The Use of Websites for Practicing Listening Skills of Undergraduate Students

A Case Study at Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand

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Abstract: It is well known that listening comprehension plays a very important role in foreign language teaching, especially with young learners (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Brewster, 1994; Brown, 1986, 1989; Grabielatos, 1995; Phillips, 1993; Rost, 1990; Shorrocks, 1994). 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). Many of the activities of our contemporary society are based on information (and possible operations) made available through the World Wide Web. Practical information, images, presentations, sale catalogues, booking and reservations, selling and buying are exchanged, purchased, activated through the web (or find their vehicle in the web). The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of websites for practicing listening skills of undergraduate students. To explore students' views towards using websites for practicing their listening skills in English II course at Suranaree University of Technology

Keywords: Listening, Websites, View

I. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that listening comprehension plays a key role in foreign language teaching, especially with young learners (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Brewster, 1994; Brown, 1986, 1989; Grabielatos, 1995; Phillips, 1993; Rost, 1990; Shorrocks, 1994). 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)

Many of the activities of our contemporary society are based on information (and possible operations) made available through the World Wide Web. Practical information, images, presentations, sale catalogues, booking and reservations, selling

and buying are exchanged, purchased, activated through the web (or find their vehicle in the web).

The World Wide Web (WWW) is the future in teaching and learning. Listening in language learning has undergone several important stages, from being assumed that acquisition through exposure but not really taught (Richard, 2002) to be viewed as a primary vehicle for language learning (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 such as watching educational English programs on TV, going to the English Corner, running a campus broadcasting station, joining in an English Summer Camp, traveling to English speaking countries, chatting with foreigners via the Internet are all helpful ways to practice listening skills.

II. RESEARCH PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of websites for practicing listening skills of undergraduate students. To explore students' views towards using websites for practicing their listening skills in English II course at Suranaree University of Technology, two research objectives are mentioned here:

1. To investigate students' views about the advantages of the use of websites to practice listening and

2. To investigate their problems when using websites for practicing listening skills in English II course at Suranaree University of Technology.

And investigations here attempt to answer these questions:

1. What are the students' points of views about the advantages of the use of websites for practicing listening skills?

2. What are the students' problems when using websites for practicing listening skills?

III. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

This study involves with the concepts and researches as the following

Attitudes/Views

Attitudes consist of satisfactions and dissatisfactions and the core of likes or dislikes for certain people, groups, situations, objects, and intangible ideas. These

cognitions are rooted in strong emotions and are stated in evaluative terms—"good", "bad", "desirable"," undesirable". (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1965)

Attitudes have generally been regarded as either mental readiness or implicit predispositions that exert some general and consistent influence on fairly large class of evaluative response. Attitudes are thus internal, private events whose existence we infer from our own introspection or from some from behavioral evidence we infer from our own introspection or from some from of behavioral evidence when they are expressed overtly in word or deed. A verbalized attitude is called an opinion. (Hovland & Rosennberg, 1960)

There are three components to study attitudes change:

1. The affective component consists of a person's evaluation of, liking of, or emotional response to some object or person.

2. The cognitive component has been conceptualized as a person's beliefs about, or factual knowledge of, the object or person.

3. The behavior component involves the person's overt behavior directed toward the object or person.

The attitudinal component refers to the person's attitude toward performing the behavior under consideration. Investigators have defined attitude in many different ways. To access a person's attitude toward a behavior, we could use any of the standard scaling procedures.

Vorapongpaiboon (2002) stated that the Likert scale is the most popular measurement as it is easy to measure attitudes. The Likert scale is made up of a series of opinion statements about some issue. Like the Thursonte scale, a person's attitude is measured by asking him or her to indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement within each item. This is done by having the person rate each item on a five-point scale of response (strongly agrees, agree undecided, disagree, strongly disagree). A person's attitude score is the sum of his or her individual ratings. Likert assumes that each statement that is used in the scale is a linear function of the same attitude dimension. This assumption is the basis for the operation of adding up a person's individual score or summating the ratings, to put it more formally to obtain the final score.

Likert's method measures the extent of the respondent's agreement with each item. In this method, a large number of opinion statements on given topic are collected, but each one is phrased in such a way that it can be answered on a 5 point rating sale. The score for the positive statement must be rated by score ranking as strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1.

Negative statements should be measured by score ranking as strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1.

Internet and Website.

Nowadays, information technology is considered very important and almost essential to a person's career. For example, any ordinary person can just touch the button and click to search for any kind of information. Using the Internet allows one to spread credible messages or knowledge, look for a job, chat with new friends, shop, read the news, listen to international radio broadcasting, or even travel around the world. Therefore, using the Internet has become a part of the daily lives of the people. Technological developments have allowed the computer to provide a new interactive means of overcoming time and distance to reach users (Vorapongpaiboon, 2002).

People call the Internet is an electronic highway that is a way to ship information one place to another. The Internet is composed of many various computers and computer networks, publicly or privately owned.

The Internet is the largest, the most powerful computer network in the world. It encompasses 1.3 million computers with Internet addresses that are used by up to 30 million people in more than fifty countries.

Dominick (1998) further described the Internet as a network of computer networks. People can think of it as a system that combines computers from all over the world into one big computer that can operate from own personal computer. Some computers are run by government agencies, some are run by universities, some by libraries, some by school systems, some by businesses, and so on. The connections between these networks can be ordinary phone lines, microwaves, optical fibers, or wires built specially for this purpose. So when people search for information, send mail, or chat online, several different networks may handle messages.

Website is a compilation of media and present news and entertainment to users. Websites grow up rapidly because it is easy to operate and update. Websites have several of tradition electronic mail Ebersol (1999, as cited in Thanasinlapakul, 2002).

The three major types of internet services are communication, information retrieval and the World Wide Web. The communication services include electronic mail, usenet, newsgroup, chatting, telnet, Internet telephony and Internet fax. Information retrieval services include gophers, wais, file transfer protocol and veronica. The World Wide Web includes electronic commerce, information search and retrieval. (Turban, Rainer & Potter, 2001)

Definition and the Importance of Listening Skills

Listening is arguably the most important skill required for obtaining comprehensible input in one's first and any subsequent languages. It is a pervasive communicative event: we listen considerably more than we read, write, or speak (Decker, 2004; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Wilt, 1950, cited in Hysop & Tone, 1988).

Underwood (1989) discussed the importance of listening and how English learners need to listen to English in different situations and for different purposes in their real life, depending on each situation. Pierce (1998) stated that listening as an interactive, not passive process that the students need to reply much effort and practice. He explained that listening involves 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. The listening is not a passive skill but an interactive process, which requires learners to have adequate knowledge of the language to decode the message, and the ability to apply different strategies.

Listening in language learning has undergone several important stages, from being assumed acquisition through exposure but not really taught (Richard, 2002) to be viewed as a primary vehicle for language learning (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. The following discussion elaborates on the topic from two aspects, namely, the relationship between listening and other language skills, and the practice of comprehensible input theory in listening.

In daily communication, listening plays an important role. Research has demonstrated that adults spend 40-50% of communication with listening, 25-30% speaking, 11-16% reading, and about 9% writing (Vandergrift, 1999). Listening, the most widely used language skill, is often used in conjunction 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. Listening provides opportunities to hear voices other than the teachers', enables students to acquire good speaking habits as a result of the spoken English they have absorbed, and helps to improve their pronunciation. Listening texts often provide excellent examples of functions such as apologizing, inviting and refusing. The process of listening, especially the bottom-up and top-down model, and 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 learner gained access to L2 data, and that it therefore served as the trigger for acquisition (Rost, 2001).

According to Abrams (1986), there are two main levels of listening involvement for native speakers: passive level and active level. About passive level,

no reaction is required on the part of the listener. For example, when one listens to a conversation in which one is not directly involved or listens to music merely for pleasure. Active level requires more involvement than the first one. The listener has to react to what is said to him in different ways depending on the purpose.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS DESIGN

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of websites for practicing listening skills of undergraduate students.

The sample was purposively selected from students who enrolled on English II course in the 3rd trimester of academic year 2007 at Suranaree University of Technology. Data collection was entirely conducted within the study where the entire time-frame was 4 weeks. It took 50 minutes per student a week in the practice hours of English II course. To collect the data on the students' feelings, opinions, comments, strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions to the use of the websites for practicing listening skills, 40 students were asked to complete the open-ended questionnaire and 5 students were selected for in-depth semi-structured interview.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The first step for data analysis is to translate the questionnaire answers from Thai to English and transcribe the interview part, and also did translation into Thai, and then the researchers coded each answer in order to group them into clearer categories, so that based on the research questions. Second step the researchers classified the main categories into sub-categories, and got them three in each category. The main categories are depended on what the research questions are, thus the two categories were found:

1) Advantages of the use of websites for practicing listening skills;

2) Students' problems when using websites for practicing listening skills.

From the results, students' information was coded and classified into each category and there were three sub-categories found in each group.

According to the first category 'the advantages of the use of websites for practicing listening skills', the sub-categories are:

1) Convenience of the use of websites for practicing listening skills;

2) Support autonomous learning;

3) Enhance listening and other English skills.

The second category 'the students' problems when using websites for practicing listening skills, the sub-categories are:

1) Personal limitation;

2) Background knowledge;

3) Technical problems.

V. RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

According to students' answer from questionnaire and interview, researchers got information from their points of view about using websites to improve their listening skills. The results from data analysis can be responded to the two research questions;

To the research question 1, "What are the students' points of view about advantages of the use of websites to practice listening skill?", nearly all of 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, researchers found all informants mentioned about advantages into 3 points. Firstly the use of website is convenient for them to practice listening skills. The students, who often surf the Internet outside classroom state that the use of website is convenient for them to practice English listening skills.   Many websites provide various topics and they can choose the topics they prefer and or those related to the topics they are studying in English class. This result agrees to the study of Kentera (2007), in the article mentions that the use of Internet in classroom making unites more interesting, students will get to see whatever around the world, just type some words and with the click, many topics will display on the screen. And also it is stated that if the students are familiarized with the Net, they will start using the websites to find their personal interest and needs.   They also save the teacher's times.   This statement is agreed to the result of our study. The informants 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 for them. Hong, Ridzuan&M (2003) found also in their study that University of Malaysia Sarawak put some effort to promote and to encourage students to use the Internet as their leisure to support their learning activities, and they were quite successful.

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, this result quite agrees to the Improving Listening Skills; Listening Tips suggested by Beare on the website About.com; English as 2nd language. His advices strategies for listening, one is repeating. People who give some information, they will probably repeat the information, giving the listeners a second, third or fourth chance to make them understand what they have said. This means repeating supports listeners to know ideas or details better. 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 informants reported using the websites help them improve English listening skills. Rather than that they thought 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 speak better after then. When they looked at the sound script, they know new words and vocabularies as well. The study of Kentera (2007) was found that practicing English skills through websites expands students' vocabularies with brainstorming several terms; such as driving condition, travel, car rental, and other things.

According to the findings, it was found that the student had a good view to use the Website for practicing listening skill. Isman (2004) studied the refection of the students' attitudes towards internet. The study found that students have positive tendency the useful and easy reflections of internet. This examine that there is a consciousness about effects and importance of internet by having tendency to apply the consciousness or willingness of new technological style, because students education levels are convenient to apply and use internet otherwise they can not reach the competitive environment.

To the research question 2 "What are the students' problems when using websites for practicing listening skills?", disadvantages and problems when using websites to practice listening skills are technical problems, the Internet connection is quite slow, the processes and instruction of the websites are complicated. Some students do not have their own personal computers. Somebody had a lot of schedules to do, so it is limitation for them to get good chance to practice listening skills outside classroom. And another problem is 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 informants' answers from questionnaire and interview part, it is found that there are three main points that the informants revealed about their problems when using the websites for practicing listening skills. The first problem students reported that practicing listening skill on the websites is their personal limitation. Some of the students do not have their own personal computers; they either cannot practice outside classroom, or go somewhere, such as library, computer lab room, English Language Resource Unit (ELRU), or Internet café. Although many students have their personal computer, somebody reported that they didn't use the websites for practicing listening skills outside classroom because they have 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, here there are still some of the students reported they didn't think using websites can 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 cannot catch the words or sentences because they were unable to get used to the speakers' intonation and pronunciation. Difficulty of vocabularies, phrases and words is also their problems to find the meaning. In this case they stated that they need guiders to explain and suggest when they have the problems while they use the websites.

Another very important issue is the technical problems. Some websites are quite slow, it takes time to wait to open or download listening materials. Some websites are quite complicated to use and they cannot operated by themselves. And this can cause students' dysphoria. A few students said they feel using websites is quite complicated and finally they will give it up. That is to say, those students need some guiders like a teacher, and or their friends help them to choose suitable websites or guide them how to choose suitable materials for practicing listening, do it step by step.

VI. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTION

VI.1. IMPICATIONS

According to those data which was got from students' investigation, using websites for practicing listening can be a good assistance for students to improve their 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 have 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. Hong, Ridzuan & M also stated, University of Malaysia Sarawak achieved the objectives of promoting the use of the Internet for teaching and learning process. Students had positive attitudes toward using the Internet as learning tool, adequate basic knowledge of the Internet, and viewed the learning environment as supportive of using the Internet for learning.

After conducting the research it was found there were four major critical factors for the perceived usefulness of websites assisted language teaching and learning. The first of these is the course work interactivity. Course materials could be available electronically in different formats via the website and students can easily go and practice any of them. Those websites already include many other links to related materials and websites that widen students' exposure to current information on their topics.

The Second usefulness factor is to enable students to accomplish their listening practicing quickly, because those websites can provide them with on-line components such as animations and multimedia materials.

The third factor is to make study course material easier by having related study material available anytime anywhere, facilitating student–student and student–teacher communications.

The last factor is to increase the students' productivity and effectiveness. This factor is a result of enabling students to finish their practicing quickly and achieving their objectives efficiently using the tools available on the website.

VI.2. SUGGESTIONS

New technologies have forced teachers to reconsider 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 & Gruba, 1999). However, it is teachers who decide how the class should be conducted, not the computers, not the Internet. In other words, it is necessary to decide whether computers should be used, in which teachers may play an important role for guiding students to use websites properly (Levy, 1997; Fernandez, 2001). Teachers are not the

only source of knowledge. With the rise of Internet, learners can have easy and free access to the "unprecedented amount of authentic materials as well as get into direct contact with global peers across cultures." (Huang, 2006: 242).

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations of this study are to be pointed out for the further research in this field.

The first limitation of the study is that it is quite restricted since only 90 students involved in this questionnaire and the students are limited in classes with the researchers at Suranaree University of Technology. Therefore a same study with a larger sample of more proficiency levels is necessary to be carried out to get more trustworthy findings.

The second limitation of the study is that if the investigation had been extended to students who are not just from Suranaree University of Technology, the result of the study would be generalizable to a broader scope instead of confined to a single level. And if the students which have been interviewed had been extended more than 5, the result of this study would be more convincing.

The third limitation of the study is the Websites. Researchers only provide students 4 websites, because of time-constraining; we can not go deeper with those websites and offer them other new ones for practicing. If the websites we provided were more than 4, the result of this study would be more generalizable.

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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

PART ONE   PERSONAL INFORMATION

Please tick the suitable options

Your Age is	17 – 20☐	21 – 24☐	25 – 28☐
Your Gender	Male ☐		Female ☐
Your Major is ……………………………..			

PART TWO QUESTIONS

Please give details to each question, thank you!

1. Do you often surf the Internet outside classroom? How often do you use the Internet for practicing listening per week?

2. What do you think about using Websites to practice listening skills?

3. Do you know some Websites for practicing listening skills? If yes, please list them here.

4. When you use Websites to practice your listening, have you ever experienced some problems? If yes, what are they?

5. If there are some problems during you use Websites to practice your listening, how will you deal with it?

6. When you study or practice listening skills at the Websites, can you learn by yourself without anybody's help?

7. Do you like to go to the websites for practicing your listening skills?

8. In your points of views, what are the advantages and disadvantages of practicing listening through Websites?

   Advantages:

   Disadvantages:

This questionnaire is used to collect data of
your opinions about using Websites
for practicing listening skills

Thank you for your cooperation!

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW

Interview Questions

1. Why did you practice listening skills on the websites only once or twice a week?

2. Why do you like to practice listening skills on the websites?

3. You reported in the questionnaire practicing listening skills on the websites was good. What is it good?

4. You reported that practicing listening skills on the websites is useful and you gained more knowledge, what benefits and what kind of knowledge have you got?

5. If there are some problems during you use Websites to practice your listening, how will you deal with it?

6. Why do you think you need somebody help when you use the websites to practice your listening skills?

7. Who did you ask for help when you had any problems during you practice listening skills on the websites?

8. Do you like to use Websites for practicing the listening skills? In your points of views, what are the advantages and disadvantages of practicing listening through Websites?

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