

# Online English Learning Realities: Satisfaction and Challenges among Thai EFL University Students

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## Abstract

This study examined the satisfaction and challenges encountered by 293 Thai university students in their online English learning experiences. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the data were collected through a 20-item questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Quantitative findings reported a high overall level of satisfaction, indicating generally positive perceptions of online English learning. The highest-rated aspect was instructors, particularly for creating opportunities for students to ask questions and check their understanding. In contrast, the lowest-rated aspect was learners, especially regarding students' ability to maintain focus during online lessons. Qualitative data revealed several key challenges, including poor internet connectivity, lack of interaction, distracting home environments, and instructors' limited technological skills. Furthermore, the study also found that prolonged exposure to online learning led to long-term effects, such as reduced motivation, increased passivity, and weakened academic discipline that persisted even after returning to on-site classes. The study highlights the need for active instructor engagement, ongoing training in online teaching, student-centered course design, and structured support to help students regain motivation and discipline after passive online learning. This research contributes to support the improvement of more efficient and responsive online English instruction.

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## Introduction

Online English learning has become an important part of higher education, offering flexibility, convenience, and opportunities to develop key language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Persada et al., 2022). While online learning was essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has remained an important part of blended and hybrid teaching in the post-pandemic period (Broadbent et al., 2023; Sain et al., 2024). Some scholars have highlighted that students' satisfaction with their online learning experience was strongly linked to motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (AL-Harsoosi et al., 2024; Ritonga et al., 2023). However, previous research has shown mixed results on students' perspectives. Some studies reported that students were satisfied with online English learning, especially appreciating its flexibility, variety of materials, and chances for independent learning (Boonmoh & Kulavichian, 2024; Darwish, 2025). Conversely, other studies identified difficulties faced by students. Those revealed issues such as poor internet connection, limited interaction, lack of engagement, technical problems, and difficulty understanding lessons, all of which reduce student satisfaction and overall learning quality (Aroonsrimarakot et al., 2023; Kirana & Gupta, 2023; Raktham, 2022; Sipe & Sitthitikul, 2022).

These inconsistent findings highlight the need to explore both the satisfaction and challenges in online English learning, particularly among Thai non-English majors. To address this research gap, the present study aims to examine Thai EFL non-English majors' satisfaction levels and the difficulties they experienced in online English learning when they return to onsite classes. Employing a mixed-method approach, the findings could provide an updated, clearer picture of students' experiences and offer suggestions to improve online English learning in Thailand. To offer more comprehensive insights, this study addresses the following research questions:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** What was the degree of satisfaction among non-English major university students regarding their online English learning experience?

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** What challenges did non-English major university students face during online English learning?

## Literature Review

### *Online Learning*

Online learning allows students to access materials, interact with instructors, and collaborate with peers remotely, offering flexibility and convenience (Persada et al., 2022). Online English learning focuses on improving reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills through multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, and interactive exercises, supporting self-paced, personalized learning and real-world language use

(Persada et al., 2022). It is typically divided into synchronous (real-time, interactive) and asynchronous (flexible, self-paced) formats, making it adaptable to students' varied schedules and responsibilities (Persada et al., 2022).

Online learning was adopted and integrated into teaching and learning practices (Boonmoh & Kulavichian, 2024; Chumworatayee, 2023). Boonmoh and Kulavichian (2024) developed an online training program to enhance Thai undergraduates' online and intercultural communication skills and found that the program was effective and well received. In Chumworatayee's (2023) study, synchronous online teaching was implemented in English courses for undergraduate and graduate students during the pandemic. Even though online learning is no longer mandatory, it has shown clear benefits, become a valuable alternative, and is now a growing part of teaching practices (Broadbent et al., 2023; Sain et al., 2024). Broadbent et al. (2023) also reported that post-pandemic, online learning activities became more common, driven by institutional policies, workload demands, and educators' motivation to innovate. Therefore, students' satisfaction with online learning has received increasing attention from several scholars.

#### *Online Learner Satisfaction Framework*

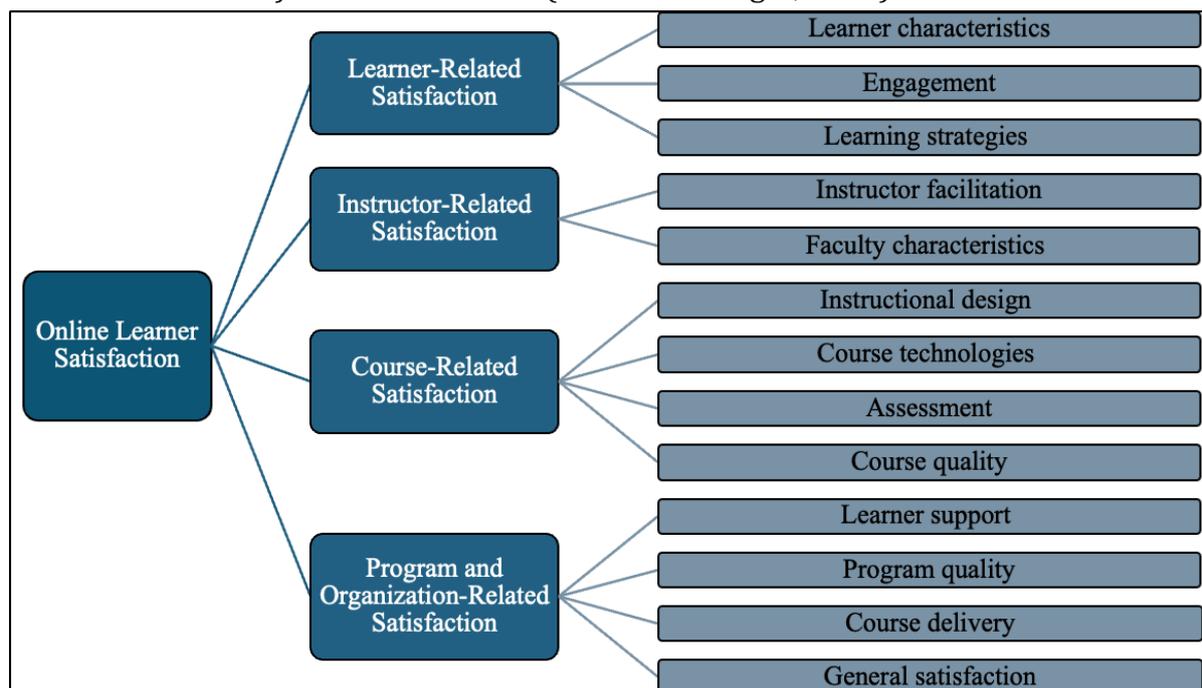
Martin and Bolliger (2022) cite studies by Astin (1993), Sahin and Shelley (2008), and Wickersham and McGee (2008) to demonstrate that student satisfaction plays an important role in their online learning journey, as it can influence how they learn and perform, as well as their motivation, classroom engagement, academic success, and graduation rates. To identify the patterns of online learner satisfaction, research themes and factors, and data collection tools used to explore online learner satisfaction, Martin and Bolliger (2022) conducted a systematic review of 98 journal articles published between 2010 and 2019 on aspects of online learner satisfaction. Their findings revealed four main themes including "Learner-Related Satisfaction, Instructor-Related Satisfaction, Course-Related Satisfaction, and Program and Organization-Related Satisfaction" (Martin & Bolliger, 2022, p. 12). These four themes consisted of the 13 sub-themes as illustrated in Figure 1.

#### *Satisfaction with Online English Learning*

Student satisfaction is a crucial indicator of academic success, as it reflects learners' engagement and perceptions of educational quality. Research shows that satisfaction is closely linked to key educational outcomes, including motivation, retention, and academic performance (AL-Harsoosi et al., 2024). In online learning environments, satisfaction enhances learner motivation, which in turn supports academic achievement (Ritonga et al., 2023). Existing studies conducted in different contexts have examined satisfaction in online English learning and revealed both positive and negative attitudes, highlighting key factors that influence learners' online learning experiences.

**Figure 1**

*Online Learner Satisfaction Framework (Martin & Bolliger, 2022)*



Several studies have revealed similar findings, confirming students' positive perceptions of their online learning experiences (Darwish, 2025; Fu, 2025; Inkaew, 2022; Karim & Mustapha, 2025; Ketmuni, 2021; Lemosnero & Bacasmot, 2025; Sangkasuth & Trimek, 2021). In Jordan, Darwish (2025) found that undergraduate students had high levels of satisfaction with online English learning, with key benefits including flexibility and ease of access to learning tools. Similarly, in China, Fu (2025) revealed that four types of online interaction significantly influenced Chinese EFL students' satisfaction and their intention to continue learning. Meaningful interaction was a key factor contributing to both satisfaction and sustained engagement. In addition, in Malaysia, Karim and Mustapha (2025) found that online learning did not hinder ESL students' English learning; instead, it fostered positive attitudes toward language learning, particularly regarding instructors' preparedness, teaching approaches, and the use of digital technology. Likewise, in the Philippines, Lemosnero and Bacasmot (2025) found that ESL learners' informal online English use during leisure time positively influenced their satisfaction with speaking classes. In the Thai context, these studies reported consistent findings (Inkaew, 2022; Ketmuni, 2021; Sangkasuth & Trimek, 2021). Sangkasuth and Trimek (2021) revealed high overall satisfaction with online teaching and learning, particularly in the area of curriculum and content. Ketmuni (2021) found high levels of both satisfaction and acceptance of online English learning, with perceived ease of use identified as the most influential factor. Inkaew (2022) further observed that students enrolled in an online fundamental English writing course viewed online learning positively, mentioning convenience, flexibility, and improved writing skills. Besides the factors mentioned in those studies, students' readiness and active participation were also

identified as significant factors contributing to satisfaction in online English learning (Altinsoy & Boyraz, 2025; Ip & To, 2025).

In contrast, although online English learning has demonstrated benefits and high satisfaction, some studies have presented contrasting perspectives, particularly when the challenges outweigh the perceived advantages (Han et al., 2024; Kirana & Gupta, 2023; Raktham, 2022; Syarifah Ismia et al., 2023).

Han et al. (2024) found that Chinese college students reported moderate to high levels of satisfaction with online English learning. Challenges such as limited student engagement and unstable internet access negatively affected students' overall learning experience. In Thailand, Raktham (2022) found moderate satisfaction, mainly with institutional support and preparedness. While teaching quality was rated positively, students reported that disadvantages—such as lack of face-to-face interaction, heavy workloads, and low engagement—outweighed the benefits. A related study on a specific English skill revealed even more negative attitudes. Kirana and Gupta (2023) examined Thai EFL students' perceptions of online advanced writing courses. The study found low overall satisfaction due to limited interaction, difficulty understanding lessons, and feelings of isolation. Similar findings were reported by Syarifah Ismia et al. (2023) in Indonesia, where 61% of students negatively viewed online English learning. Main concerns included incomprehension, lack of communication, and technical obstacles. With these drawbacks and concerns, the challenges in online English learning cannot be overlooked.

#### *Challenges Faced by EFL students in Online English Learning*

The rapid shift to online learning in EFL education has revealed several important challenges faced by students. Although online learning provides some benefits (Chaiyasat et al., 2024; Nusong & Watanapokakul, 2025; Pusey & Nanni, 2022), it also creates many challenges for EFL students.

During the great pandemic, several studies have indicated that university students experienced various challenges that affected their online English learning experiences. In the Chinese context, Liu and Xie (2024) and Zhang and Wu (2022) reported that students often felt bored and disengaged during online classes due to teacher-centered instruction, monotonous tasks, and a lack of emotional and peer support. Technical issues such as unstable internet and distractions from home also reduced students' participation and confidence in learning.

Similar problems were also found in the Thai EFL context. Studies by Pusey and Nanni (2022), Sipe and Sitthitikul (2022), and Aroonsrimarakot et al. (2023) similarly showed that Thai students experienced low engagement and limited interaction with their teachers which could make their learning less active. In addition, Thai EFL students reported low motivation while learning English online (Aroonsrimarakot et al., 2023;

Chaiyasat et al., 2024; Pusey & Nanni, 2022) and academic dishonesty issues were also reported (Sipe & Sitthitikul, 2022). Regarding technical and internet issues, students reported that they struggled with internet instability and other technical problems that frequently disrupted their classes (Aroonsrimarakot et al., 2023; Chaiyasat et al., 2024; Sipe & Sitthitikul, 2022). Furthermore, frequent distractions while studying from home were commonly reported (Aroonsrimarakot et al., 2023; Sipe & Sitthitikul, 2022). As a whole, these studies suggest that the obstacles or challenges faced by EFL university students during online learning were not only technical but also motivational and environmental. Also, the previous findings underscored the need for more interactive and well-supported online English instruction (Aroonsrimarakot et al., 2023; Chaiyasat et al., 2024).

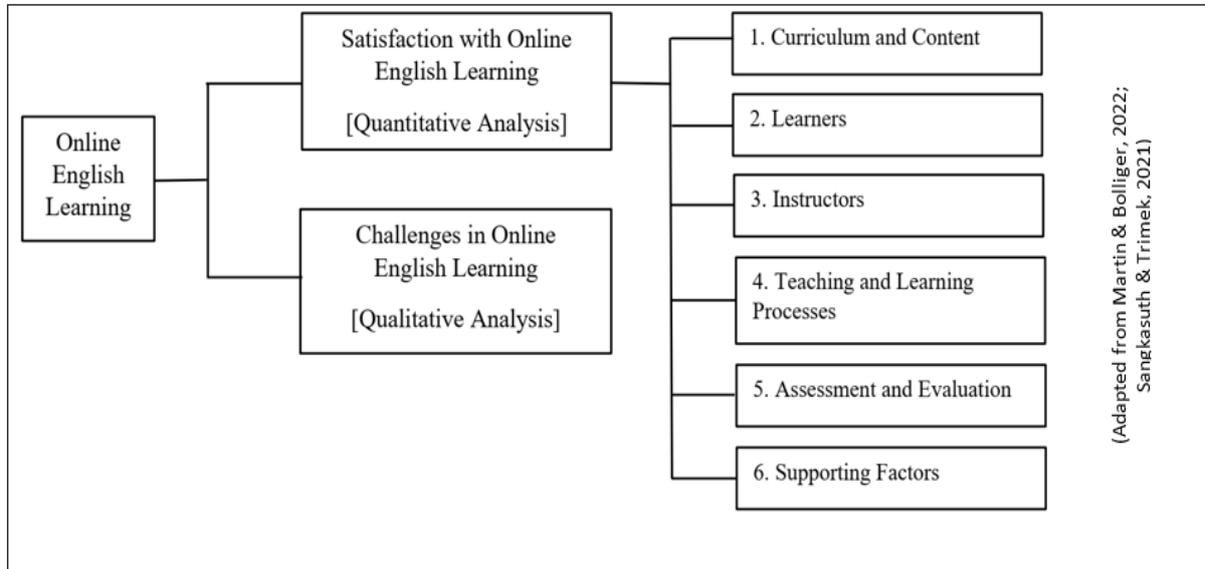
Recent studies in 2025 have continued to explore the challenges and evolving perspectives on online learning in the post-pandemic period. Despite the gradual return to on-site classes, many issues identified during the pandemic remain relevant. First, both students and teachers still reported difficulties with technical reliability and internet stability, which continued to affect the quality of online instruction (Najjar et al., 2025; Zhang & Thanavisuth, 2025). Second, the classroom engagement and interactivity have still played the important role in maintaining learning effectiveness (Deng & Yang, 2025). Finally, the need for institutional and pedagogical support including teacher training and accessible technical assistance was recognized as essential for sustaining quality online learning (Deng & Yang, 2025; Najjar et al., 2025).

The review of the literature shed light on the important barriers that EFL university students faced while studying English online, both during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era. However, there is still a need to explore students' experiences more deeply in terms of the challenges they encountered after returning to on-site learning to gain a broader understanding, especially in the Thai EFL context, which has been less explored recently (Zhang & Thanavisuth, 2025).

As evidenced by several related studies, learners held positive perceptions of online English learning; however, some showed negative views. These studies mainly focused on either satisfaction or challenges, examining different aspects and contexts. Most research employed a quantitative approach, while a few studies presented mixed-method data. Thus, to fill these gaps, this study aims to explore whether learners perceive online English learning positively or negatively, particularly in the Thai EFL context. To be more specific, six main aspects, including 1) curriculum and content, 2) learners, 3) instructors, 4) teaching and learning processes, 5) assessment and evaluation, and 6) supporting factors, were also examined to identify the areas of greatest and least satisfaction. Moreover, the study attempts to further investigate the challenges that hinder learners' satisfaction with their online learning experiences. Through a mixed-methods design, the findings could present a more comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of students'

experiences and recommend improvements for online English learning in Thailand. Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

**Figure 2**  
*Conceptual Framework of the Study*



**Methodology**

*Participants*

This study focused on fourth-year undergraduate students who were not majoring in English at a university located in Sakon Nakhon province, Thailand. The total population consisted of 1,100 students from four faculties. For the quantitative part of the study, a sample of 293 students was selected using Yamane’s (1973) formula for sample size calculation. Purposive sampling was used to recruit fourth-year non-English major students who were enrolled in the 2023 academic year (June-March, 2024) because these participants had experienced both online classes and on-site classes. In the qualitative phase, six students from the same population volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews.

**Table 1**  
*Student Demographic Information*

Basic Information		Number of Participants (n=293)
Gender	Male	68
	Female	223
	LGBTQIA+	2
Faculty	Natural Resources and Agro-Industry	15
	Liberal Arts and Management Science	187
	Science and Engineering	47
	Public Health	44

The demographic data of the 293 randomly selected participants are reported in Table 1. The majority of the participants were from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science ( $n=187$ ), followed by those from the Faculty of Science and Engineering ( $n=47$ ) and the Faculty of Public Health ( $n=44$ ). The students from the Faculty of Natural Resources and Agro-Industry were the smallest group ( $n=15$ ). Regarding gender, 223 students were female, 68 were male, and 2 identified as LGBTQIA+.

### *Research Instruments and the Pilot Study*

To address the two research questions, the researchers employed two research instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative questionnaire assessed students' satisfaction with online English learning. The development process involved reviewing relevant literature and previous studies, particularly Martin and Bolliger (2022) and Sangkasuth and Trimek (2021). To verify the content validity, the researchers invited three experts from the related field to examine the IOC (The Index of Item-Objective Congruence). The IOC of the questionnaire was 0.93 which showed that the questions were in line with objectives of the study. The questionnaire included 20 items across six key areas: curriculum and content, learners, instructors, teaching and learning processes, assessment and evaluation, and supporting factors. The questionnaire had three sections: (1) demographic information, (2) satisfaction with online English learning, and (3) suggestions. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High). The interpretation of mean scores followed the Likert scale criteria proposed by Silanoi and Chindaprasert (2019) as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Criteria for Measuring the Students' Satisfaction with Online English Learning*

Criteria	Average Rating
Very Low	1.00-1.79
Low	1.80-2.59
Moderate	2.60-3.39
High	3.40-4.19
Very High	4.20-5.00

For qualitative data collection, the interview questions were divided into two sections: (1) students' experiences with online English learning and (2) the challenges they encountered. These questions were examined by three experts to verify that the questions were align with the research objectives, comprehensible, and not ambiguous. Their feedback was used in revision. Both the questionnaire and the interview questions were translated into Thai, the participants' native language.

The instruments for data collection, including a questionnaire and interview form, were prepared and pilot tested with participants who shared similar characteristics to the main sample, but they were not part of the actual study. In so doing, the researchers could ensure that the questions could provide relevant information to RQ 1 and 2.

*Ethical Considerations and Data Collection Procedure*

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (reference no. XXREC-XXX65/020), and all ethical standards were strictly observed. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights to withdraw at any time before signing a consent form. Upon their agreement, the researchers obtained their permission to record the conversations before starting each interview. To preserve their privacy, the researchers used pseudonyms when presenting or reported the results, and their real names or institutions were not mentioned.

To collect the data, the questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms with the first page presenting the research title and objectives. For qualitative data, interviews were conducted through Google Meet or Zoom with participants who volunteered to provide further information. Data from both instruments were then analyzed to address the research questions.

**Data Analysis**

The present study used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to address RQ1. For the qualitative analysis, all audio recordings were transcribed word for word and analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) open and axial coding methods. Open coding was applied to break down the qualitative data, identify concepts, and categorize them by their properties and dimensions. Axial coding was then used to reassemble the data by linking categories with their subcategories to establish meaningful relationships. Data from six voluntary interviewees were collected to gain deeper insights into the challenges they experienced and to address RQ2.

Table 3 shows the demographic information of the six interviewees. It includes their pseudonyms, gender, age, year of study, major, and their experience in learning English.

**Table 3***Interviewee Demographics*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Year	Faculty	English Learning Experience	
					Online	Onsite
Aline	Female	21	4	Liberal Arts and Management Science	/	/
Tiffany	Female	21	4	Liberal Arts and Management Science	/	/
Tyler	Male	22	4	Public Health	/	/
Sam	Male	21	4	Natural Resources and Agro-Industry	/	/
Kate	Female	21	4	Science and Engineering	/	/
Emma	Female	21	4	Science and Engineering	/	/

## Findings

*RQ1: What was the Degree of Satisfaction among non-English Major University Students regarding their Online English Learning Experience?*

To respond to RQ1, the data are presented in the following tables. Table 4 presents the levels of students' satisfaction with online English learning across six key aspects, as well as the overall result. Table 5 displays individual 20 items used to measure satisfaction.

### *Student satisfaction with online English learning across six key aspects*

Table 4 illustrates students' satisfaction with online English learning across six key aspects. The findings reveal that the overall satisfaction level was high, with a mean score of 4.10 (SD = 0.78). Among the six aspects, the highest satisfaction was found in the area of instructors (M = 4.20, SD = 0.67), which was the only aspect classified as "very high" and ranked first. The remaining aspects were all rated at a high level of satisfaction, including assessment and evaluation (M = 4.19, SD = 0.65), curriculum and content (M = 4.16, SD = 0.67), teaching and learning process (M = 4.14, SD = 0.67), and supporting factors (M = 4.02, SD = 0.70), respectively. The aspect with the lowest satisfaction score was learners themselves (M = 3.97, SD = 0.69), although it was still classified as high.

**Table 4**

*Student Satisfaction with Online English Learning across Six Key Aspects*

Aspects	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
1. Curriculum and Content	4.16	0.67	High	3
2. Learners	3.97	0.69	High	6
3. Instructors	4.20	0.67	Very High	1
4. Teaching and Learning Process	4.14	0.67	High	4
5. Assessment and Evaluation	4.19	0.65	High	2
6. Supporting Factors	4.02	0.70	High	5
Overall	4.10	0.78	High	

### *Satisfaction items related to online English learning*

Table 5 provides a more detailed report of students' satisfaction, measured across 20 items within six key aspects. Overall, most items were rated at a "High" level of satisfaction, while a few were rated as "Very High." Items achieving a "Very High" rating included item 8, "The instructor allows learners to ask questions and share opinions on unclear topics or lessons" (M = 4.23, SD = 0.74); item 10, "The instructor reviews the content and checks learners' understanding" (M = 4.21, SD = 0.74); item 1, "The course content aligns with the lessons" (M = 4.20, SD = 0.69); and item 16, "The appropriateness of test result announcements" (M = 4.20, SD = 0.74).

While most items were rated at a "High" level, some received relatively lower mean scores. The four lowest-ranked items were: item 6, "Learners can stay focused and engaged in the lessons" (M = 3.86, SD = 0.83); item 17, "The quality of the internet connection used by learners" (M = 3.94, SD = 0.86); item 19, "The online learning

environment is engaging and enjoyable" (M = 3.95, SD = 0.84); and item 5, "Learners can choose their preferred learning schedule" (M = 3.97, SD = 0.94).

**Table 5**

*Individual Items Measuring Satisfaction with Online English Learning*

Aspects	Items	Mean	SD	Level
Curriculum and Content	1. The course content aligns with the lessons.	4.20	0.69	Very High
	2. The course content is appropriate for the learning duration.	4.12	0.76	High
Learners	3. Learners can review the course content anytime as needed.	4.16	0.79	High
	4. Learners are ready for studying.	4.02	0.75	High
	5. Learners can choose their preferred learning schedule.	3.97	0.94	High
	6. Learners can stay focused and engaged in the lessons.	3.86	0.83	High
	7. Learners can conveniently communicate with the instructor.	4.04	0.81	High
Instructors	8. The instructor allows learners to ask questions and share opinions on unclear topics or lessons.	4.23	0.74	Very High
	9. The teaching duration is appropriate.	4.17	0.74	High
	10. The instructor reviews the content and checks learners' understanding.	4.21	0.74	Very High
Teaching and Learning Process	11. Learners can attend classes from any location.	4.15	0.78	High
	12. The appropriateness of assignments/worksheets.	4.11	0.74	High
	13. The appropriateness of the teaching and learning process.	4.17	0.75	High
Assessment and Evaluation	14. The appropriateness of pre- and post-tests.	4.19	0.71	High
	15. The appropriateness of the test evaluation system.	4.18	0.69	High
	16. The appropriateness of test result announcements.	4.20	0.74	Very High
Supporting Factors	17. The quality of the internet connection used by learners.	3.94	0.86	High
	18. The suitability of online learning platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, etc.	4.13	0.72	High
	19. The online learning environment is engaging and enjoyable.	3.95	0.84	High
	20. The availability of devices for online learning, such as computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones.	4.06	0.83	High

*RQ2: What Challenges did Non-English Major University Students Face during Online English Learning?*

Analyzed data from interviews conducted with six Thai students from non-English majors regarding their experiences with online English learning highlighted two main points. Those consisted of (1) challenges encountered when studying English online and (2) impacts of online English learning on student learning behaviors.

*Challenges encountered when studying English online*

From the interviews, the data revealed five challenges that the Thai EFL university students had to face when they studied English online. These included internet issues, an uncondusive learning environment, lack of student-teacher interaction, concerns about the academic honesty in online exams, and teachers with limited technological proficiency.

### *Internet connectivity challenges*

Analysis of the data indicated that internet connectivity problems affected five of the six students during their online English studies. Emma said, *“For me, it’s mainly the internet. Sometimes the connection lags or cuts out unexpectedly, something like that.”* This also happened to Tyler. He stated, *“If we’re studying off-campus, there could be signal congestion—like when you’re in a place with lots of people. For example, if I go to the library, there are connection issues because everyone’s sharing the network.”*

This aligns with what the other three students, Kate, Sam, and Tiffany, experienced. In addition, these problems negatively affected their learning experience. For Kate, she was unable to hear her teacher clearly due to a weak internet connection in her dormitory. Kate stated, *“Hmm... sometimes the app crashes, and sometimes it’s just slow internet—like the Wi-Fi at my dorm is slow, or there’s a power outage. Sometimes the teacher can’t hear us, or sometimes we can’t hear the teacher properly. The sound gets choppy. Yeah... if the internet lags, then the audio isn’t clear—we can’t hear properly.”*

Sam also experienced the same issue, but he was too shy to ask the teacher for clarification during class. He stated, *“Sometimes, when the internet isn’t good, the signal cuts out, and I don’t really understand some parts. Most of the time, I don’t dare to ask questions. I feel shy to turn on the mic and ask, especially in large online classes.”*

For Tiffany, she reported that internet problems negatively impacted her learning experience, particularly in online listening and speaking classes. She highlighted that internet problems made her online English learning experience twice as difficult. She stated, *“Speaking and listening online isn’t very stable. It’s video-based, but I can’t really watch the videos properly because of internet problems. I also can’t hear the teacher very well. Listening is already hard for me because my English isn’t very good, and when it’s online, it just makes it twice as difficult.”*

Not only did the students encounter these problems during online classes, but the issues became even more apparent during exams. Two of the six students, Tiffany and Kate, reported experiencing internet issues during their examinations due to a high number of students being online at the same time. In their view, it wasted a lot of time.

Internet connectivity problems significantly impacted the online English learning experience for Thai university students, particularly in listening and speaking with teachers. Additionally, these issues also disrupted the process of taking their exams.

### *Unconducive learning environments at home*

The analysis revealed the four interviewees highlighted the challenge of online English studying in an environment that was not conducive to learning. For Sam, finding an appropriate place to study online was inconvenient and often disrupted his concentration. Sam shared, *“The internet in my dorm wasn’t good, so I often had to move*

*to other floors or go downstairs to study. It was inconvenient and disrupted my concentration."*

For Aline, living with four roommates affected her online learning experience, especially when they were all studying at the same time. Aline shared, *"When studying online, I lived with four roommates. Sometimes we all had online classes at the same time, which got really noisy because we had to turn on our own devices. And when I had to use the speaker for class, I felt bad for my roommates, something like that."*

The analysis further showed that unsupportive study environments made it easy for students to lose focus during online English classes. The other two students, Tyler and Tiffany, similarly faced this same issue. Tyler stated, *"At home, there are distractions, and I completely lose focus. The 24-hour study area in the campus library is also noisy—people nearby often talk loudly."* For Tiffany, she highlighted that learning online made her concentration worse. She stated, *"Personally, I don't like studying online. I have trouble concentrating, and learning through a screen makes it worse. My device is an iPad or a phone, so it's easy to get distracted—Facebook, Instagram, you name it. And when lecturers only share slides and narrate without turning on their cameras, it's even harder to follow."*

The findings highlight that one of the significant challenges faced by students during online English learning was the lack of a supportive learning environment. Many students struggled to find a suitable place to study, and distractions in their surroundings often disrupted their concentration.

#### *Lack of real-time interaction in online classes*

While Sam expressed positive attitudes toward his Thai teacher for being supportive and caring, he, along with Tyler and Aline, noted that courses taught by foreign instructors often involved receiving assignments without any actual teaching. Tyler said, *"Some foreign lecturers gave more assignments than actual teaching."* Aline had the same experience, which was not quite what she expected, as she had looked forward to learning from native speakers. Aline explained how her online class was conducted, *"I had a class with a foreign teacher, but honestly, it felt like I barely learned anything. I never really had a class, and I never even saw the teacher. It was like the teacher just gave us worksheets, you know? Like, do from this page to that page and submit it by the deadline—that was it."* Aline also shared how she dealt with it. She said, *"So, I ended up asking a friend who had taken the course before."*

Similarly, Sam also encountered the same online learning experience. He stated, *"It was a foreign teacher. Um... he just assigned work, really. I only got to attend one class, so I had to study on my own. I did some translating here and there, but honestly, the foreign teacher didn't show up online at all. He would just assign work through Google Classroom and tell us to keep submitting it."*

Another concern was the experience of receiving assignments without any real teaching. This lack of teaching and communication made students feel disconnected and underprepared, which affected their online learning experience.

#### *Concerns about academic honesty in online examinations*

The analysis revealed that one student showed concern, and two students said cheating was possible in online exams. One of them, Tiffany, noted that although all students were warned not to cheat, it depended on the individual student. She pointed out, *“I’m not sure if cheating was even possible, but they did warn us not to click out of the screen or open other apps. I think it would notify the proctor or something like that. I guess it depends on the person—if someone wanted to cheat, maybe they could.”*

For the other two students, Tyler and Sam, they shared that cheating was possible during online exams. Tyler said, *“Is it okay if I say this? When it comes to grades, it was actually possible to cheat during online exams. Friends would just help each other out, and we’d all get through it together. It was on Google Forms—we had to turn on our cameras so the teacher could see us, but we still managed to cheat anyway.”*

During online tests, some students were able to use tools like Google Translate, which made the exams easier for them. Sam explained, *“To be honest, in online exams, we often used tools like Google Translate. That made things easier. We mostly used translation tools and our own notes or handouts”*

The results show different views about academic honesty in online exams. One student was worried about cheating, while two students said cheating could happen. This means keeping exams fair is still a problem in online learning.

#### *Limited technological proficiency among instructors*

The analysis also revealed that two students had online English classes with teachers who were still adapting to using technology. Aline said, *“I took the class with one teacher, but... the teacher was quite old, and it seemed like he wasn’t very good with technology. He couldn’t even show slides properly. I mean, he did try to teach, but he didn’t really know how to use Google Classroom or even Line, so it caused a lot of issues back then.”*

This aligns with Tiffany’s experience. She said, *“Some teachers weren’t really that good with technology. It took a while just to get the class started—turning on the camera, opening slides, taking attendance. Sometimes the teacher would disconnect and then come back, but the communication just wasn’t smooth. That was mostly during the early stages, though.”*

This shed light on another faced challenge in online English classes because some teachers were still adapting to using technology. Therefore, teachers should be trained

on how to use technology effectively for teaching and managing classrooms both online and on-site.

### *Impacts of online English learning on student learning behaviors*

The analysis revealed the effects of online English learning on Thai non-English major students. It indicated that online learning negatively influenced their learning behaviors, both in the short and long term.

#### *Short-term effects*

The analyzed data revealed that four out of the six interviewees lacked motivation and became lazier after experiencing online learning. Learning through a screen made her lack of motivation to communication with her teacher, Aline said, *"I found it pretty boring, to be honest, because I personally enjoy using English and actually want to communicate with the teacher. So, it just felt dull and I didn't really pay as much attention as I should have."*

This is similar to Sam. He did not really focus during online classes—he just turned them on, let them run, and went back to sleep. Sam stated, *"Sometimes I didn't really pay attention in online classes. Like, on days when I had early classes, I'd just turn it on, let it play, and go do something else—or even go back to sleep."*

The analysis also revealed the other two students became lazier after online learning. Tyler shared, *"I used to be a hardworking student, but online learning made me lazy. That's the honest truth."* This aligns with Tiffany. She became lazier and more passive. Tiffany shared, *"Since it was online, I just didn't feel like getting up. I guess it made me lazier. Online learning didn't really make me feel active or engaged. Some teachers didn't even require us to turn on our cameras—just log in and listen. So, I started feeling lazy or more passive, and even now I still don't really feel like going to on-site classes."*

This sheds light on the short-term effects of online education, such as reduced student engagement, lower energy to study, and less interaction with teachers during the learning process.

#### **Long-Term Effects**

The analysis showed that learning English online affected the long-term learning behaviors of these three students when they returned to on-site classes. Tiffany shared, *"It affected my behavior. I've become passive—even now, even though we're back to onsite classes."*

This also happened to Aline. She said, *"There were definitely some issues. Like, once I got used to online learning, switching back to onsite classes was a bit of a struggle—especially*

*with early morning classes. With onsite, I needed more time to prepare, so sometimes I ended up being late.”*

For Tyler, learning through a screen completely changed his behavior — it was like night and day. Tyler explained, *“And it’s had a long-term effect. It completely burned me out. I just got lazier. Each day I’d wake up not really wanting to go to class. It’s like I got used to that laziness, that comfort from online learning. Honestly, I didn’t really pay much attention in class. There were always other things that seemed more interesting. My attention span got shorter, and my laziness increased. Now I just focus when they take attendance. That feeling stuck with me after online learning. I went from being hardworking to being lazy. Before online studying, I used to summarize lessons for my friends. Now I just wait for their summaries instead. (laughs)”*

This sheds light on how online education may lead to long-term changes in students’ attitudes and habits, which could affect their overall academic performance.

## **Discussion**

Thai non-English major university students reported high satisfaction with their online English learning experiences, particularly in the area related to instructors. Despite the overall high satisfaction scores, learners rated themselves relatively lower among the six aspects. Challenges were also identified to gain deeper insights.

### *Satisfaction with Online English Learning*

The overall high level of student satisfaction with online English learning observed in this study suggests that, when well implemented and adequately supported, online instruction can effectively meet learners’ educational needs and expectations, fostering positive attitudes essential for academic achievement (AL-Harsoosi et al., 2024; Ritonga et al., 2023). This finding aligns with previous research conducted in the Thai context (Boonmoh & Kulavichian, 2024; Chumworatayee, 2023; Ketmuni, 2021). In these studies, students generally expressed positive attitudes toward their online learning experiences. Boonmoh and Kulavichian (2024) reported that Thai undergraduate students were highly satisfied with an online training program that enhanced their online and intercultural communication skills. The results from previous and present studies confirm that online English learning is positively perceived by students and can serve as a favorable tool for improving their language proficiency, whether in a mandatory situation or as an alternative means for lifelong learning.

Instructors emerged as a key strength in this study, receiving the highest satisfaction ratings among the six key aspects. The findings reveal students’ preferred teacher roles, particularly their responsiveness to questions and efforts to facilitate understanding. This emphasizes the importance of teacher presence in promoting positive online learning experiences, consistent with the previous research (Han et al., 2024; Inkaew,

2022; Ketmuni, 2021; Lemosnero & Bacasmot, 2025). Lemosnero and Bacasmot (2025) found that ESL learners expressed the greatest satisfaction with their instructors, specifically in fostering student motivation and engagement. Providing clear and consistent feedback, along with responsive teaching strategies enhanced student engagement and satisfaction (Inkaew, 2022; Ketmuni, 2021). Likewise, instructors' adaptability, individualized feedback, and the integration of innovative tools had a positive influence on students' learning experiences (Han et al., 2024). As teachers' support and attention contribute to student satisfaction, instructors should maintain active communication and regularly check students' understanding during online classes to keep them engaged and foster a sense of connection.

Learners, though classified at a high level overall, received the lowest satisfaction ratings among all categories. This may indicate that students themselves perceived difficulties, particularly in sustaining focus and active participation during online lessons. The findings highlight concerns that were also identified in previous research (Kirana & Gupta, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Individual factors, including limited self-discipline, low motivation, lack of self-confidence, and difficulty maintaining concentration, were major causes of students' challenges in online learning (Wang et al., 2024). Similarly, Kirana and Gupta (2023) found that students experienced difficulties in maintaining focus and motivation in online education. The results suggest that students' self-regulation skills should be further enhanced. Instructors and universities should provide training that helps students develop time management and self-discipline. Strengthening these skills enables students to take responsibility for their own learning and maintain engagement throughout online lessons. In addition, instructors are encouraged to include interactive learning activities and create opportunities for regular communication—instructor–learner and peer interaction—to help students stay actively involved and feel more connected and supported.

#### *Challenges Faced by EFL University Students in Online English Learning*

The findings of the present study align with previous research on the challenges faced by EFL university students during online learning, particularly throughout the lockdown period. Consistent with studies conducted during the pandemic (Aroonsrimarakot et al., 2023; Chaiyasat et al., 2024; Liu & Xie, 2024; Sipe & Sitthitikul, 2022), poor internet connectivity is still reported as one of the barriers to effective online English learning. Most Thai EFL students in this present study experienced unstable connections during live learning sessions which reduced their participation in listening and speaking tasks and increased the difficulty in understanding their lessons. This problem was also found when they took online examinations. This finding echoes Aroonsrimarakot et al. (2023) who reported that technological issues, such as poor-quality audio and system overload were major obstacles during peak assessment periods.

Teachers' limited technological proficiency has also been reported as a problem affecting students' learning engagement in online learning. In line with Aroonsrimarakot et al. (2023), the current participants indicated that some instructors, particularly older ones, struggled with digital tools. This resulted in poorly organized lessons and reduced interaction which lowered student engagement and their learning quality. The results highlight the continuing need for teacher training in online pedagogy and classroom technology in line with the post-pandemic recommendations from Najjar et al. (2025) and Deng and Yang (2025) for institutional support and professional development.

In terms of environmental factors, the findings of the present study also support earlier evidence. Similar to the observations of Zhang and Wu (2022), Sipe and Sitthitikul (2022), and Aroonsrimarakot et al. (2023), the participants in this study reported experiencing distractions and a lack of private study space when learning from home or dormitories. Not only were such disruptions reported to reduce focus and productivity, but they also reinforced how unsupervised environments weakened students' self-discipline. Moreover, this study extends previous findings by showing that these environmental issues had longer-term effects on students' learning behaviors including the loss of motivation and learning routine persisted after students returned to on-site classes.

Beyond confirming earlier findings, the present study also provides further insight into the issue of academic integrity. The participants in this study reported that cheating during online exams was common and could be easily done with the help of peers or translation software. While Sipe and Sitthitikul (2022) noted the risk of dishonesty in online assessments, the present data also reveal that such practices weakened students' sense of responsibility and reduced their perceived value of learning.

Finally, compared with both pandemic-era and 2025 post-pandemic studies, the present study highlights the development of passive learning habits. The participants reported lower participation, greater dependence on classmates, and less effort, and these patterns continued even after they returned to face-to-face classes. This finding suggests that emergency online learning not only caused short-term difficulties but also reshaped students' learning behavior over time. In line with Deng and Yang (2025) and Najjar et al. (2025), the results emphasize that improving online education requires continuous institutional attention to both technological and emotional aspects. Therefore, these findings suggest that universities should provide training for teachers in digital teaching and classroom technology, develop programs that encourage students to re-engage in active learning, and establish support systems that ensure fair and effective learning in both online and hybrid settings.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored Thai EFL university students' online English learning experiences, with a primary focus on the satisfaction and challenges they encountered. Overall,

students reported a high level of satisfaction with online English learning. Among the six key aspects, instructors were rated as the most satisfying, while learners were rated as the least. Instructors played a vital role in supporting students' inquiries and ensuring comprehension. However, learners themselves acknowledged the difficulties in maintaining concentration during online classes. These findings suggest that online English learning was generally well received, particularly when teachers provided interactive support. Nevertheless, sustaining students' concentration should be taken into account to enhance student satisfaction in online learning settings.

In terms of the challenges faced by Thai EFL university students, this study confirms that Thai university students faced significant challenges in online English learning, including poor internet access, limited interaction, unstructured home environments, and instructors' low digital proficiency. While these align with earlier findings, this study further highlights the long-term impact on students' learning behaviors, such as reduced motivation and increased passivity even after returning to on-site classes. These insights suggest that beyond ensuring access, universities must invest in teacher training, student support, and structured re-engagement to rebuild effective and engaging learning environments.

This research contributes to the existing literature by examining the extent to which the educational needs of Thai EFL university students in online English learning are effectively met, ultimately leading to academic achievement. The findings offer practical insights for English instructors and curriculum designers by highlighting both the strengths that support effective learning and the challenges that hinder a positive learning experience. These insights are especially relevant if online English instruction is to be adopted in future teaching practices.

Pedagogical improvements in online English instruction are proposed in this study. The findings underscore the importance of instructor engagement in enhancing students' online learning experiences. Instructors are encouraged to continue fostering interaction by inviting questions and conducting regular comprehension checks, as these practices significantly contribute to student satisfaction. In light of the challenges faced by EFL university students, the following suggestions are offered. Instructors should receive continuous training in digital tools and interactive teaching methods to enhance lesson delivery and student engagement. Course design should prioritize active participation through real-time interaction and student-centered tasks. Additionally, universities need to offer structured support to help students regain motivation and learning discipline after extended periods of passive online learning. These strategies are crucial for improving the quality of both online and blended English instruction.

The study's scope was limited to one university and a specific group of non-English major students. Future research should include broader and more diverse samples across

multiple institutions and disciplines. Longitudinal studies may offer deeper insights into changes in student satisfaction and challenges over time. Additionally, future studies may explore instructors' and administrators' perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of effective online English learning practices.

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## Ethics Declarations

### World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki–Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Participants

This research received approval from the Institutional Review Board (reference no. XXREC-XXX65/020), and all ethical standards were respected.

## Competing Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy considerations but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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