Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of a Web-Based Online Practice during a Fundamental English Language Course for Undergraduate Students

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Article Information	Abstract
Article History:	This research investigates teachers' attitudes towards the use of a web-based
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Accepted: December 20, 2019	Choice Online Practice, a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) from Smart
Available online:	Choice 3rd Edition coursebook, published by Oxford University Press,
December 30, 2019	was presented to undergraduate students to assess students after
	learning LNG 101 from the usual classroom. In-depth interviews were
	conducted with ten English teachers at King Mongkut's University of
Keywords:	Technology Thonburi (KUMTT) to explore teachers' attitudes after 13
Advantages and	weeks of the features of Smart Choice Online Practice from the teaching
disadvantages of	practice, focusing on the functions and the attitudes towards the use of
online practice,	Smart Choice Online Practice, including the advantages and disadvantages
Online practice, VLE or LMS,	of using the Smart Choice online practice, and the teachers' attitudes of
Teachers' attitudes	using the Smart Choice Online Practice. The findings revealed Teachers'
	positive attitudes towards the use of the Smart Choice online practice
	and prolong the use of Smart Choice Online Practice for the future course.

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching with technology is fast-growing trends. The integration between education and technologies has facilitated the communication between students and teachers, but at the same time, it raised new challenges for both teachers and students to develop their technological skills. Using technology such as mobile phones and other forms of technology could be embedded within the cultures of children and young people, providing a strong illustration of resources which can drive the learning endeavour of the students (Sutherland, Robertson and John, 2009). One of the fast-growing trends of using technology nowadays is online practice, which is a part of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) or Learning Management Systems (LMS), a technological based programme designed to manage, track and administer learning as well as creating courses, registering students and monitoring the progress (Lewis, 2017). It is not always the case that VLE and LMS are the same. Please be careful on the term

used. This system helps students' online learning such as providing course information, learning resources, online communication or online courses (Clarke, 2008). Bringing together a number of online resources, a website generally features a forum for teachers and students to communicate, provides ready-to-use multimedia resources (audios, videos, documents, etc.), or provide a gradebook that shows students' progress, automated exercise. Online practice has become a major selection to integrate in language learning (Scrivener, 2015).

Another important integration of the online practice in a language classroom is to facilitate time management. The online exercise can support teachers and students to plan their lives. The course structures and the learners can share the coordination to complete the course. The online practice also provides responsibility of the students. It produces teachers and students to concern their own personal objectives with planning and deadlines, as scheduled by the teacher. Additionally, the study of LMS has become significant in ELT. Kasim and Kalid (2016) examined choosing the right learning management system (LMS) for the higher education institution context in a Malaysian University. This systematic review found that the lecturer chose the right platform according to its the specification and needs of the users. The platform had to be up-to-date. Moodle, one of a popular free and open-source learning management system became the best selection because of its wide range of functions that met the students' needs and teacher requirements, such as up-to-date resources and user-friendly. At this point, online practice motivates the learners to overcome their goals and the teachers to introduce new styles of teaching the language through technology. As shown in Vymetalkova and Milkova (2019) who studied about the use of MyEnglishLab, one of the online practice from Pearson Education, presenting that this learning model This blended learning model provides important factors through new learning environment and a well-designed course. Using MyEnglishLab engaged students to learn more skills, including grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening. And, it promoted possibilities of individualised practice, self-managed practice and time-independency. As the online practice is an optional tool used in the classroom, it can help the learner learn a language, boost up independent learning, provide extra and relevant contents and provide ready-to-use resources, all of which is supported by Okada, Sakamoto and Suguira's works in 2014 which stated that real-time feedback can impact students' learning and can manage a class based on students' needs and what they want to learn.

With multiple functions, online practice is becoming an alternative way of learning language. The online practice additionally brings assessment into the classroom along with ELT materials, especially course books which are offering a different platform. Regarding benefits, online practice has wide selections and names. Created by ELT publishers, the following names are examples of online practice which have been widely used among universities in Thailand. They are A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) where it provides learning materials or extra exercises, learning assessment and communication tools for students to independently study on their own at their own pace.

At King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), the online practice has been integrated for a few years: Oxford Learn from Speak Now (Oxford University Press) and Smart Choice Online Practice from Smart Choice (Oxford University Press). In the 2018 academic

year, LNG 101 was the first English course that all KMUTT students had to enrol in at their first year of study. Based on the course book, Smart Choice, the online practice required progressive marks for students to complete - 10% for the Smart Choice Online Practice and 3% for Smart Choice On the Move. The length of the online practice expended was one semester and the deadline was set two weeks before the semester ended. Students had to complete activities in six units in both Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move. This study will focus on the teachers' attitudes towards the use of online practice to explore the attitudes of using online practice and how the teachers facilitated the classroom.

The chosen material which provides the online practice is Smart Choice 3rd Edition from Oxford University Press. The online practice offers two different platform; Smart Choice Online Practice (Computer-based platform) and Smart Choice On the Move (mobile phone platform). In Smart Choice Online Practice, there are ten interactive learning activities, including vocabulary, grammar, listening and speaking. In each activity, there are five to six items of the exercise to complete. Students can complete each exercise as many times as they wish, depending on the number of attempts set by the teachers. When the attempts are completed and students submit the exercise, they will be able to see the answers and their scores, but they cannot redo the exercise.

There are six functions in the teacher webpage. The Manage Classes function is for checking students' names and attendances. The Reports function is for checking students' scores and progress. The Activities and Resources function is for the online practice exercises and extra resources provided. The Add Level function is for adding more levels of the Smart Choice course book. Email function is for sending emails to students in each class. And, Discussion Board function is for setting up forums or threads to have conversation with the students. At the end of the course, the teacher will be able to export students' scores from the gradebook function, providing total scores, numbers of activity completion and percentage of the overall performance.

Smart Choice On the Move provides five learning skills, including vocabulary, grammar, listening, video and challenges. On the Move is the latest online practice platform provided by the publisher. It is the online practice which can be accessed either on a computer or smartphone. On the Move is not an application on mobile phones, but it is a web-based online practice that has been developed to be compatible with mobile phone users. At the end of the course, the teacher will be able to export students' scores from the gradebook function, providing total scores, numbers of activity completion and percentage of the overall performance. In this study, Smart Choice Online Practice will be shortened and mentioned as Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move will be called On the Move.

The main focus of this paper is to explore the teachers' attitudes towards the use of a web-based online practice from King's Mongkut University of Technology with factors including advantages and disadvantages that impact these attitudes.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Nine full-time and one part-time English teachers from King Mongkut's University of Technology who are currently teaching LNG101 General English who have wide range of teaching at the university. All participants have experiences and inexperience in using online learning exercises and online practice exercise. All teachers attended an orientation before the course started. In the orientation, teachers were introduced Smart Choice 3rd coursebook with the Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move. After the orientation was conducted, later in the classroom, all LNG101 teachers were strongly supported by KMUTT staff who helped the teachers handle the online practice platform from the teachers' support teams at SALC (Self-Access Learning Centre).

Data Analysis

In this study, the semi-structured interview was firstly and piloted with the research advisor. After that, the interview was administered to face to face individuals in Thai for 20-30 minutes and was translated into English by the researcher. The data was transcribed and categorised into theme. The data collection started from the design of the interview questions and a consultation with an advisor. Then the researcher contacted the teachers to ask for an interview. The introduction of the interviewers was conducted before the interview began.

This study had no predetermined framework to analyse the data; instead, using the data indicated the direction to proceed. As a result, the criteria used for data analysis are positive and negative attitudes. For positive perceptions, the key message received from the teachers contains these positive words, such as help, support, appropriate, motivate and promote. These words identify the positive attitudes which can drive the motivation of the teachers to continue using the online practice physically and emotionally. For negative attitudes, the key message received from the teachers contains these words: however, not and nothing. These analysis criteria can help understand the teachers' attitudes and the justification in using the online practice.

The data was analysed by transcribing and categorised into themes, including 1) Teacher's background 2) Experiences in orientation 3) Functions and reasons of using online practice 4) Advantages and disadvantages after using online practice 5) Teacher's attitudes towards the use of online practice.

FINDING

The findings of the study will show three results of the study, including the teachers' attitudes towards the Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move, supporting by the reasons which categorised into two topics: 1) the advantages of using Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move and 2) the disadvantages of using Smart Choice Online

Practice and Smart Choice On the Move. Lastly, the finding shows the teachers' attitudes towards the use of Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move which can be presented that the justification of the teacher regarding the use of Smart Choice Online Practice and the Smart Choice Online Practice whether it provides benefits in the language classroom. In response to the open-ended questions about the benefits of using the Smart Choice Online Practice, nine teachers have considered that Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice Online Practice are helpful in language learning. Here are some comments from the teachers.

The advantages of using Smart Choice online practice

The teachers' opinions of on advantages of Smart Choice using Online Practice and On the Move. The expressions are categorised into three major advantages: 1) learning outcomes - a common advantage experienced by teachers that the online practice can boost up the independent learning of the students 2) the online practice can provide relevant and extra contents related to the content taught and learned from the course book, and 3) another interesting opinion presented is that the online practice can provide ready-to-use resources, allow students to access the system anywhere and anytime, and reduce paper use when giving extra exercises and homework.

One teacher expressed why the use of online practice had benefits that helped her manage the content inside and outside classroom. This data presentation repeated itself with the previous data presentation.

> *"… The Smart Choice Online Practice supports teaching and learning in many ways. In terms of learning outcomes, it boosts up independent learning channel for students to access the online learning anywhere and anytime, plus providing ready-to-use learning resources such as audios, videos, and extra activities …"*
>
> *(Teacher 1)*

Another interesting point is from Teacher 10 who believed that the Smart Choice Online Practice offered varied benefits.

> *"… The Smart Choice Online Practice has a lot of advantages. In my point of view, it motivates students to learn outside the classroom. In terms of teaching, it is paperless materials. It saves my time to prepare the classroom. Additionally, the Smart Choice Online Practice gives instant feedback when students practice …"*
>
> *(Teacher 10)*

The disadvantages of using Smart Choice online practice

The finding part presents the disadvantages of the teachers' attitudes in using the online practice. Those attitudes are categorised into three major concerns: course requirements, contents and teacher usage. Those three concerns are based on the experiences in using the Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice on the Move. The course requirements include the grading marked for the use of the online practice (13%) and the stress and the demotivation

due to the workloads. The contents include 1) the content relevance found in the online practice 2) the explanation of the questions and keys given after submitting the online practice into the system 3) the scopes and sequences found in the online practice and 4) the language skills that are assessed in the online practice.

> *"… In fact, it depends on the teacher who would like to manage the use of the online practice in the course. As we know that the online practice requires extra marks, based on the course curriculum. Students perhaps get stressed and receive more tasks to work on …"*
> *(Teacher 10)*

Additionally, there are four minor concerns mentioned by the teachers, including the irrelevant content found in the online practice, the lack of explanation in the exercises, the lack of language skills and the unclear scopes and sequences in the exercises.

> *"… I have found that the exercises in the online practice are easier than what I have taught in the class. Some exercises do not have the same or relevant contents that I have taught in the class …"*
> *(Teacher 1)*

The teachers' attitudes towards the use of Smart Choice online practice and Smart Choice On the Move

The attitudes of the teacher about making the justification of the teacher regarding the use of Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move whether it provides benefits in the language classroom. In response to the open-ended questions about the benefits of using the Smart Choice Online Practice, nine teachers have considered that the online practice is useful. Here are some comments from the teachers.

> *"… I think to bring online practice into the course can be the reinforcement for the teachers and students to use more technology in learning. . I have never had a negative opinion that using online practice is a burden because it motivates students to learn independently with interactive exercises. The online practice helps me a lot. I only ask the students to work online. Then, I can check their progress at the end of the term. All the exercises are also related to the coursebook. At this point, the online practice can promote independent learning, build up motivation in using technology in learning, provide relevant contents, offer ready-to-use resources with user-friendly impacts …"*
> *(Teacher 3)*

However, when investigating deeper through the teachers' attitudes, it can be found that Teacher 9, as shown in Table 1, rarely accessed the Smart Choice Online Practice for personal reasons.

> *"… I rarely login to Smart Choice On the Move. I can export the student's reports from the Smart Choice Online Practice anyway. In addition, Smart Choice On the Move has been designed for mobile phone. I don't like staring at a small screen. So, I don't often access to the system. I accessed to Activities and Resources function only once. It is*

because I was told in the orientation that all the extra materials are already provided in USB, already given by the publisher…"

(Teacher 9)

For negative attitudes, some reasons were expressed by Teacher 9 who found zero advantages from the use of online practice in the course.

"… At the beginning, I think the online practice can help me and students learn independently. However, when the class has run for a few weeks, I notice that my students have not learnt a lot in the class. It increases more work for me and the students. I have to teach in the class and check the exercise from the coursebook. I also have document works to finish. And I have to manage the online classroom. It is too much work …"

(Teacher 9)

The teacher additionally mentions the assessments of the use of the Smart Choice Online Practice which require extra marks and writes that students do not work on the online practice for pleasure, and the next mention is the demotivation impact caused by extra workloads.

"… I believe in independent learning, but I don't see the useful points of using the online practice. Students seem to get nothing because they don't understand the lesson in the class very well. I'd rather apply the online practice as quizzes than assigning them to do at home. I think giving real language practice in the classroom can have more benefits to the students …"

(Teacher 9)

As a result, it can be analysed that 90% of the respondents accepted the use of the Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice on the Move. However, to have more effective use of the online practice, the majority of the teachers recommended that the online practice should be for practice, not for score marking.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the investigation showed that most of the teachers had positive attitudes towards the use of the online practice in LNG101. It was also found that the teachers tend to want to use the online practice in the future. The online practice provided benefits in language classroom such as to boost up independent learning, to provide ready-to-use resources, to build up motivation to use technology in the classroom, and to help teachers look closely through the progress of the students. On the other hand, the online practice hinders teachers to work on it in several ways: it caused high assessing for extra marks, it caused extra workload for teachers and students, it provided answers without any explanation, and it required extra time for teachers to get reports.

It is obvious that teachers have clearly expressed positive attitudes towards the use of the online practice. It can be implied that they are more likely to accept this mode of alternative language learning. With the demographic factor, teaching experiences do not affect the use of the online practice as its new technology in the classroom. As they have used the online practice from the previous academic year, it can be concluded that integrating technology – the online practice into the classroom can facilitate the language learning between the teachers and the students effectively.

With some limitation found, KMUTT has integrated the online practice in language classroom for only two years for each coursebook, with different platforms. As a result, the teachers do not fully understand all the functions in the online practice platform. Teachers were mainly part-time teachers who did not choose the platform themselves and were told to use the online practice in the classroom and track the scores of the students.

To become more successful in using online practice, the course coordinators or the teachers should do the following; 1) Integrate the online practice into the course design or course requirement, 2) Classify the online practice as self-assessment, or reduce the marking score proportion, 3) Use online practice as quizzes or exercises and 4) Help students to reach their learning outcomes by giving feedback and explain the exercises in the online practice.

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