

# **The Use of Internet Resources and Applications for Language Instruction**

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## **Abstract**

The exponential growth of the Internet has had a considerable impact on language teaching and learning. Language teachers have increasingly harnessed its power for language pedagogy. This study aimed to investigate the use of online resources and applications by language teachers and the purposes for which they used them for language teaching. The data were gathered from 70 Thai EFL language teachers in northeastern Thailand by means of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, whereas the qualitative data obtained from open-ended items and semi-structured interviews were inductively analyzed to create categories and to develop themes. Results showed that Google, YouTube, and Facebook were the top three resources and applications used by language teachers. These systems were used to support teaching, encourage autonomous learning, and enhance communication. Based upon the findings, professional development on the applications of technology to language education should be continuously provided.

## **Keywords**

Internet resources and applications, language pedagogy, EFL language teachers

## **1. Introduction**

Technological advancement and globalization have affected language instruction (Chen, 2008; Rosetta Stone, 2012; van Lier, 2006; Wu, 2012). These effects of the technological revolution have greatly benefited both teachers and students. Today, it is obvious that the Internet is one of the most exciting, influential technologies that play a crucial role in one's personal and professional life. According to a study by Noytim (2006), the Internet is a powerful repository of information for language teaching. The development of the Internet has enabled the emergence of new digital tools for pedagogical applications (Martin, et al, 2011), and an indefinite number of resources and materials in a variety of formats are available on the World Wide Web (WWW) for language teaching and learning. In addition, the Internet keeps people across the globe connected. This connection or networking has considerably empowered people to communicate and exchange information.

The revolution of the Internet has had profound effects on education-related matters, including learning, teaching, assessment, communication, and participation. It is therefore imperative that teaching professionals be technology-literate. As language professionals, basically they may use computers to design and create materials for language instruction (Teeler & Gray, 2000) as well as delivering instruction. These instructional practices are ubiquitous from primary to university levels. At a more advanced level, advances in technology have helped create novel educational paradigms, such as blended learning, flipped classrooms, distance learning (Rosetta Stone, 2012), and individualized instruction (Harlow,

1987). This means that knowledge is no longer tethered merely to the classrooms and campuses. It is predicted that by 2020 there will be a transition to more collaborative environments, massive online classes, hybrid classes, and individualized assessment (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2012).

Today, Internet technology has become more powerful and more sophisticated. This raises questions for educators and researchers on how online resources and applications can be used to enhance students' learning and meet their needs. An increasing number of language teachers are showing an interest in making use of resources on the Internet for language pedagogy. Many kinds of applications allow teachers to perform actions using the following: search engines (e.g., Google, Ask, Bing), synchronous and asynchronous tools (e.g., Skype, Gmail), social networking (e.g., Second Life, Facebook), microblogging (e.g., Twitter, Blogger, WordPress), media sharing (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest), and authoring (e.g., Wiki, Wikipedia) (Franklin & Harmelen, 2007; Richardson, 2010; Rolando, Salvador, & Luz, 2013; Uzun, 2012). These online resources and applications can be utilized to supplement or augment language teaching in traditional classroom settings and to engage students in real-world learning experiences that extend beyond the walls of the classroom.

The Internet has a long and fascinating history in Thailand, one of the first countries in Asia to adopt the Internet. This development occurred in mid-1987. However, 1991 was a critically important year as a network was established to connect five Thai universities. After 1995, the general population began to use the Internet (Palasri, Huter, & Wenzel, 1999). Currently, more than 23 million people use the Internet, and it is expected that it will boom among people from all walks of life, reaching almost every school and university (NECTEC, 2013). The revolution of the Internet has led to the emergence of a novel educational paradigm for Thailand: online learning. In 2003, UniNet, the information superhighway, was able to connect 145 tertiary institutions and offer 38 distance-learning classrooms (OEC, 2004). At present, there are 67 distance-learning programs, 50 of which have been approved with 17 currently under review by the Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC). Provided with e-content, video lectures, audio files, and live discussions, students manage their own learning off campus through online channels (Khaopa, 2012). Thus, the Internet plays a crucial role in novel learning paradigms.

In order to transition classroom teaching to online learning, many language teachers have searched for ways to make pedagogic use of technology. This trend can be observed from a growing number of research studies into the use of the Internet for language teaching and learning in the Thai context (e.g., Charupan, Soranastaporn, & Suwattananand, 2001; Noytim, 2006; Phadvibulya & Luksaneeyanawin, 2008; Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012). However, qualitative or mixed-methods studies need to explore further in order for us to gain a deeper understanding of observed phenomena. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study aimed to investigate the range of Internet resources and applications used by language teachers and how they utilize these technologies for language teaching. This investigation will provide insights into how language teachers react to technologies. Based upon the purposes of the study, two research questions were posed as follows:

1. What are the online resources and applications used for language teaching by Thai EFL teachers in tertiary institutions?
2. For what purposes do Thai EFL teachers use online resources and applications for language teaching?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research design**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of Internet resources and applications for language instruction by EFL teachers. The study used a mixed-methods research design in which quantitative and qualitative methods were combined. The objective of this was to triangulate the results and provide a deeper understanding of the observed phenomena.

### **2.2 Participants**

A total of 70 EFL teachers were randomly selected from five Thai public universities in the northeastern region of Thailand. Both online and paper surveys were employed. Thirty eight teachers (54.3%) responded to the online survey while 32 (45.7%) completed and returned the paper survey. The findings showed that a majority (n=63, 90.0%) reported that they used the Internet for language teaching while the rest (n=7, 10%) stated that they did not use it. After completion of the questionnaire, five participants who reported using the Internet frequently were invited for follow-up semi-structured interviews.

### **2.3 Instruments**

An open-ended questionnaire was developed by the researchers for data collection. Internet resources and applications included in the questionnaire were divided into four categories adapted from the taxonomy by Lian (1991) for the ease of questionnaire completion. As a listing of software applications was not provided, participants were required to identify as many online resources and applications as they used for pedagogical purposes. In addition, a semi-structured interview was carried out to verify the results from the questionnaires. Specific questions based on the research questions, the questionnaire, and initial responses to the survey were prepared prior to the interviews. The interview protocol consisted of five open-ended questions with some sub-questions emerging during the interview.

### **2.4 Procedures**

Two experts in the field were invited to review the questions developed in the questionnaire and the interview protocol. These techniques were employed to reduce ambiguity and ensure comprehensiveness. In addition, validity was established by a field test using a “think aloud” procedure (Dillman, 2000; Chen, 2008). Two EFL teachers with backgrounds similar to those of the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire. As they were responding to the questionnaire, they were encouraged to report verbally if some particular items were not clear. Then, the questionnaire was revised on the basis of the reported comments. Finally, since online and paper surveys had been used, email invitations were sent to potential participants. To increase the response rate, paper surveys were distributed by the researchers to participants in the five universities.

### **2.5 Data analysis**

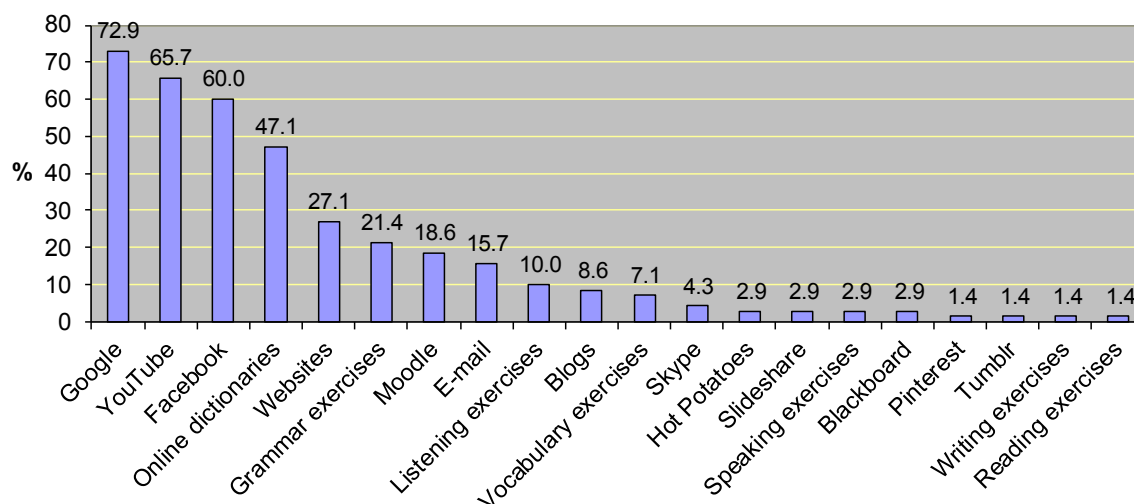
Two steps were involved in the data analysis stage. The quantitative data were analyzed statistically using descriptive statistics to count frequency and calculate percentages, whereas the qualitative data were analyzed from the open-ended questions and the transcriptions of the interviews. Themes that were identified inductively emerged as a result of coding of transcriptions. The results from both approaches were compared and synthesized.

## **3. Results**

Sixty-three EFL teachers who reported using the Internet were asked to identify resources and applications they used for teaching-related purposes. It should be noted that teachers were able to list more than one application, so the percentages in Figure 1 refer to a total

number of 63 teachers in each Internet resource or application. The findings are presented according to the research questions.

**Research question 1 :** What are the online resources and applications used for language teaching by Thai EFL teachers in tertiary institutions?



**Figure 1.** Percentages of language teachers' use of online resources and/or applications

In general, language teachers reported using a variety of online resources and applications. Figure 1 shows that Google (72.9%), YouTube (65.7%), and Facebook (60.0%) were the top three used for language instruction. The qualitative data showed that teachers acquired information in almost all kinds of formats by using search engines like Google and obtained VDO clips and incorporated them in language classroom activities. Facebook's high popularity stemmed from the fact that it could be utilized for convenient communication and discussions. This finding indicates that these technologies allow language teachers to enhance communication with students and to have easy and quick access to online resources and materials.

Figure 1 also shows that less than half of the language teachers (47.1%) used online dictionaries. 27.1% reported using various resource websites (e.g. <http://www.cnn.com>, <http://www.dailyscience.com>, <http://www.englishclub.com>, etc.), followed by grammar exercises (21.4%), Moodle (18.6%), and e-mail (15.7%). Less than 10% of language teachers stated that they used blogs (8.6%) and vocabulary exercises (7.1%) for language instruction, followed by Skype (4.3%), Hot Potatoes (2.9%), Slideshare (2.9%), speaking exercises (2.9%), and Blackboard (2.9%). The least used were Pinterest (1.4%), Tumblr (1.4%), writing exercises (1.4%), and reading exercises (1.4%). This low usage may be explained in a number of ways, such as unfamiliarity, time constraints, inadequate institutional support, and/or teachers' beliefs.

**Research question 2 :** For what purposes do Thai EFL teachers use online resources and applications for language teaching?

In the open-ended questionnaire, the participating teachers were required to identify the purposes for which they used Internet resources and applications. The inductive analysis of 225 reported statements resulted in four main categories or themes under which ten common purposes were categorized (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
Purposes of use of online resources and applications

Themes	Purposes
Supporting teaching/learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To look for information of all kinds, such as texts, audios, videos, etc.</li> <li>• To look up the definitions of unfamiliar words or technical terms.</li> <li>• To find worksheets, including exercises, learning tasks, and tests.</li> </ul>
Encouraging autonomous learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To assign exercises, learning tasks, and projects to students.</li> <li>• To provide links to or suggest resources for self-study.</li> </ul>
Facilitating communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To deal with study-related schedules, announcements, and appointments.</li> <li>• To give assignments and provide feedback on assignments.</li> <li>• To provide online platforms for discussion, explanation, and suggestion.</li> </ul>
Distributing materials/projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To share supplementary materials to students.</li> <li>• To publicize students' performance or projects online.</li> </ul>

Findings from the interview data confirm those of the qualitative data from the questionnaires. Interviewed teachers stated that they used online resources to prepare lessons (e.g., "I regularly download worksheets and articles to make supplementary materials.") and to support language activities in the classroom (e.g., "I always use online games to lead students to the lessons.", "I use VDO clips for students to practice listening skills.", and "I use short films for students to practice listening and writing."). Furthermore, they urged students to study out of class using online resources and applications (e.g., "I ask my students to find information and study on their own.", and "I suggest useful web sites to them for further study."

#### 4. Discussion

The findings showed that participants used a variety of online resources and applications for language teaching, the top three of which were Google, YouTube, and Facebook. In addition, the inductive analysis of participants' reported statements revealed that the top three emerging purposes of Internet use were to support language teaching, encourage autonomous learning, and facilitate communication. The following discussion is organized according to the research questions.

**Research question 1 :** What are the online resources and applications used for language teaching by Thai EFL teachers in tertiary institutions?

Google was the most used online tool as reported by language teachers. This finding is consistent with that of the study conducted by Chen (2008), reporting that search engines were one of the top three online tools most applied by EFL teachers in Taiwan. They used them mainly to acquire information for teaching-related purposes. In addition, the results of four studies by Sparrow, Liu, and Wegner (2011) suggest that people are primed to use Google when facing tough questions and, instead of recalling information, they now tend to remember where to find it. In May 2013, comScore reported approximately 20 billion explicit core online searches, Google ranked first with 13.4 billion searches. There is no doubt that Google is a widely used search engine because it is likely to offer immediate access to information in almost all kinds of formats. One participant (P2) said that:

"If I want to find something, I always use Google. I don't want to walk to the library. I just sit in front of the computer, type key words, and then I'll find what I'm looking for."

YouTube ranked second among the top three used by responding teachers. They reported that they obtained videos on YouTube and incorporated them in language activities in the classroom. According to Brook (2011), YouTube is an online resource that facilitates language pedagogy and provides authentic content used to supplement textbook materials. It is essential that teachers link language learning with real language in authentic materials (Idavoy, 2012) as these media provide a great source of rich language input (Bahrani & Sim, 2012), and they can enhance students' motivation thus eventually improving learning outcomes (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Hyland, 2003; Tschirner, 2001). In addition, the integration of audiovisual media in language teaching provides multisensory stimulation, which is effective and optimal for learning (Shams & Seitz, 2008).

It is not surprising that Facebook was one of the top three applications most used by language teachers. Lian (2011) asserts that "social networking is firmly installed as a major means of communication [and] information-dissemination..." (p.5). In Thailand, there are almost 18.5 million Facebook users (Zocialrank, 2013). This growth is driven by the younger generations (comScore, 2013). Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) argued that Facebook served as an attractive and convenient tool for collaborative learning. Students' learning can be constructed during the interaction and collaboration (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). According to Google, roughly 60 percent of people spend less time talking in real life than online (Forbes, 2013). It is plausible to suggest that having recognized this technological trend, teachers have to stay abreast of technologies to engage today's students and to increase their participation.

Although a total of 20 online resources and applications were identified by language teachers, less than half had used 17 of these technologies for language teaching. Even worse, less than 5% of the language teachers had used the following 9 applications: Skype, Hot Potatoes, Slideshare, speaking exercises, Blackboard, Pinterest, Tumblr, writing exercises, and reading exercises. A number of interplaying factors that may explain this relatively low use of these technologies include unfamiliarity, time constraints, inadequate institutional support, and/or teachers' beliefs. Chen (2008) found that one of the factors contributing to the low use was lack of long-term commitment to funding by institutions. He added that it was time-consuming for teachers to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to keep abreast of emerging technologies. Teachers' beliefs are also another crucial factor. According to the interviews, some teachers believed that using technology required technical knowledge and skills, which discouraged them from integrating technology into teaching. Kim, Kim, Lee, Spector, and DeMeester (2013) found that teachers' beliefs...about effective methods of teaching were correlated with their "technology integration practices" (p.82).

**Research question 2 :** For what purposes do Thai EFL teachers use online resources and applications for language teaching?

A majority of participants reported that they used online resources and applications to support language teaching and learning as they perceived that they lived in a world of resources and information at their fingertips. This means that “[n]o longer do we [teachers] have to make costly efforts to find the things we want” (Sparrow, Liu, & Wegner, 2011, p. 776). Chen (2008) stated that language teaching and learning is more convenient as a massive number of resources are stored online. This may be because “...[I]nformation and knowledge are now emanating not only from dominant mainstream sources but also from innovative intellectual outliers” (Lian, 2011, p.6). This indicates that there is an increasing likelihood that information is shared and received regardless of hierarchies by people from almost all walks of life through the use of modern technologies.

Lian (2011) points out that information can be accessed from a myriad of resources that are highly trustworthy. However, he suggests that effective ways are needed to identify those that are good and those that are not. This statement is congruent with the findings of this study which showed that teachers encouraged their students to study autonomously by assigning learning tasks and suggesting resources on the Internet. Groß and Wolff (2001) note that during this learning process learners activate their tacit knowledge to create new knowledge and later their new knowledge is stored. They learn best when they get involved and when they discover “new ideas or concepts by making use of their own experience and knowledge” (Beatty, 2003, p.91). It can be explained that learning in the classroom may not be sufficient for students to acquire knowledge; therefore, students should be empowered to self-organize learning.

In addition, language teachers reported that they used the Internet to facilitate communication and to discuss study-related issues via social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). VanDoorn and Eklund (2013) state that social networking provides teachers and learners with exciting opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous communication. In addition, social networking sites serve as online platforms for language learning discussions. During this social interaction, students can learn with assistance from those who are more capable and who later learn at the individual level. According to Vygotsky, “social interaction is a fundamental aspect of successful cognitive and intellectual growth” (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p.14). Through the use of the Internet, not only can students ask questions and often receive immediate responses from their teachers or peers, but they can also be engaged in shared learning regardless of time and place.

## **5. Limitations and Recommendations**

Several limitations in the present study should be addressed. As this investigation is a survey in design, the sample size should be increased to enhance representativeness. In this respect, the results derived from 63 EFL teachers cannot be confidently generalized to teachers in other settings. However, the findings do provide insights into the use of online resources and applications by Thai EFL language teachers and the purposes of using them for language instruction. In addition, even though mixed modes of data collection were employed, it is imperative that classroom observations be conducted and policy-related documents examined in order to gain a better understanding of phenomena under investigation.

## **6. Conclusion and Implications**

The findings showed that even if teachers reported using a variety of online resources and applications for language teaching, they used them only to support language teaching, foster

autonomous learning, and facilitate communication. To serve these purposes, it is not surprising that Google, Youtube, and Facebook were the most popular resources used in language teaching and learning. In fact, the Internet has the potential to make language learning take place beyond the classroom by using models such as hybrid learning or blended learning that requires less seat time in the classroom. These educational paradigms are now possible although they are novel to traditional teaching settings.

Therefore, since most language teachers are not tech-savvy, it is necessary that support be provided to them continuously. In addition to providing sufficient facilities and financial support, professional training should be organized continuously. This teacher training should involve the dual knowledge of technology and pedagogy with a focus on application at the practical level. One participant (P4) suggested that:

"It's definitely useful if professionals guide teachers through workshops. I think most teachers know how to use the Internet, but [are] incapable of applying it in their teaching practices."

At the national or international levels, collaboration programs should be established for sharing good practices and research studies beyond common practices. In this context, good practices should be stored and shared in one or more centralized databases to which all language teachers could have access and make contributions.



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