Students' Perceptions towards the Use of VLE in a Fundamental English Course: A review of Smart Choice Online Practice and Smart Choice On the Move

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Abstract

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) has been used as a teaching aid in language learning for the past several years. One of the examples of CALL integration in language teaching is the virtual learning environment (VLE). This study investigates Thai university students' perceptions towards the use of VLE as a learning support in their fundamental English course. The websites discussed in this study served as complementary materials of the main textbook of the course, *"Smart Choice"* by Oxford University Press (2016) including its accompanying VLE materials *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"*. *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* was designed for use with personal computers, while *"Smart Choice On the Move"* was designed for use with smartphones. The data was obtained by implementing

semi-structured interviews with 20 Thai university students taking a fundamental English course in academic year 2018. The interview data was transcribed and classified into themes. The findings detail the students' perceptions regarding the noteworthy features of the VLE materials. In what follows we discuss the students' viewpoints about the VLE materials as well as their pedagogical implications.

Keywords: CALL, Students' perceptions, VLE

Introduction

At present, technological advancements together with globalization have led computer assisted language learning (CALL) to become an important component of education. Therefore, in many countries, the primary learning style has begun to shift from traditional, face-to-face classroom settings to reflect the increased integration of technology in learning environments where teachers integrate CALL in classrooms. This shift has been occurring in all fields of education, including English classes (Vovides, Sanchez-alonso, Mitropoulou, & Nickmans, 2007). Observing this shift, textbook publishers have adapted themselves to technology integration in classrooms, as they now produce online materials that supplement their textbooks in order to support both traditional and modern learning environments. However, educators or institutions are left to decide whether or not to use these online-learning materials with their students. As CALL assumes an ever-greater presence in the classroom, one of the most popular tools of online English language learning is the virtual learning environment, or (VLE). VLEs are known for their benefits of enabling content

management (courses and homework), ensuring synchronized collaboration (via chat and videoconferences), as well as non-synchronized collaboration (forums, messages, blog), as well as managing students. However, the term VLE is often confused with Learning Management System (LMS). LMS offers similar features of VLE such as allowing teachers and students to share classroom materials, submit and return assignments, and communicate to each other online. However, VLE enables educators to represent knowledge by delivering different types of content and, monitor student participation that can enhance the learning process. Also, VLE provides the creation of knowledge representation and contains a set of tools for communications, assessments, and various features (Maaliw & Ballera, 2017). Since the VLE has been perceived to be a more complete platform for online language teaching and learning, many universities in Thailand have integrated this type of technology in their curricula.

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) is one of the universities in Thailand implementing web-based learning platforms language learning. Currently, students are required to take three English courses, which are LNG 101 General English, LNG 102 Technical English, and LNG 103 English for Workplace Communication. For the LNG 101 course, the university is using a new textbook by Oxford University Press called *"Smart Choice" (2016),* which is designed for beginning to intermediate English learners. The textbook comes with VLE materials, and the university has seen the potential of classroom integration of this online-learning support method. These online materials have been integrated to the fundamental English course;

the students are required to use these web-based learning materials, and are graded based on the amount and quality of activities they do. This online self-study is worth 13 percent of the total course grade. The VLE materials include two websites. The first one is called *"Smart Choice Online Practice"*, which students must access via personal computer, and contains activities and tests designed in alignment with the students' textbook. The other website is called *"Smart Choice On the Move"*, which requires students to log in via their smartphones and do activities related to their textbook.

Therefore, the researchers saw the importance of collecting feedback from the students in order to see how they perceive these VLE materials, and to gauge the effectiveness of integrating VLE websites as learning support for a traditional, face-to-face English course.

Literature review
Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

After a period of changes in language teaching pedagogy, from the traditional face-to-face classroom environment, to more interactive and integrative classrooms, CALL seems to have assumed a pivotal role in language teaching. This pedagogical shift is the result of the convergence between internet technologies and social learning theory. With the ubiquity of computers and the Internet, it would be beneficial for learners if the teachers were to include CALL in their lessons in order to provide more opportunities for language learning.

To clarify what CALL could refer to in the language learning field, Scott and Beadle (2014) said that CALL refers to any process in which the learner uses a computer to improve foreign language competence. The technology includes not only computers but also smart-phones, tablets, MP-3 players, and consoles. Therefore, CALL includes authentic foreign language material, such as: video clips, Flash-animations, webquests, podcasts, webcasts, and news; online environments where learners can communicate with foreign language speakers, through email, text-based computer-mediated communication (synchronous and asynchronous), social media, or voice/video conferencing. CALL also includes language-learning tools (online apps or software), such as: for phonetics, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and clause analysis. These tools may include a text to-speech function or speech recognition, and often includes interactive and guided exercises, online proprietary virtual learning environments, which offer teacher-student and peer-to-peer communication, and game-based learning (Scott & Beadle, 2014).

To investigate the integration of CALL in language classrooms, a number of studies have been conducted, e.g. (Suh, 2002; Felix, 2003; Lan, Sung, & Chang, 2007; Sagarra & Zapata, 2008; Yang, Chuang, Li, & Tseng ,2013; Wasim, Sharma, Khan, & Siddiqui, 2014; Wang & Lieberoth, 2016; Ngo, 2018). These studies looked at learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of different CALL tools in language classrooms, and the results of these studies showed similar benefits in providing learners ease of information gathering and access, helping to promote learning motivation, helping to improve learners' English language skills,

and providing immediate feedback. Also, Jingyu (2014), who explored the benefits of online-based CALL integration in classrooms for students from the previous studies, found that web-based learning environments allow learners to select from learning modules or course materials which best facilitate their own understanding and attention. In addition, CALL materials can be reviewed at a later time or as many times as necessary in order to master specific skills or retain knowledge. Similarly, in a survey designed and conducted by Hirata and Hirata (2008) showed that learners perceived differences between face-to-face learning and a more independent web-based learning in that the learners highly evaluated the independent, self-paced learning afforded by the internet materials.

Currently popular types of CALL
Learning Management Systems

With the popularity of web-based distance learning, the use of learning management systems (LMS) is becoming more favored by educators (Basal, 2016). In terms of blended learning, which is a search for a combination between traditional face-to-face and online learning, LMS can offer benefits by providing a more appropriate platform for learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). An LMS is a web-based software and e-learning platform mainly used for facilitating online and blended learning. This system allows teachers and students to share learning materials, make class announcements, submit and return assignments, and communicate with each other online (Lonn & Teasley, 2009). In other words, LMS functions as a bridge between teachers and learners to provide a

well-organized platform for distance and blended education (Basal, 2016). There are a number of existing e-learning tools (Moodle, Blackboard, WebCT) that have become easier to use and which offer a range of services. Moodle is one of the most often-used e-learning tools. Moodle, is said to optimize the learning-teaching process while creating an effective and flexible learning environment (Paragia et al., 2011).

Virtual Learning Environment

While the concept of LMS and VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) are similar, there are still some differences between the two terms. LMS is used for facilitation online and blended learning by allowing teachers and students to share classroom materials, submit and return assignments, and communicate to each other online. However, VLE is a distinct platform as it has two roles: first, to allow content management (courses, homework), while facilitating synchronized collaboration (by chat, videoconferences), as well as non-synchronized collaboration (forum, messages, blog); and second, for use in managing the courses and their students (Weller, 2007). Also, VLE allows teachers to export students' gradebook or progress and add online materials. As VLE use and management is complex, this type of platform has seen more use in university settings (Oproiu & Chicioreanu, 2012).

A study by Hockly (2015) outlined formats for learning language online, with multiple models of online language learning, their approaches varied in degrees of formality and structure. 'Formal' online language courses are still frequently offered by schools or universities, and their students are likely to be formally

assessed for credits or a qualification. Formal courses typically take place in a VLE, which can include online language learning materials produced by the institution, or pre-packaged online learning materials produced by publishers. Formal courses usually address all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), as well as grammar and vocabulary. Based on approaches found in contemporary communicative language teaching coursebooks, often with themed 'units' and an integrated skills approach, students work fully online and mainly in asynchronous mode to practice reading, writing, and listening; this is often complemented by regular synchronous speaking classes, for example via a videoconferencing platform.

Web-based language learning

Another popular type of CALL is web-based language learning (WBLL). An increasing number of studies have addressed the use of web-based tools in language classrooms. Web-based technology allows language instructors to extend their teaching beyond the physical constraints of their language classroom (Lai & Gu, 2011). For example, in blended learning, besides attending a traditional face-to-face language class, learners can also engage in online activities outside of school. Using WBLL, language learners have more opportunity to learn and practice the target language through collaborative learning with their peers or creating their own projects (Ghoneim & Elghotmy, 2016). WBLL can assist the language acquisition process in that it allows learners to interact with each other as well as gradually construct their own knowledge (Lin, Shie, & Holmes, 2017). Related research by Chang and Ho

(2009) indicated that the interactivity and immediate feedback of the web-based learning environment have a positive effect, stimulating the students' interest and ability in language learning. Taylor and Gitsaki (2004) stated that the students' participation in web-based activities showed that use of the web makes the course more interesting because of the varied and current information it provides. In general, the Internet and the WWW contributed to the enhancement of learners' active involvement and satisfaction towards learning in the web-based environment as well as the opportunities for learners to access and share information without the limitations of time and place.

Game-based learning

Another type of CALL that has proven popular of late is game-based CALL. Game-based learning has increased in foreign language learning by making language education entertaining and providing learning environments that contextualize knowledge (Dourda, Bratitsis, Griva, & Papadopoulou, 2013). Games-based learning develops problem-solving and critical thinking skills through engagement and interactive feedback that are crucial to the learning process and are generally effective for achieving learning outcomes (Chiu, Kao, & Reynolds, 2012). One example of game-based CALL is Kahoot! Kahoot! is a digital game-based student response system that allows teachers and learners in classroom settings to interact through competitive knowledge games using existing infrastructure. Wang and Lieberoth (2016) pointed out that Kahoot! represents a new generation of student response systems that focuses on student motivation and engagement through

gamification. Furthermore, gamification also applies the use of badges to show learners' progress in a lesson. This approach of using an object as a means to show learners' progression, known as "badges" in the field of gamification, is supported by the work of Gibson et al. (2013) which provides an overview of how these badges can be useful and beneficial for both students and instructors. They claimed that digital badges could have important impacts on motivations for learning, status within a community, and can transparently display achievement level. Thus, using gamification could help increasing learner interest to the lessons, and could enhance a competitive spirit in classrooms, and also could motivate learners to participate in the learning process via gamification features such as points, badges, levels, and league tables.

Taking advantage of VLEs' features, textbook publishers have been developing their own VLEs and adding them to their textbooks as supplementary materials. These materials are often called "online practice" by the publishers. However, each publisher gives their own name to their respective VLE materials, and publishers can have one or more versions of VLE per one textbook. Below are some examples of VLE materials that complement different publishers' textbooks.

Figure 1 Examples of VLE materials named by publishers

Publishers	Textbook name	VLE
Oxford	Discover	Discover Online Practice
	Smart Choice	Smart Choice Online Practice
		Smart Choice On the Move
Cambridge	Eyes Open	Eyes Open Online Practice
	Ventures	Ventures Online Workbook
Macmillan	Open Mind	Macmillan Open Mind Online
	Beyond	Macmillan Beyond Online

In this study, the researchers focused on two variations of VLE that come with the "Smart Choice" textbook for beginning to intermediate English learners, published by Oxford University Press, and presently used in the LNG 101 fundamental English course for first-year students at KMUTT. In LNG 101. Both of the VLEs are set as self-study activities which the students are required to complete as the school allocate up to 13% of students' grade. The VLEs are called *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"*. For *"Smart Choice Online Practice"*, the students are required to log in to the website using a personal computer, while *"Smart Choice On the Move"* requires the students to log in via smartphone.

On *"Smart Choice Online Practice"*, there are only 4 units opened for the students to do. The school would grade the students on task completion of this website as the activities provided on the website are more difficult than the ones on *"Smart Choice On the Move"*. However, since the school didn't grade its students on

activity completion for *"Smart Choice On the Move"*, there were 12 units opened for students to do. For both websites, each unit is designed according to the units in the textbook.

The activities on both websites focus on vocabulary, grammar, listening, conversation (speaking), video, and challenge (e.g. timed-activity, matching activity). However, the amount of activities provided is different. In "Smart Choice Online Practice", there are 9 activities provided in each unit, including 2 vocabulary activities, 3 grammar activities, 1 conversation, and 3 videos. On the other hand, each unit of *"Smart Choice On the Move"* provides 5 activities including 1 vocabulary activity, 1 grammar, 1 listening, 1 video, and 1 challenge activity. Most of the activity types designed in "Smart Choice Online Practice" are multiple-choice, gap-filling, and true & false. *"Smart Choice On the Move"* has similar activity types as provided *"Smart Choice Online Practice"*, but there are some timed-activities and matching activities (word-picture, synonyms) added to the website.

In terms of shared features between both websites, students' progress is reported using trophies and stars, inferring students' quality of work. Answers of each activity will be shown after the students submit their work. Also, students could download all the audio and video files and its transcription to their devices.

Studies on learners' perceptions towards CALL integration in language classrooms

CALL integration in language classrooms is a broad teaching approach with several aspects worthy of study. Many researchers, e.g. Suh (2002), Wasim et al. (2014), Lan et al. (2007),

Wang and Lieberoth (2016), Yang et al. (2013), Ngo (2018), Felix (2003), and Sagarra and Zapata (2008), have explored CALL integration studies and reported positive attitudes regarding CALL among language learners. Most of the results showed that its integration could benefit language learners in that it could facilitate learners' information gathering, help promote learning motivation, help improve English language skills, and provide immediate feedback. These studies have been conducted worldwide and have examined different types of CALL, including technology-based classes, websites, online applications (such as Kahoot!), learning management systems (LMS), and online instruction models.

From previous studies, it can be seen that integrating CALL could help expose learners to vast amounts of information. For example, a questionnaire survey by Suh (2002) showed that 19 Korean EFL university students who took computer-mediated writing classes had positive attitudes towards the use of CALL in their writing classes. They reported that CALL integration could help stimulate their learning interest, allowed for easy and convenient information gathering, and provided exposure to various English texts. In a similar vein, Wasim et al. (2014) reviewed previous studies addressing the scenario of how educators ensure that the web's potential is used effectively to support both their own learning and that of their students. The results of the study showed that CALL integration offers great opportunities for learners to learn more and to easily access information. However, teachers must ensure that the provided learning environment takes account of learners' needs and ensures that they are effectively prepared and supported.

Many studies have shown that one of the benefits of using CALL in language classrooms is that it could help foster learners' motivation. In an Asian context, Lan et al. (2007) conducted a study of the effectiveness of collaborative, peer-assisted learning practices of reading skills of 52 elementary school EFL learners in Taiwan. There were two groups of students: those with and without tablet PCs. The researchers concluded that the learner groups with the tablets attended more to the reading tasks, and exhibited more collaborative behaviors, such as giving support and feedback, and avoiding conflict. The researchers had the distinct impression that tablet use seemed to reduce anxiety in elementary EFL learners, promote motivation to learn, and enhance oral reading confidence. On the other hand, in the European context, a study on Kahoot! by Wang and Lieberoth (2016) used a questionnaire to examine how the use of points and audio in Kahoot! affect the learning environment of 593 university students in Norway. The survey results showed that using audio and points positively affected learners in the areas of concentration, engagement, enjoyment, and motivation.

Apart from increasing motivation of learners in language learning, studies have shown that CALL integration could help promote learners' English performance, including listening and speaking skills, and English grammar. For instance, Yang et al. (2013) examined the effectiveness of integrating critical thinking skills into individualized English listening and speaking instructions using an LMS called Moodle, with 83 university students in Taiwan. Results from pretest and posttest scores were compared to identify students' improvements. The results of the study showed that

learners participating in the treatment group, when compared to the non-treatment group, significantly improved in terms of English listening and speaking, as well as critical thinking skills. In a more recent study, Ngo (2018) explored the impact of CALL integration on students' learning outcomes by measuring scores on quizzes and exams of 68 university students in Indonesia. To gather pertinent data for the study, assessments and a questionnaire were administered to the students. The results of the study showed that teaching English grammar through an online instruction model could help students improve their English grammar skills. This study also showed the role of technology in the classroom as a pedagogical support enabling the growth of students' autonomy and improving students' attitudes towards the English language.

Another benefit that CALL could provide for language learners is immediate feedback. Felix (2003) reviewed studies regarding popular claims attached to the integration of technology in language classrooms, from three perspectives: administration, teachers, and students. She found that some students liked instant feedback so much that they spent many unplanned hours at the computer in pursuit of the perfect score. Immediate feedback, multiple opportunities for improvement and the extensive and overt practice that online environments provide more quickly convert procedural into declarative knowledge, and promote L2 learning. Similarly, Sagarra and Zapata (2008) investigated the impact of use of an online workbook over two semesters on 245 second-language Spanish learners. Students' attitudes were measured by a survey administered at the end of the second semester. The results found positive findings of student perceptions about the online workbook,

emphasizing its benefits in terms of accessibility, user-friendliness, and instant feedback. Significantly, most students praised the usefulness of the online workbook for language learning, particularly in the areas of grammar and vocabulary acquisition.

Looking into the existing research on students' perceptions towards the integration of CALL in language classrooms reveals additional research that could be done. From the literature review section, it can be seen that a number of studies have been conducted worldwide, but little research has been done on CALL in Thailand, especially studies that look into the integration of VLE as a complementary material for its textbook. Moreover, it is the first time that KMUTT integrated online learning materials as self-study activities for students, as KMUTT aims to explore more opportunities technology-enhanced learning. Thus, the researchers have chosen to examine Thai university students' perceptions towards the use of VLE as learning support materials in a fundamental English course.

Research question:

This study was developed from the following research question: What are students' perceptions towards the use of *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* as learning supports for a fundamental English course?

Methodology
Participants

Since every first-year student has to enroll in LNG 101, an English fundamentals course, the researchers then chose 20 students,

who are from the faculty of Engineering, Science and Industrial Education and Technology, at SALC (Self-access language center), KMUTT. During the data collection period, the participants were selected based on if they had already used both *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"*. The participants were asked if they had used both of the websites before participating in a semi-structured interview. If not, they were not qualified to do the interview.

Instrument

The instrument of this study was a semi-structured interview. The objectives of the semi-structured interview were to investigate students' perceptions towards the use of *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* as self-study activities. The questions for the interview were designed after the researcher had analyzed all of the features of both websites to see the similarities and differences of the websites. The questions were composed within the area of differences between *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* as learning supports for a fundamental English course.

Procedure

Firstly, interview questions were designed in Thai, and checked by the advisor. Secondly, the questions were piloted to improve their clarity and correctness, and changes were made. Next the semi-structured interviews were implemented, each lasted 5-15 minutes. The collected data was then translated into English, and analyzed by transcription and categorized into themes. The

researcher validated the translation of the interview by asking an native English speaker. Finally, the research was written up.

Data analysis

In this study, the data was obtained by semi-structured interview. During the interview, the participant's voice was recorded using a smartphone application. After the semi-structured interview was conducted, the data was transcribed and categorized into themes based upon two main areas, which are:

1) Students' perceptions towards *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* in terms of the similar features both websites provide for learning support.

2) Students' perceptions towards *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* in terms of the features that motivate learners.

Data presentation and interpretation

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews is presented in this section.

Table 1

Students' perceptions towards similar features of *"Smart Choice Online*

Theme	Website provides more opportunity to practice English Outside classrooms		Website helps improve English skills		Website provides instant feedback	
No. / Platforms	Online Practics	On the Move	Online Practice	On the Move	Online Practice	On the Move
S1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕
S5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕
S11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S14	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S15	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S17	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total	**20**	**19**	**20**	**19**	**18**	**18**

As shown in Table 1, almost all of the students perceived that both *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* provided them with more opportunity to practice English outside of class, and help them to improve their English skills (100% and 95%, respectively). It can also be seen that 18 of the students (90%) noticed that both websites provide them instant feedback. To elaborate, one of the common noticeable aspects of the VLE websites perceived by most of the students was that the websites gave learners a chance to practice English outside of class, meaning that the students could learn at their own pace, and they could practice the activities as many times as they deem necessary. Also, they could choose any activity from any learning module at their discretion. This could help the students to review their lessons if needed, or help them prepare themselves prior to a class.

> *"I like that both of the websites provide me with all of the units in the workbook, so I can choose any activity to do by my choice. I can practice a lot online, especially on grammar as I sometimes couldn't follow the teacher in my class."*

(Student 2)

> *"I can do the activities on the future units prior to what my teacher will teach in class. Doing this, I can prepare myself and make sure I can enjoy myself in the class. And, if I have any questions, I could list them to ask my teacher."*

(Student 5)

The other shared aspect of the VLE websites perceived by most of the students was that both of the websites could help them improve their English skills. Most of the participants claimed that the listening and video activities provided could help them improve their listening skills, as they could pause and play the audio and video files as many times as they wanted in order to fully understand each task. Interview excerpts from students support this:

> *"I like the way they designed the activities, especially listening and video activities. I could rewind the audio tracks as many times as I want to fully understand them. I also could click on a button to let the system show me the subtitles. This helps me a lot to practice listening to words I have never heard of before."*

(Student 3)

"I have problems understanding people speaking in English, so, the video activities help me to practice watching the speaker's mouth movement and listening to their voice at the same time. I think I will use these websites to practice my listening skills more."

(Student 19)

The last shared aspect of the VLE websites that the students noted was that both websites provided instant feedback. Almost all of the students observed that both websites gave instant feedback after they had submitted their answers for each activity. This could help them gauge the accuracy of their answers. Some students said

that they could thus learn from their own mistakes, and try to do better in further attempts or in future activities. Interview excerpts from students support this:

> *"The function of giving instant feedback on my answers helps a lot in my learning. I could look at my incorrect answers and learn from them. This gives me a motivation to have more correct answers in the next activities."*

<div align="center">(Student 9)</div>

> *"In any activities, I always want to know how I am doing. This function helps a lot in that it tells the correct and incorrect answers, but it doesn't tell me why. So, I could study more on language points that I often make mistakes."*

<div align="center">(Student 11)</div>

Table 1 showed students' perceptions towards *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* in terms of their similarities. Table 2 shows students' perceptions towards *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* in terms of features that motivate learners. For learning activities, most of the students noticed that *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* could provide a number of grammar activities and provide simple activity types, and has a simple design. In comparison, most of the students noticed that *"Smart Choice On the Move"* provides challenging activities and is more convenient to access.

Table 2

Students' perceptions towards *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* in terms of features that motivate learners.

Theme	Learning activities						Design of the website			
	Website provides a number of grammar activities		Website provides simple activity types		Website provides challengling activities		Website has a simple design		Website is convenient to access	
No. / Platforms	Online Practics	On the Move	Online Practice	On the Move	Online Practice	On the Move	Online Practice	On the Move	Online Practice	On the Move
S1	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
S2	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
S3	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
S4	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
S5	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
S6	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
S7	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
S8	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
S9	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
S10	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
S11	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
S12	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
S13	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
S14	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
S15	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
S16	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
S17	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
S18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
S19	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
S20	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Total	**20**	**9**	**18**	**8**	**6**	**18**	**17**	**3**	**6**	**19**

According to Table 2, in terms of learning activities, 18 students (90%) noticed that *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* provides more grammar activities compared to *"Smart Choice On the Move"*. Also, 18 students (90%) mentioned that *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* provides simple activity types such as multiple-choice and true-false exercises. In comparison, 18 students (90%) claimed that *"Smart Choice On the Move"* offered them more challenging activities. In terms of website design, 17 students (85%) reported that *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* has a simple design, while almost all of the students (95%) observed that *"Smart Choice On the Move"* is convenient to access.

In terms of learning activities, one of the noticeable features of *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* is that it provides the students more grammar activities, meaning that they have more chances to practice their English grammar. Some students also mentioned that, in *"Smart Choice Online Practice"*, there are at least three grammar activities in a unit. The students also said that these grammar activities help them to review what they learnt in the classrooms as well.

> *"Online Practice" has more activities compared to On the Move, especially grammar activities. I think I would be better at English grammar after finishing all the units as I can review all the grammar points taught in the class. I also can review the grammar points that I don't understand yet."*

(Student 6)

"There are lots of activities to do on both of the websites, but I like to practice my grammar more on "Online Practice" as it provides more grammar activities than "On the Move". I think "Online Practice" has three grammar activities in a unit, while "On the Move" has just one. So, if I want to practice my grammar, I tend to come to this website."

(Student 14)

The next noticeable feature of "Smart Choice Online Practice" is that it provides simple activity types such as gap filling and multiple-choice activities. Most of the participants claimed that they were comfortable doing these activity types, but the activities could make them bored as they tended to lack variety.

"Activities provided on 'Smart Choice Online Practice' are very familiar to me. I have seen these kinds of activities since I was a child. I think they are a bit boring for me."

(Student 13)

"I wish the publishers would put some different types of activities in this website to make it more interesting and more fun. Doing the same kinds of activities like multiple choice is very boring."

(Student 1)

A feature of *"Smart Choice On the Move"* that most of the students noticed is that the activities are challenging in that the website provides different types of activities such as word/picture matching, drag and drop, and timed activities. Most of the students were not familiar with these types of activities, so that may have made them feel excited when they first did the activities.

> *"Activities on "On the Move" are fun to do as they have various kinds of activities such as drag & drop and timed activities. These types of activities are different from the traditional exercises, and they keep me focused on the activities."*

(Student 16)

"I come from a learning environment where teachers prefer to use multiple-choice activity type in almost all of exercises; having this opportunity to do many different kinds of activities makes me excited and keeps me motivated to learn more."

(Student 19)

However, one student said that he felt pressured when doing timed-activities and matching activities as he needed more time to work. This might make him anxious when doing these kinds of activities.

"When I do the timed-activities and matching activities, I feel a bit stressful as I sometimes don't know all the meaning of the words, so I need more time to look up for their meaning. But these activities won't let me do that because they don't give me enough time. This sometime makes me not want to do the activities."

(Student 18)

In terms of website design, one of the features that was most often mentioned by the students is that the overall design of "Smart Choice Online Practice" is simple, meaning that the website's layout is easy to follow and use. However, many students claimed that they felt like they were simply working in a conventional workbook.

"The design of "Smart Choice Online Practice" is very simple. Menus are easy to see, instructions are easy to follow, but I think it's too plain and too white. They [the publishers] could have made it better."

(Student 8)

"I feel like I'm working in an electronic workbook when I do activities on "Smart Choice Online Practice". I wish that it looked better to get more attention from students."

(Student 20)

In comparison, most of the students said that "Smart Choice On the Move" has a game-like design, where the website reports the results of their work and their progression as a game would,

meaning that the website shows students' progress by using different colors of stars and trophies. These "badges" represent the quality of the students' work in each activity. This makes some students highly motivated, as they want to collect all the best badges.

> *"I like doing activities on "On the Move" because it shows my progression like a game. I get stars and trophies in each activity depending on my scores. I want to collect all of the best badges so I have to pay close attention to every answer I put. I would say the platform motivates me a lot, not directly in learning English, but in collecting awards. However, from this badge hunting, I could practice English a lot."*

(Student 4)

> *"I like the way the website uses stars and trophies to show my progression. My friends and I compete with each other to collect all the best badges. It is fun, and I feel that I also learn some English too."*

(Student 15)

Another interesting feature of *"Smart Choice On the Move"* is that the website is more convenient to access. This is because the website is designed to be accessed via smartphone, meaning that the students could log in to the website anywhere and anytime they want. Thus, most of the students found it more convenient to access *"Smart Choice On the Move"* rather than "Smart Choice Online Practice," which requires students to access it via personal computer.

"I can access the website ['Smart Choice On the Move'] anytime and anywhere I want. I just need to have an internet connection to connect to it. I think it's easier to access websites from my smartphone rather than from my computer."

(Student 12)

"When I am outside and I want to kill time, I could go to "On the Move" and do some activities. It's so easy to access and the website is compatible with my smartphone. For 'Online Practice', I have to have lots of time in front of my computer to do activities on it as the website requires me to access via computer only."

(Student 17)

However, there was one student who couldn't access to both websites using Macbook. He suggested that the publishers should make the systems to be compatible with any kind of device.

"I can't use my Macbook to access to both websites, so I have to switch to my phone instead. I prefer to do the activities on my computer as the screen is way bigger. I think that the publishers should make sure that their websites work with all kinds of devices."

(Student 4)

Discussion and recommendations

Promoting an own-pace learning environment

The findings from the semi-structured interviews showed that one of the interesting features of both *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* is that the VLE websites could provide more opportunities for learners to practice English outside of the classroom. Doing self-study activities could help students to learn at their own pace, meaning that they could select lessons or activities from only the learning modules that they are interested in. In addition, students could also practice any lesson as many times as they felt necessary. This idea of integrating online self-study activities in line with Jingyu's (2014) study, supporting the similar idea that providing learners more control of their own learning would be beneficial for them in terms of increased motivation and more opportunity to practice their lessons. Therefore, CALL integration in classrooms is considered preferable since this teaching method allows face-to-face instruction and online learning to complement each other, combining their separate advantages to bring about improved learning.

The findings also showed that integrating VLE could positively affect students' English skills, especially listening skills, by allowing them to practice at their own pace and as many times as they need. In both *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"*, the students could pause an audio file or video file to catch up with the speed of the recordings. They could also view the audio/ video scripts to work on vocabulary that they

were not familiar with. It was found that online exercises, from the learners' point of view, effectively facilitated their listening. There are empirical studies showing that online learning promotes listening skills in addition to: critical thinking, grammar, vocabulary, speaking, and writing. For example, Yang et al. (2013), examined a VLE for individualized English listening and speaking while integrating critical thinking, finding that VLEs facilitate individualized learning, or learning at one's own pace, by individually addressing the difficulties faced by learners with mixed ability levels. This is where standard, lecture-based instructional approaches fail to support individualized learning.

All in all, the use of VLE websites in this course could augment the classroom environment where teachers had to rush through their lessons in order to achieve their lesson plan target. This could result in leaving some students behind, as they might need more time to digest what they have learned in the class. Therefore, online self-study activities like this could help ensure that learners can practice their lessons online to keep up with their class.

Providing more chances to practice English grammar

Apart from English listening skills, the findings showed that VLE websites, especially *"Smart Choice Online Practice*, could help students to improve their English grammar as the websites provide a sufficient amount of grammar activities. Actually, there are more grammar activities provided in *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* than in *"Smart Choice On the Move."* Again, the students claimed that they could practice English grammar at their own pace

and could review it multiple times. This gave the students more motivation in learning and more confidence as they could practice until they fully understood each grammar point. The idea of promoting students' grammar through web-based learning is supported by Sagarra and Zapata (2008) who mentioned that students perceived the usefulness of an online workbook for language learning, particularly in the areas of grammar and vocabulary acquisition. This is in line with another study by Ngo (2018), who confirmed that teaching English grammar through a blended learning instruction model is effective in helping students improve their English grammar skills. The study also noted that the role of technology in the classroom is to be a pedagogical support fostering students' autonomy and reinforcing students' positive attitude towards the English language. As teachers sometimes lack the time to make sure each one of their students understands what is being taught, especially in grammar classes, integrating online self-study with a sufficient amount of grammar exercises could assist those students who need more time and practice to fully understand the material being presented in class.

Providing instant error feedback and progression

In terms of feedback, both *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* give instant error feedback once the learners submit their answers. Both websites give learners answer keys of each exercise, and correct learners' mistakes as well. This approach could help students learn from their mistakes and encourage them to try to get a higher or perfect score in further attempts, and in this way improves their language learning. The

findings also agree with Felix (2003), who observed that instant error feedback could drive learners to spend more time with the exercises in order to get a better score. Moreover, the participants noted that both *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"* report their learning progress by using different colors of stars and trophies. However, the *"Smart Choice On the Move"* system shows students' progression immediately after they finish each activity, while *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* requires students to click on a "Progress" button to see their progress in each unit. In any case, the idea of showing progression by using stars and trophies gives students the feeling of playing a game, rather than practicing English. This prompts some students to try to collect the best stars and trophies that they could, meaning that they have to pay more attention to the tasks, resulting in increased motivation and more practice. The use of "badges" is in line with a study by Gibson et. al. (2015), who claimed that digital badges could have important impacts on motivation for learning, status within a community, and can transparently display achievement level.

Flexibility to access from anywhere

Another feature that most of the students mentioned about *"Smart Choice On the Move"* is that the website provides flexibility for the participants to access it from anywhere and at any time. They could access *"Smart Choice On the Move"* using their smartphones, whereas they had to use a personal computer to access *"Smart Choice Online Practice."* Two of the reasons that the course publishers included a website designed for smartphones might be the proliferation of mobile devices (such as mobile phones, PDAs,

laptops, and iPads), and enhancements in the technological capabilities of these devices. With decreasing costs, these mobile devices are becoming accessible to more people (Iqbal & Qureshi, 2012). This might facilitate learners, wherever they are, in spending their free time learning more English by going to a mobile-friendly website. It could also help learners who want to practice their English lessons online, but do not have access to a personal computer. From the findings, the students felt that they could access the mobile-based materials freely, without adhering to timetables or attending classes, resulting in more opportunity to practice their lessons. Therefore, the use of VLE websites could be seen as having a positive impact on students, especially regarding the motivation aspect of the learning process.

Overall design

In terms of the overall design of both *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* and *"Smart Choice On the Move"*, there are some differences between them. For *"Smart Choice Online Practice"*, most of the students said that the website has a simple design, meaning that the website is easy to use and follow. Also, most students reported that the activity types provided are simple. These activity types include true/ false, gap-filling, and multiple-choice. In addition, most of the students were already familiar with these activity types, so that they felt comfortable practicing English through these activities. Finally, there are more grammar and listening/ video activities provided on the website. This means that learners who want to practice such skills tend to come to the website

and practice as they wish. This could result in improving learners' English grammar and listening performance.

In contrast, the activities provided on *"Smart Choice On the Move"* were more fun and challenging as the students were not familiar with the different types of activities such as drag and drop, timed activities, and picture-word matching. Also, the activities required less time to complete compared with the ones on *"Smart Choice Online Practice."* These kinds of activities could help learners practice English in a quick and fun way, resulting in increased learning motivation. That, together with the game-like design where the website shows students' feedback and progress using stars and trophies, could encourage learners to put in more effort to collect all the best badges, indirectly resulting in increased learning motivation.

Apart from all the positive qualities mentioned above, some negative comments are brought up by some students. For example, one student had a problem accessing both websites using a Macbook where the systems might not support OS. Also, some students commented that activities and the design of *"Smart Choice Online Practice"* are so traditional they might get bored. They said that the publishers might have done a better job designing the website to be more attractive by making it more colorful and providing different types of activities. Moreover, doing unfamiliar type of activities such as timed and matching activities could make some students be more stressful in that they have to finish the activities in a short period of time. This might make some students anxious as they need more time to finish each activity.

Implications

From the findings, it can be seen that integrating VLE websites as supplementary materials could provide more opportunities for students to practice their lessons. Also, using VLE websites could help students improve their weaker skills and prepare for their exams. Moreover, it could help increase learning motivation by using fun and challenging activities with instant feedback and a progress monitoring system to maintain students' interest in continuing with the activities. However, there are some aspects that must be considered when integrating VLE websites to get the most benefit from them. Thus, what follows are some of the pedagogical implications drawn from the findings of this study.

1) Teachers or institutions should integrate VLE websites as learning support into their courses, as this method has many benefits for language learners.

2) The design of VLE websites should be attractive, colorful, and containing different types of activities, in order to keep learners engaged and motivated.

3) To maximize learners' access to VLE websites, websites that allow access via both personal computers and smartphones should be considered.

Limitations

There were some limitations in carrying out this research. The first limitation of this study is that the participants were a highly specific group of students in a specific learning context. In

other words, the type of CALL used by KMUTT, as well as students' perceptions towards the use of VLE websites, were investigated through only a single particular group of language learners. Consequently, the results cannot be said to broadly represent students' perceptions towards the use of web-based learning materials. Another limitation of this study is that the data was obtained by implementing semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the data provided by the participants may have been inaccurate. For instance, some participants might not have said what they actually think about the use of web-based learning materials. Finally, this study focuses closely on particular VLE materials that come with a textbook. Therefore, the results could not be generalized to VLE in general.

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