

# Enhancing English Listening Skills through Websites Practicing: A Study of Thai EFL University Students

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**Abstract.** This paper presents the qualitative study of the employment of websites to practice English listening skills of students. The samples of this study were the students majoring in English, Faculty of Education at Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University, Chachoengsao, Thailand. The open-ended questionnaire and interview were used to collect the data. The study reported that the students had a positive attitude toward the use of the websites for practicing listening skills because of many advantages such as the websites offer unlimited opportunities to learn and practice their listening skill as if they are in the real situation with native speakers and these opportunities provided them more new English vocabularies. Moreover, it can help them to create autonomous learning strategies. It was also found that it was so convenient when using the websites for practicing listening skills outside classroom and from book, anywhere and anytime. However, the students had a problem with the native speaker accent so they could not understand the conversation. In addition, lacking of computer skill and technical problems were found.

**Keywords:** English Listening Skills, Practice English Listening Skills Through the Websites.

## 1. Introduction

It is well known that listening comprehension plays an important role in foreign language teaching. Listening is assuming a more and more important place in foreign language teaching and learning process. Yet the present situation is far from satisfactory. Students are still frustrated and helpless against listening (Yang, 2005). Pierce (1998) stated that listening as an interactive, not passive process that the students needed to reply much effort and practice. He explained that listening involved actively perceiving and constructing from a stream of sound. In order to do well in listening, the listeners must have sufficient knowledge of the language. Research has demonstrated that adults spend 40-50% with listening, 25-30% with speaking, 11-16% with reading, and about 9% with writing (Vandergrift, 2005).

Listening is often used in together with the other skills of speaking, reading and writing. It is not only a skill area in language performance, but also a critical means of acquiring a second language. It helps students to acquire good speaking habits as a result of the spoken English they have absorbed, and helps them to improve their pronunciation. Listening texts often provide excellent examples of functions such as apologizing, inviting and refusing. The process of listening, especially the bottoms-up and top-down model, the schema-building activities are also applicable to reading. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, applied linguistics recognized that listening was the primary channel by which the students gained access to second language data, and that it therefore served as the trigger for acquisition (Rost, 2001).

During the decades, developments in education, linguistics and sociology have led to the powerful theories of the nature of language comprehension and the active interest in the role of listening comprehension in second language acquisition. There are many activities to practice listening through internet or websites such as watching educational English programs on TV, enjoying a radio station, or chatting with foreigners. It can be said that the Internet or websites can provide the opportunities to practice their English listening skills and it is a tool that offers powerful possibilities for improving their learning.

Many researchers attempted to study the ways of learning via the web. Ru-Si and Chin-Chung (2007) investigated students' attitudes toward learning via the web of 1,866 Taiwanese university students by using an online survey. The results showed that the students had a positive attitude on the dimension of access to Internet technology for learning. Ahmed and Abdulaziz (2006) examined 47 University of Wisconsin-La Crosse students' performance on the Use of Internet in learning. This study reported that students had a positive attitude toward learning via Internet and the use of the web as a supplement to classroom learning

and as a long distance instructional medium was an ideal way to improve learning and increase access to Education. Aytakin (2004) studied on classroom learning towards Internet. 73 graduate and postgraduate students in Eastern Mediterranean University were explored and the result showed that high percentages concentrated on positive and consciousness about internet. This study showed that there was a consciousness about effects and importance of internet by having tendency to apply the consciousness or willingness of new technological style.

Hong, Ridzuan, and Kuek (2003) studied the success of a technology and Internet enriched teaching and learning environment in molding positive attitudes among students toward using the Internet for learning at a university in Malaysia. The findings indicated that students had a positive attitude toward using the Internet as a learning tool and viewed the learning environment as supportive of using the Internet for learning. Moreover the students with better basic Internet skills and who viewed the learning environment as promoting the use of the Internet favored using the Internet for learning. Furthermore, Sanders and Morrison-Shetlar (2001) explored the relationship between student attitudes toward web-enhanced instruction and variables such as sex, race, age, year in school, computer experience, and learning styles. The study reported positive effect of the Web-component on student learning. It was also found that age, race, year in school, computer experience, and learning styles did not affect student use of the web.

As the important of listening skills and the useful of learning via website and Internet in the age of technological education are mentioned above, therefore, this study is examined to explore both the students' attitudes about the advantages and their problem on the websites employment for practicing English listening skills in order to succeed in their English learning

## **2. Methodology**

The samples of this study were 24 fourth-year students majoring in English, Faculty of Education who enrolled in the Introduction to Multimedia in the English Classroom course in the first semester, academic year 2011 at Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University, Chachoengsao, Thailand. The open-ended questionnaire and interview were used to collect the students' feelings, opinions, comments, strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions about the website employment to practice English listening skills. The websites were [www.esl-lab.com](http://www.esl-lab.com), [www.ello.org](http://www.ello.org), <http://esl.about.com>, [www.manythings.org](http://www.manythings.org), [www.englishclub.com/listening](http://www.englishclub.com/listening), [www.carolinebrownlisteninglessons.com](http://www.carolinebrownlisteninglessons.com), and [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

Data collection was entirely conducted within the study where the entire time-frame was 14 weeks. It took an hour per student a week in the practice hours of the Introduction to Multimedia in the English Classroom course. Five students were selected for in-depth interview. The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire and the interview was analyzed by the process of content analysis.

## **3. Findings and Discussion**

### **3.1. The Students' Point of View about the Advantages on the Websites Employment for Practicing English Listening Skills**

Most students agreed that using websites for practicing listening skills can help them improve not only their listening skills, but also other skills as well, and it can help them to create autonomous learning strategies. Another one it is convenient for them when using the websites for practicing listening skills outside classroom and from book, anywhere and anytime.

According to the questionnaire and interview results, it was found that all students mentioned about advantages into three points. Firstly, the use of website is convenient for them to practice listening skills. Many websites provide various topics and students can choose the topics they prefer and or those related to the topics they are studying in English class. They also stated that it saved time and was convenient. They don't need to find materials for practicing listening skills from library or book stores. Many informants said they can use the websites in part time or in their free time at library, house, or dormitory and Internet café. These are quite convenient and support time and place for them.

Secondly, the students find their suitable learning strategies to solve some problems by themselves. Students can easily repeat listening materials again and again until they finally get information about

listening materials and with the help of scripts, students can find out where are the problems when they listen to those materials. Outside classroom students can use the websites for practicing listening skills to prepare themselves for listening test of their English class. This is quite helpful to create autonomous learning environment.

Finally, the use of websites enhances English skills for students. Most students reported that using the websites can help them improve English listening skills. Moreover they thought that this kind of practicing listening skills enhanced them not only listening skills, but also they could improve other skills while they listened through websites, such as pronunciation, speaking, reading, vocabulary learning. During the time they listened to the native speakers' sound, they also tried to follow and repeat the sound, in order to familiar with pronunciation, native accent and intonation, and they spoke better after then. When they looked at the sound script, they knew new words and vocabularies as well.

### **3.2. The Students' Problem on the Websites Employment for Practicing English Listening Skills**

The problems when using the websites to practice listening skills were technical problems, the Internet connection was quite slow, the processes and instruction of the websites are complicated. Some students did not have their own personal computers. Somebody had a lot of schedules to do, so it was limitation for them to get good chance to practice listening skills outside classroom. Another problem was students' background knowledge. Students didn't know some new words, they were unable to get used to the native speakers' intonation and pronunciation. These are quite difficult for them to improve their listening skills by the use of websites.

According to the students' answers from questionnaire and interview part, it is found that there are three main points that they revealed about their problems when using the websites for practicing listening skills. The first problem of their practicing listening skill on the websites is their personal limitation. Some of the students did not have their own personal computers, they either could not practice outside classroom, or go somewhere, such as library, computer lab room, English Language Learning Center, or Internet cafe, but from the questionnaire, the students stated that they rarely went to these places for that. Although many students had their personal computer, someone reported that they didn't use the websites for practicing listening skills outside classroom because they had a lot of plans to do, such as taking courses, joining university activities like clubs and sports, and doing part time job. Such those students lose many chances because of their limitation.

Secondly, some of students reported they didn't think that using websites could improve their listening skills since they have little background knowledge. The students claimed that while they were practicing and listening to the native voice on the websites, they felt sometimes the speed of listening materials was too fast and they could not get the information. They could not catch the words or sentences because they were unable to get used to the speakers' intonation and pronunciation. Difficulty of vocabularies, phrases and words was also their problems to find the meaning. In this case they stated that they need teacher to explain and suggest when they had the problems while they used the websites. Another problem was the technical problems. Some websites were quite slow, it took time to wait to open or download listening materials. Some websites were quite complicated to use and they could not operated by themselves. A few students said they felt using websites was quite complicated and finally they will give it up. That is to say, those students needed someone like a teacher or their friends help them to choose suitable websites or guided them how to choose suitable materials for practicing listening, did it step by step.

## **4. Conclusion**

According to the data which was got from students' investigation, using websites for practicing listening could be a good assistance to improve students' language learning ability. Like Robin (2007) mentioned, effectively use of Internet website resources, such as easily repeatable video clips, captions, and even translated scripts will bring a wider variety of input at the proper level for a broader range of learning styles than could possibly be made available in any pre-packaged closed-track program. The findings of this study had significant implications on the appropriateness of relying on websites assisted language learning and

teaching process. Teachers and higher education institutions should focus on those websites usefulness and ease of use them for language learning and teaching.

The study revealed four major critical factors for the perceived usefulness of websites assisted language teaching and learning. Firstly, the coursework interactivity, course materials could be available electronically in different formats via the website and students could easily go and practice any of them. Those websites already included many other links to related materials and websites that could help to get the information on their topics. Secondly, students enjoyed practicing as well, because those websites can provide them with on-line components such as animations and multimedia materials. Next factor, it is easier to make study course material by having related study material available anytime anywhere, facilitating student–student and student–teacher communications. The last factor was to increase the students’ productivity and effectiveness in learning. This factor was a result of enabling students to finish their practicing quickly and achieving their objectives efficiently using the tools available on the websites.

New technologies have forced teachers to think about their roles in teaching with computers. And nowadays, websites through Internet grow rapidly, teachers began to see computers more as “active partners” than “passive assistants” (Debski and Gruba, 1999). However, Levy (1997) and Fernandez (2001) discussed that teacher is the important person who decide how the class should be conducted, not the computers, not the Internet. Therefore, teacher is not the only source of knowledge but also the person who enlighten students to succeed in their learning.

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