

TTITUDES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS AN ONLINE ENGLISH CLASS

Asst. Prof. Dr.
A. Napaporn SRICHANYACHON
Language Institute,
Building 10, 4th Floor,
Rangsit Campus, THAILAND
Bangkok University, THAILAND

ABSTRACT

Distance online learning has been regarded as a useful learning method, especially when we faced the big flood crisis in Thailand. To solve the lack of classrooms, our university administrators decided to implement WebEx system as an alternative to continue teaching. And, there were some relevant aspects that we needed to consider. Therefore, this study investigated students' attitude toward WebEx system.

It aimed to examine students' attitudes toward using WebEx for an online English class, compare students' attitudes toward WebEx system with their background and investigate the relationship between students' computer aptitude and their attitudes towards WebEx system. The samples were 211 undergraduate students enrolled in Fundamental English course. The instrument in this study was a questionnaire. Results indicated that the levels of computer aptitude and attitudes towards WebEx system in general were moderate. There were no statistically significant differences at .05 level found in students' attitudes toward WebEx system as classified by gender, computer ownership, and monthly allowance.

As hypothesised, there was a positive relationship between students' computer aptitude and their attitudes toward WebEx at .01 levels. Students with high computer aptitude were found to have more positive attitudes toward WebEx system than those with low computer aptitude. The research was done during the flood crisis.

Thus, it is interesting to find out whether an English online class through WebEx system will be more accepted by users in the future, especially in a normal circumstance after the flood crisis. Nevertheless, the results of this study will give some ideas to institutions that plan to use online learning technologies.

Keywords: Attitudes, WebEx, online learning

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

WebEx is a type of webinar software for holding online meetings in real time as a web meeting or as a video conference. It is a pay system with different subscription pricing available. The provider (Webex.com) is a member of the Cisco Systems group, a telecommunication hardware systems provider.

Students taking lessons through WebEx must have high speed Internet access and the latest versions of the free applications Java and Flash. WebEx is compatible with most computers. It can also be accessed from your cell phone if it is a Wi-Fi or 3G-enabled mobile device. The program is easy to use. Teachers who use WebEx will send their students a link either by email or via Skype to join the conference. Then the students just need to follow the instructions -fill in name and email address and click "join"- to become a participant in the conference. The program permits numerous people to enter a virtual classroom in order to communicate with each other. There are a lot of benefits to using WebEx in a teaching environment. WebEx solutions and services are designed to reduce the need for costly travel and increase active participation. With this system, presentations can be done through web conferencing.

It allows users to deliver presentations and ideas to various locations throughout the world by using video interaction, application and desktop sharing and annotation tools. Through this distance learning option, teachers and students can access out of class just by logging onto the Internet. There is no need to commute to the campus. In addition, students can access documents and record their classes in order to view them at a later date, so they can arrange their courses according to their own schedules.

Wake Forest University, in Winston-Salem, NC, conducted a six-month pilot program using WebEx and found that the students and faculty welcomed and valued WebEx. Rick Matthews, Wake Forest's Chief Information Officer said that "WebEx makes WFU professors and students more accessible to each other, going beyond the brick and mortar buildings to provide new avenues for learning" (Office of Communications and External Relations, 2011). The Distance Education Network (DEN) at the University of Southern California (USC) has implemented WebEx solutions since in 2004 and enabled off-campus students to fully participate in classes that are highly interactive. They can't only give presentations from anywhere in the world, but also can work with other students, both on and off campus, in groups outside of class. Requests to use WebEx for class projects have gone up 250 percent because the students like the interactive dimension. (Cisco Systems Inc, 2009).

In 2011, the flood crisis in Thailand damaged a lot of classrooms in Bangkok University; there were not enough classrooms for all of our classes. So, the university administrators decided to implement WebEx system as an alternative to solve the problem. Although we had seen a lot of advantages of WebEx system, there were some limitations that we needed to consider. For example, students must have a computer with high-speed Internet access in order to participate in WebEx lessons.

They also needed training and adapting themselves to use this new technology for an online class. Unanticipated technical problems with the system may shorten the class time and discussion that negatively affect the overall quality of the presentation (Teaster & Bliesner, 1999). In addition, distance learning requires students to be more focused and more responsible than face-to-face learning environments.

As Threkeld and Brzoska (1994) points out, the successful distance learning student needs to have a number of characteristics such as tolerance for ambiguity, a need for autonomy, and an ability to be flexible. Another fact to consider is the cost. Using a video distance-learning program is not cheap. As Ng (2000) points out, using online technologies is considerably more expensive, especially if it is implemented as a primary teaching medium.

If the students use WebEx for learning outside the university, they need a quality headphone, video camera, and high-speed Internet. The university provided the equipments for the students in our two campuses, but some of them were not in good condition. This is another factor which affects the quality of online learning.

Deploying WebEx system seems a reasonable course of action in our circumstances, but it is necessary to make sure we implemented it in the most effective manner.

There are many aspects to be investigated such as the attitudes of students, the quality of instruction, and the hidden costs. In many ways, each of these issues relates to the others and has an effect on the overall quality of distance learning as a product.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the attitudes of the students and their problems in using WebEx system in order to resolve them in the future.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

- To study students' attitudes toward using WebEx for an online English class.
- To compare students' attitudes toward WebEx system with their background.
- To investigate the relationship between students' computer aptitude and their attitudes towards WebEx system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Samples

The participants included in this study were undergraduate students enrolled in Fundamental English course at Bangkok University. These students have studied English as a foreign language. The samples were selected by the use of stratified random sampling technique. As a result, 211 students were participated in the data collection.

Research Instrument

In order to identify students' attitudes toward WebEx system, a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The first part gathered personal information from the respondents who were asked to answer the questions on gender, computer ownership, monthly allowance and computer aptitude. The second part was a survey of students' attitude toward WebEx system. The questionnaire was prepared for rating in a form of five-rating scale.

Data Analysis

The acceptable statistical significance level was set at alpha (α) < .05. After the receipt of the completed questionnaires, the data were statistically analyzed by using SPSS/Window 12 through the following steps:

- The data of personal information were brought to calculate for average means.
- The data of students' computer aptitude and attitude toward WebEx system were brought to calculate for average means and standard deviation.

- The means of students' computer aptitude and attitude toward WebEx system were divided into three levels and interpreted in the form of range based on the criterion of $\bar{X} \pm .5SD$.
 - The average mean of computer aptitude was 3.48 and standard deviation was .59. $3.48 \pm (.5)(.59) \rightarrow 3.48 \pm 0.30$

Computer Aptitude	Mean Range
high	3.79 – 5.00
moderate	3.18 – 3.78
low	1.00 – 3.17

- The average mean of attitude toward WebEx was 3.33 and standard deviation was .61. $3.33 \pm (.5)(.61) \rightarrow 3.33 \pm 0.31$

Attitude toward WebEx	Mean Range
high	3.63 – 5.00
moderate	3.02 – 3.64
low	1.00 – 3.01

- The independent-samples t-test was used to test the mean scores of two groups of subjects concerning their attitude toward WebEx system.
- The One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare mean scores of three and more groups concerning students' attitude toward WebEx system. Then the Scheffe test was used to test a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of any two groups.
- The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used to investigate the relationship students' computer aptitude and attitude toward WebEx system.

RESULTS

Results of Fundamental Analysis

Level of Computer Aptitude

The study revealed that the level of computer aptitude in general was moderate ($\bar{X} = 3.48$). Among four items of computer aptitude, the third highest score of aptitude were Internet skills, software skills and hardware skills respectively ($\bar{X} = 3.90, 3.44, 3.40$). The lowest mean was the item of typing skills ($\bar{X} = 3.18$). The results were presented in Table 1.

Table: 1
Mean and Standard Deviation of the Respondents' Computer Aptitude

Computer Aptitude	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1. Hardware skills	3.40	.71	moderate
2. Software skills	3.44	.70	moderate
3. Internet skills	3.90	.71	high
4. Typing skills	3.18	.90	moderate
Total	3.48	.59	moderate

Level of Attitude Toward WebEx

The study revealed that the level of attitude toward WebEx in general was moderate ($\bar{X} = 3.33$). Among twelve items of attitude toward WebEx, the third highest means of opinion were items no. 8, 9 and 4 respectively ($\bar{X} = 3.96, 3.82, 3.80$). These items were at a high level. The two lowest means which were items no. 11 and 12 ($\bar{X} = 2.72, 2.89$) were at a low level. The results were presented in Table 2.

Table: 2
Mean and Standard Deviation of the Respondents' Attitude toward WebEx

Attitude toward WebEx	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1. WebEx system requires teachers and students to be more proficient in information technology (IT).	3.55	.93	moderate
2. I am interested in using WebEx system for an online English class.	3.03	1.15	moderate
3. Learning English through WebEx system is more difficult than learning in a normal class.	3.50	1.11	moderate
4. Over all, I still believe learning in a normal class is more fun and effective than learning through WebEx	3.80	1.16	high
5. I will participate in a WebEx even after evening classes	3.02	1.16	moderate
6. Learning through WebEx system is acceptable now	3.17	1.13	moderate
7. Learning through WebEx system is becoming more popular in Thailand.	3.21	1.11	moderate
8. Learning through WebEx system makes me realize that we can learn from anywhere in the world	3.96	1.14	high
9. WebEx system makes communication between instructors and students much more accessible and easier	3.82	.99	high
10. WebEx system is useful for learning English.	3.25	1.04	moderate
11. Learning English through WebEx system is more useful than learning in a normal class.	2.72	.99	low
12. Using WebEx system for an online English class will attract people to study at Bangkok University	2.89	1.14	low
Total	3.33	.61	Moderate

Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 compared students' attitude toward WebEx with different background

Hypothesis 1 was not accepted because none of the variables related to students' background affected their attitude toward WebEx. There were no statistically significant differences at .05 level found in students' attitude toward WebEx as classified by gender, computer ownership, monthly allowance.

The overall mean score of male students ($\bar{X} = 3.38$) was higher than that of female students ($\bar{X} = 3.29$). Both groups had attitude toward WebEx at a moderate level. Due to the results obtained from the application of the t-test, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference found in students' overall attitude towards WebEx between two groups (male and female) at level of .05.

This means that male and female students were not different in having attitude toward WebEx. The overall mean score of students who owned a computer was higher than that of students who didn't own a computer ($\bar{X} = 3.33, 3.07$).

Both groups had attitude toward WebEx at a moderate level. The t-test was employed to examine the significant difference between students who owned a computer and those who didn't own a computer on their attitude toward WebEx. It was found that there was no statistically significant difference found in students' overall attitude toward WebEx between two groups at level of .05. This means students who owned a computer and those who didn't own a computer were not different in having attitudes toward WebEx. The results obtained from applying the ANOVA revealed that no difference in overall attitude toward WebEx among three groups of monthly allowance (less than 3,500 baht; 3,501-5,000 baht; and more than 5,000 baht) was found statistically significant at .05 level. This means that allowance received from parents per month had no impact on students' attitude toward WebEx.

Hypothesis 2 Investigated The Relationship Between Students' Computer Aptitude And Their Attitude Toward Webex

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used to find out whether there was a statistically significant relationship between computer aptitude and attitude toward WebEx. This hypothesis was accepted. Table 3 shows that there was a positive relationship between students' computer aptitude and their attitude toward WebEx at .01 level. In other words, students with high computer aptitude expressed more positive attitude than those with low computer aptitude.

Table: 3
Correlate Results for the Respondents' Computer Aptitude and Their Attitude toward WebEx

VARIABLE	Computer Aptitude	Attitudes toward WebEx
Computer Aptitude	1.00	
Attitudes toward WebEx	.24**	1.00

** P < .01

When all items were considered, the result showed that there was a positive relationship between students' computer aptitude and their attitudes toward WebEx in terms of hardware and typing skills (items no. 1 and 4) at .01 level; software and internet skills (items no. 2 and 3) at .05 level. In other words, students with high hardware, software, internet and typing skills expressed more positive attitude toward WebEx. On the other hand, students with low hardware, software, internet and typing skills expressed less positive attitude toward WebEx. The results were show in Table 4.

Table: 4
Correlate Results for the Respondents' Computer Aptitude and Their Attitude toward WebEx Shown in All Items

VARIABLE	Attitude toward WebEx	1. Hardware	2. Software	3. Internet	4. Typing
Attitude toward WebEx	1.00				
1. Hardware	.17*	1.00			
2. Software	.27**	.72**	1.00		
3. Internet	.18**	.46**	.51**	1.00	
4. Typing	.14*	.40**	.44**	.37**	1.00

* P < .05

** P < .01

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research have shown the attitude of Bangkok University students toward an online English class via WebEx system. The level of their attitudes toward WebEx system in general was moderate.

The main reason why the students liked this online learning was because it allowed them to learn from anywhere. Also, its interactive dimension gave students new learning experiences. However, when they were asked whether they preferred an online class to a normal class, it seemed that they preferred studying English in a normal classroom. They still believed that in-class learning is more fun and effective.

It might be concluded that they may not get sufficient knowledge about online learning.

It may be partly caused by the university's urgent policy to resolve the problems on lack of classrooms during the flood crisis. We did not have enough time to prepare our teaching material for online classes. Moreover, both students and teachers did not get enough workshops on how to make the most of WebEx applications. Teachers were trained to use basic applications, but they had to learn to use other applications by themselves in their own time.

Therefore, it is interesting to find out whether an English online class through WebEx system will be more accepted by users in the future, especially in a normal circumstance after the flood crisis.

The variables like gender, computer ownership and monthly allowance did not affect students' attitudes toward WebEx. However, the finding revealed that students with high computer aptitude expressed more positive attitude than those with low computer aptitude. The computer aptitude includes hardware, software, internet and typing skills. Consequently, online learners should be given proper instruction and training on these skills.

In the future, many educational institutions may hope to expand the use of WebEx solutions in increasing the types of classes that can be offered to offsite students. Those institutions can take the above information into consideration when preparing an online course. They should keep in mind that the quality of distance learning is based on the instructor's understanding of the needs of the students.

Acknowledgements: This research was sponsored by Bangkok University.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHOR



Dr. Napaporn SRICHANYACHON received her M.A. (Theater: Text and Production) from University of East Anglia in England and B. A. (English) with 1st class honors from Silpakorn University in Thailand. She is currently a full-time lecturer of Language Institute, Bangkok University. She also works as a research reviewer for several journals and an Editorial Advisory Board of the *Journal of International Education Research (JIER)* organized by the Clute Institute, USA. She has presented her research at several international conferences and written a number of instructional materials. Her area of interest in research is EFL Teaching and Learning.

Asst. Prof. Dr. A. Napaporn SRICHANYACHON
Language Institute, Bangkok University
Building 10, 4th Floor, Rangsit Campus, THAILAND

9/1 Moo 5, Klong 1, Klong Luang,
Pathum Thani, Thailand 12120
Phone: +662 902 0299 ext. 2680
Email: napaporn.s@bu.ac.th

REFERENCES

Cisco Systems, Inc. (2009). *Web-Based Meetings Improve Student Access and Collaboration*.

Dowling, C., & Lai, K. W. (2003). *Information and communication technology and the teacher of the future*. London: Biddles.

Grabe, M., & Grabe, C. (2004). *Integrating technology for meaningful learning*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Ng, K. (2000). Costs and effectiveness of online courses in distance education. *Open Learning, 15*(3), 301-308.

Office of Communications and External Relations. (2011). *Wake Forest to use WebEx solutions: New teaching and learning opportunities surface with increased collaboration*. Retrieved 10 August, 2012, from <http://news.wfu.edu/2011/04/15/wake-forest-to-use-webex-solutions>

Teaster, P., & Blieszner, R. (1999). Promises and pitfalls of the interactive television approach to teaching adult development and aging. *Educational Gerontology, 25*(8), 741-754.

Threlkeld, R., & Brezoska, K. (1994). Research in distance education. In Willis, B. (ed). *Distance Education Strategies and Tools*. Englewood Cliffs: Educational Technology Publications.