university students in the dimension of learner control both in each item and in total was at 'Ready but needs a few improvements' level (X=3.78, S.D.=0.72). The highest mean score was item 1. "I can direct my own learning progress." (X=4.04, S.D.=0.92), followed by item 2. "I am not distracted by other online activities when learning online (instant messages, Internet surfing)." (X=3.68, S.D.=0.64), and item 3. "I repeated the online instructional materials on the basis of my needs." (X=3.62, S.D.=0.68), respectively.

Readiness for Online Learning on Motivation for Online Learning

Motivation is also important as the basis to develop online learning readiness. Table 5 displayed the dimension of motivation for online learning.

Table 5: Online learning readiness on motivation for online learning

Statements	X	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I am open to new ideas.	3.45	0.75	Ready but needs a few improvements
2. I have motivation to learn.	3.86	0.62	Ready but needs a few improvements
3. I improve from my mistakes.	3.58	0.70	Ready but needs a few improvements
4. I like to share my ideas with others.	3.42	0.84	Ready but needs a few improvements
Total	**3.58**	**0.74**	**Ready but needs a few improvements**

Table 5 showed that the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL university students in the dimension of motivation for online learning both in each item and in total was at 'Ready but needs a few improvements' level (X=3.58, S.D.=0.74). The highest mean score was item 2. "I have motivation to learn." (X=3.86, S.D.=0.62), followed by item 3. "I improve from my mistakes." (X=3.65, S.D.=0.70), item 1. "I am open to new ideas." (X=3.45, S.D.=0.75), and item 4. "I like to share my ideas with others." (X=3.42, S.D.=0.84), respectively.

Readiness for Online Learning on Online Communication Self-efficacy

Communication is needed in teaching-learning process both in face to-face learning and online learning. Since online learning utilizes written communication more than oral communication by using an online learning platform, the students have to possess good written online communication. The results of the survey for this dimension are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Online learning readiness on online communication self-efficacy

Statements	X	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I feel confident in using online tools (email, discussion) to communicate with others effectively.	3.74	0.81	Ready but needs a few improvements
2. I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humor) through text.	3.86	0.76	Ready but needs a few improvements
3. I feel confident in posting questions in online discussions.	3.52	1.02	Ready but needs a few improvements
Total	**3.71**	**0.92**	Ready but needs a few improvements

As shown in Table 6, it was found that the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL university students in the dimension of online communication self-efficacy both in each item and in total was at 'Ready but needs a few improvements' level (X=3.71, S.D.=0.92). The highest mean score was item 2. "I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humor) through text." (X=3.86, S.D.=0.76), followed by item 1. "I feel confident in using online tools (email, discussion) to communicate with others effectively." (X=3.74, S.D.=0.81), and item 3. "I feel confident in posting questions in online discussions." (X=3.52, S.D.=1.02), respectively.

In conclusion, it can be concluded that Thai EFL university students are considered ready for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic as mentioned by Aydin & Tasci (2005, p.250) that if the mean score is or higher than 3.40 from 5.00.

DISCUSSION

The findings from OLRS (online learning readiness scale) survey questionnaire showed that the total mean score was 3.91 from 5.00. It means that it was higher than the expected level of readiness suggested by Aydın & Tasci (2005, p.250) in which Thai EFL university students are considered ready for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic if the mean score is or higher than 3.40 from 5.00. This can be considered that the readiness for online learning of Thai EFL University students was in the level of "ready but needs a few improvements". This could be explained that Thai EFL University students had experiences with the online learning in 2020 academic year so that they have to prepare all things related to their learning in order to gain more knowledge and expect to get the good grades in each course studied. This finding is similar to Gigdem & Ozturk (2016), Buzdar, Ali & Tariq (2016), and Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik (2020) who stated that the students are ready to study via online learning.

Furthermore, the findings are described and discussed in detail according to the five dimensions of online learning readiness namely, computer/Internet self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, motivation for online learning, self-efficacy of the computer and internet use, and online communication self-efficacy as follows:

Readiness for Online Learning on Computer/Internet Self-efficacy

It was found that the mean score for the dimension of computer/ Internet self-efficacy both in each item and in total was at 'Ready and go ahead' level. In addition, the mean scores of all three survey items were higher than the expect level of readiness as proposed by Aydın & Tasci (2005, p.250). That means Thai EFL University students had enough computer and Internet self-efficacy to undergo online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. This could be said that Thai EFL University students might get accustomed to technology and the Internet since they grow up in a technology era that would help

them to deal with online learning. Since computer and Internet are not the new things, Thai EFL university students may feel confident to use them in learning. Accordingly, the high-level of computer and Internet self-efficacy would help them to utilize technology and improve their online learning performance (Teh, Chong, Yong & Yew, 2010; Teo & Koh, 2010; Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik, 2020). The finding is in line with Hung, Chou, Chen & Own (2010) who found that computer/Internet self-efficacy obtained the highest mean score which indicated the students are ready to learn via online.

Readiness for Online Learning on Self-directed Learning

The findings revealed that the mean score for the dimension of self-directed learning of Thai EFL university students was at 'Ready but needs a few improvements' level. It can be concluded that all items pass the expected level of readiness. Regarding the mean score of the self-directed learning dimension, it can be said that the Thai EFL university students were ready for online learning. However, if it was seen separately, their readiness in planning their own study still needed improvement. Furthermore, to be considered as high self-directed learning, students should be able to plan their study and set their learning goals, monitor their understanding and time (Jansen, Leeuwen, Janssen, Kester & Kalz, 2017), and have high expectation toward their learning outcomes (Kırmızı, 2015).

Readiness for Online Learning on Learner Control

The findings showed that Thai EFL university students were ready to face online learning in the dimension of learner control. In addition, the mean score for this dimension was at 'Ready but needs a few improvements' level, therefore, it could be concluded that Thai EFL university students generally could direct their own learning. That is, Thai EFL university students had good learner control to ignore the distractions in online learning such as social media, electronic games, MP3 music, and other not relevant sites and materials, by contrast, they remained focus on the learning (Taylor, 2002; Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik, 2020). Besides, the learning materials were sometimes hard to be understood and need to be comprehended repeatedly. Related to this, based on the findings, Thai EFL university students had enough control to repeat the learning materials; that means, Thai EFL university students repeated the material when they did not understand it yet. This finding is consistent with Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik (2020) who mentioned that the students repeated the materials until they understand when they study via online platform.

Readiness for Online Learning on Motivation for Online Learning

The findings showed that the mean scores of all items of motivation for online learning passed the expected mean score of online learning readiness (X=3.40; as suggested by Aydın & Tasci, 2005, p.250) with the overall mean score was 3.58. This can be said that Thai EFL university students were ready to learn via online platform. However, the mean score was the lowest mean score compared with the other four dimensions. This maybe because learning via online is a new for them and they are afraid that the connection via the Internet may not be stable if they share more ideas and opinions with lecturers and friends. As a result, the mean score of each item was not high.

Nevertheless, if it was seen from the total mean score of motivation for online learning, it could be said that the students possessed high motivation for online learning in item 2. "I have motivation to learn." This may explained that they love to study and set the goal to graduate and obtain the degree; therefore, the online learning can motivate them to study and try to master the teaching materials from the lecturers. As mentioned by Widjaja & Chen (2017), the high motivation for online learning would encourage students to actively participate in online learning.

Readiness for Online Learning on Online Communication Self-efficacy

The findings showed that the mean mean of the online communication self-efficacy dimension was 3.71. It can be concluded that all items pass the expected level of readiness. This means that Thai EFL university students already passed the standard of readiness in using online tools (email, discussion) to communicate with others. This can be explained that Thai EFL university students are good in utilizing the online tools to have effective communication. Additionally, they are confident to use text to express themselves and speak through text. They even feel more confident to communicate via text than face-to-face. However, even though the students were ready in terms of online communication in general, some students might avoid being involved in communication due to their personality. This is consistent with Dwiyanti, Pratama & Manik (2020) who pointed out some students may not communicate with their teachers and friends because of their personality.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the level of Thai EFL university students' online learning readiness according the five dimensions including computer/Internet self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, motivation for online learning, self-efficacy of the computer and Internet use, and online communication self-efficacy. The result showed that generally, Thai EFL university students were ready for online learning during Covid-19 pandemic, in which the mean score at 3.91 passed the expected mean score of online learning readiness and was in the level of "ready but needs a few improvements". Specifically, the mean score of four dimensions also passed the expected mean score of readiness and in the level of "ready but needs a few improvements". However, the dimension of computer/Internet self-efficacy was at the level of "Ready and go ahead". The findings provide important implications for Thai EFL university lecturers when it comes to online learning and teaching in a similar context. Also, the findings can help the lecturers design and develop the teaching and learning activities to motivate the students to learn more via online platforms.

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