

# The Effects of Using Online Dictionary on Improving EFL Students' English Sentence Stress Pronunciation

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## Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effects of using an online dictionary on improving EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation and to explore the levels of their attitudes towards using online dictionary. The samples were 30 Business English major students enrolled in a Linguistics Course in the first semester of the 2018 academic year 1, selected via simple random sampling. This research design was based on Pre-Experimental Design: One-Shot Case Study and Survey Design. The instruments were 1) an online dictionary 2) an English sentence stress pronunciation practice, 3) an English sentence stress pronunciation test (post-test), and 4) a questionnaire. The statistics were percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

The results revealed that:

1) Results of the post-test were found that 28 EFL students got the average scores from 53 to 72 of 3 (50 -79%), indicating the proficiency in their English sentence stress pronunciation at a moderate level, compared to their pronunciation problems at “moderate” level, while two EFL students got the average scores from 45 to 48 of 2 (30 -49%), indicating the proficiency in their English sentence stress pronunciation at “low” level, compared to their pronunciation problems at “high” level.

2) Levels of their attitudes towards using online dictionary were overall found at the “uncertain” level (3.41). Considering each component, the cognitive component was first ranked at the “uncertain” level (3.42), followed by the behaviour component at the “uncertain” level (3.41), and the affective component at the “uncertain” level (3.40) respectively.

**Keywords:** Online dictionary, EFL students, English sentence stress pronunciation, Effects, Attitudes

## Introduction

It is undeniable that language is a means of communication in daily life (Zhang, 2009). Around the world today there are so many languages that people use to communicate in various countries. English has become one of the most popular languages that is used as a foreign language or an international language. In English, there are four skills that are mainly used to communicate in everyday life, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Of four English skills, the skills used more widely than other skills in communication are listening skill and speaking skill which are the most important skills in learning English because these skills are related to each other, that is, listening skill is the bridge to master the speaking skill. Especially, speaking ability is one of the most significant skills to be improved for efficient communication (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Thus, one element of efficient communications is to master English speaking clearly and understandably is pronunciation because it clearly conveys the meaning in conversation or communication. Errors in pronunciation can lead to misunderstanding or make the person interpreting the message more difficult (Plansangket, 2016).

One major reason why non-native speakers of English have difficulties with pronunciation is due to lacking knowledge of stress placement in English. Most of Thai students also encounter stress problems, so they should learn English pronunciation by focusing on the importance of stress. Taking these gaps into consideration, the researchers are interested in conducting the research entitled “ The Effectiveness of Using Online Dictionary in Improving EFL Students’ English Sentence Stress Pronunciation” among first-year Business English major students who enrolled in Linguistic Course in the first semester of the 2018 academic year, at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University because learning by mimicking native speakers’ sentence stress pronunciation will help them improve their communication in English through LDOCE online.

## **Literature Review**

### *1. Stress in English*

Stress is a very important component of intonation, revealing the speaker's L1 history, and it requires to be studied in a sentence in order to sound native-like (Kucukoglu, 2012). In English, there are two patterns of stress: word stress and sentence stress. The word stress is referred to the stress pattern of syllable within a word, while the sentence stress functions as a "pointer" indicating the most significant part of information focus within a certain word (Tam, 2008). The sentence stress is also the way a speaker emphasizes certain words in each sentence that can help a listener focus on important parts and understand the speaker’s meaning. Thus, the use of stress in speech definitely helps to help listeners better understand the meaning in the long utterance and is closely connected to intonation (Kelly, 2001). The sentence stress is the primary component of English intonation, putting stress and rhythm within a sentence in certain words. Therefore, it is much more crucial for EFL students to speak English smoothly and naturally as a native speaker does because the meaning can be misunderstood by misplacing stress and rhythm within an English sentence. The correct pronunciation of English sentence stress is a key element to make communication more effective.

## *2. Using Online Dictionary in Improving Pronunciation*

One way to help EFL students' pronunciation that is similar or close to the native speaker is using online dictionary with the audio features of the native speaker's real voice that have become a significant academic resource to facilitate pronunciation learning and teaching because it offers a wide range of practical features. Therefore, new opportunities for pronunciation practice have recently been given to EFL students (Metruk, 2017). The use of online dictionary to improve English pronunciation skills has become increasingly popular. As a result, the use of online dictionary for EFL purposes by students has increased. For the purpose of this study, one of online dictionaries used as a tool to improve EFL students' sentence stress pronunciation is Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online which is commonly known as LDOCE online because it contains 88,000 sample sentences are pronounced by British or American native speakers of English (Longman, 2018).

## *3. Related Theory of the Study*

The "mimic method" is an approach developed by Spanish language trainer Idahosa Ness to teach the sound system of a new language that has been found that the most effective way of learning a language is "by ear" (Kennedy, n.d.). The aim of the mimic method is to teach this "by ear" method to learning a language so that EFL students can improve their pronunciation and accent, and sound more like a native speaker. In the mimic method, there are three steps to build EFL students' capacity of learning how to hear and pronounce the sounds of the target language through LDOCE online as follows: Step 1: Sound capacity—mastering elemental sounds or phonemes through LDOCE online, Step 2: Syllable capacity—mastering every possible syllables through LDOCE online, and Step 3: Sentence capacity—mastering rhythm and intonation by mimicking fast native sentences through LDOCE online.

#### *4. Related Studies*

Some studies on using online dictionary to improve EFL Students' English sentence stress pronunciation have been conducted by some researchers. Doudi((2016 conducted the research entitled "The Effects of Using English Dictionaries on Students' Pronunciation", which was found that the outcomes of using the dictionary enhanced student's pronunciation and it was worth to be applied in all levels. Additionally, Metruk (2017) conducted the research entitled "The Use of Electronic Dictionaries for Pronunciation Practice by University EFL Students", which was found that the samples commonly used electronic dictionaries for pronunciation practice, and their dictionaries were the preferred choice. According to Eksi & Yesitlemar (2016), the results of their research entitled, "An Investigation of the Effectiveness of Online Text-to-Speech Tools in Improving EFL Teacher Trainees' Pronunciation" showed that the trainees accepted a native-like accent as an indicator of being a successful language instructor, and that text-to-speech websites were useful self-study resources to enhance pronunciation for trainees. Likewise, Yangklang (2013) studied about the research entitled, "Improving English Stress and Intonation Pronunciation of the First Year Students of Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University through an E-Learning", which was found that after using the e-learning program, the students improved their pronunciation, and they were also satisfied with the e-learning program that could help encourage and motivate their pronunciation improvement.

#### **Research Objectives**

This research consisted of two objectives:

1. To investigate the effects of using online dictionary on improving EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation
2. To explore the levels of their attitudes towards using online dictionary in improving English sentence stress pronunciation

## Methodology

### 1. Research Design

The research design of this study is a quantitative research method based on a Pre-Experimental Design: One-Shot Case Study Design and a Survey Design. The One-Shot Case Study Design is a type of pre-experimental design used to investigate the effects of using online dictionary on improving EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation. This presents the schematic presentation of Pre-Experimental Design: One-Shot Case Study Design (Peralta, 2014, p.1):



Figure 1. Pre-experimental design: One-shot case study design.

*Note:* As shown in Figure 1, X refers to selected experimental group's using online dictionary and English sentence stress practice; O<sub>2</sub> refers to selected experimental group's English Sentence Stress Pronunciation test (Post-test).

In addition, the Survey Design is the research method used to explore the levels of EFL students' attitudes towards using online dictionary in improving English sentence stress pronunciation by using a questionnaire.

### 2. Population and Samples

#### 2.1 Population

The population consisted of a total of 41 first-year Business English major students who enrolled in Linguistic Course during the first semester of the 2018 academic year, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University.

## *2.2 Sample*

The sample used as the target group in this study consisted of 30 first-year Business English major students that were randomly selected from the 41 first-year Business English major students as mentioned in section 2.1, by using simple random sampling method. To create the sample of this study, the researchers employed the lottery method.

## *3. Instruments and Procedures*

### *3.1 The Online Dictionary*

The online dictionary used as an instrument for assisting EFL students in practising English sentences stress pronunciation is “The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online is widely known as LDOCE online as mentioned in the section 2 of the literature review. It offers free access at <https://www.ldoceonline.com/>. This LDOCE online was selected for this study because it contains the English native speaker’s audio features with the speaker icon on which the students can click to hear it read a sentence aloud. In addition, the students can self-practice listening to and repeating the native speaker’s English sentence stress pronunciation via this LDOCE online.

### *3.2 The English Sentence Stress Pronunciation Practice*

The English sentence stress pronunciation practice was designed as an instrument for helping EFL students to self-practice listening to and repeating the native speaker’s English sentence stress pronunciation via the LDOCE online. In this English sentence stress pronunciation practice, the words used as a keyword in each sentence were composed of 30 words that were randomly selected from 100 words that Thai people often mispronounce in English conversation (Janklai, 2014). After that, the researchers used 30 selected key words to find 30 English sentences in LDOCE online in order to create the English sentence stress pronunciation practice with 30 items. After three experts had examined and checked the correctness and appropriateness of 30 English sentences with the reliability of IOC scores at 0.67, the researchers chose 20 English sentences that were

the most appropriate for 30 students as the target group to use the English sentence stress pronunciation practice in self-practising English sentence stress pronunciation while listening to and repeating native speaker's English sentence stress pronunciation from LDOCE online for a week before taking an English sentence stress pronunciation test.

### *3.3 The English Sentence Stress Pronunciation Test*

The English sentence stress pronunciation test (post-test) as an experimental instrument, based on the pre-experimental design: one-shot case study, was designed to measure only the post-test results of the single target group. This English sentence stress pronunciation test included 20 items that were adjusted from the English sentence stress pronunciation practice used to measure the levels of EFL students' scores from English sentence stress pronunciation test after self-practicing English sentence stress pronunciation from online dictionary (LDOCE) for a week.

### *3.4 The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire with 15 items was selected from the total of 23 items. with an index of item-objective congruence (IOC) result of 0.67 for all items, indicating good content validity, it was used to explore EFL students' attitudes towards using online dictionary in improving English sentence stress pronunciation.

## *4. Data Collection*

The data were gathered from 30 EFL students by using the English sentence stress pronunciation test (post-test) with 20 items to measure the score levels of their English sentence stress pronunciation after they used the LDOCE online and the English sentence stress pronunciation practice for self-practising EFL students' English Sentence Stress Pronunciation for a week. In addition, the questionnaire with 15 items was used to explore their attitudes towards using the LDOCE online in improving English sentence stress pronunciation.



### 5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the 20-item English sentence stress pronunciation test were analyzed via the descriptive statistics to calculate frequency and percentage. The criteria of five rubric score levels for evaluating proficiency levels of 30 EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation test adapted from Ma (2015, p. 39) (and the level of the score for evaluating problem levels of their English sentence stress pronunciation test) were shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

*The Interpretation of Level of Five Rubric Scores for Evaluating the Level of Proficiency of EFL Students' English Sentence Stress Pronunciation*

Level of Five Rubric Scores	Interpretation
Level of Score	
5 (90-100)	Students put stress on stressed words (content words) and unstressed words (structure words) within a sentence "all the time" at "highest" level of proficiency.
4 (80-89)	Students put stress on stressed words (content words) and unstressed words (structure words) within a sentence "almost of the time" at "high" level of proficiency.
3 (50-79)	Students put stress on stressed words (content words) and unstressed words (structure words) within a sentence "sometimes" at "moderate" level of proficiency.

Table 1 (Continued)

2 (30-49)	Students “often” put wrong stress on stressed words (content words) and unstressed words (structure words) within a sentence at “low” level of proficiency.
1 (0-29)	Students “rarely” put stress on stressed words (content words) and unstressed words (structure words) within a sentence at “lowest” level of proficiency

*Note:* Level of five rubric score = 1-5; Level of score = 0 -100 (%)

Table 2

*The Interpretation of Level of Scores for Evaluating Level of Problems of EFL Students’ English Sentence Stress Pronunciation*

Level of Score (%)	Interpretationn
90-100%	Students have no problems
80-89 %	Students have problems at a low level
50-79 %	Students have problems at a moderate level
30-49%	Students have problems at a high level
0-29%	Students have problems at a very high level

The quantitative data that obtained from the questionnaire adapted from (Dashtestani (2013), Sayed & Siddiek (2015), and Otaibi (2012) were analyzed via the descriptive statistics to calculate mean and standard deviation as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Levels of the Mean Score of EFL Students' English Sentence Stress Pronunciation*

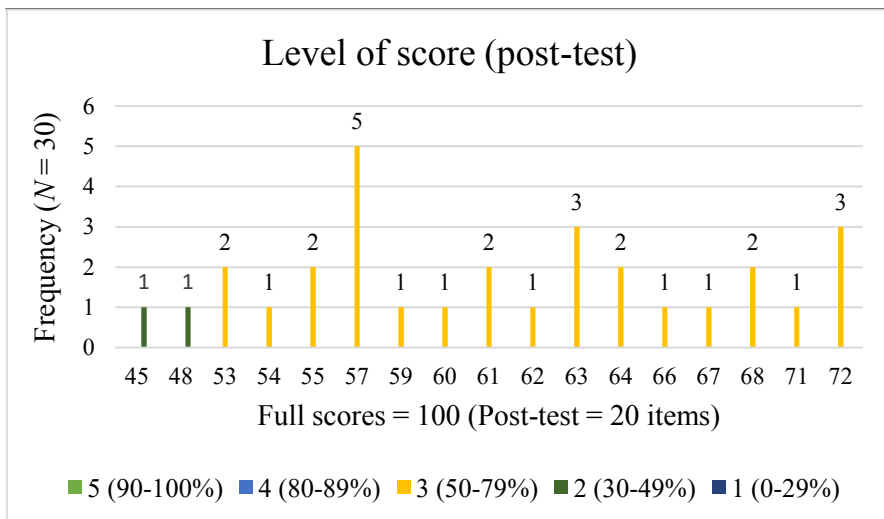
Mean score	Interpretation
4.50-5.00	Strongly agree
3.50-4.49	Agree
2.50-3.49	Uncertain
1.50-2.49	Disagree
1.0 1.49	Strongly disagree

**Results**

This section presents the results of the study relevant to the objectives as follows: 1) to investigate the effects of using online dictionary on improving EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation and 2) to explore the levels of EFL students' attitudes towards using online dictionary in improving English sentence stress pronunciation.

*1. The Results of EFL Students' English Sentence Stress Pronunciation Test (post-test)*

The results of the post-test revealed the scores of EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation, indicating the effects of using online dictionary on improving their English sentence stress pronunciation as shown in figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Results of EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation Test (post-test).

As shown in Figure 2, the results of 30 EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation test (post-test) were found that 28 EFL students got the average scores of the post-test from 53 to 72 of 3 (50 -79%), indicating that the proficiency in their English sentence stress pronunciation was at "moderate" level that means they put stress on stressed words and unstressed words with in a sentence "sometimes", compared to their pronunciation problems at "moderate" level, while only two EFL students got the average scores from 45 to 48 of 2 (30 -49%), indicating that the proficiency in their English sentence stress pronunciation was at "low" level that means they "often" put wrong stress on stressed words and unstressed words with in a sentence, compared to their pronunciation problems at "high" level.

## *2. The Levels of EFL Students' Attitudes towards Using Online Dictionary in Improving English Sentence Stress Pronunciation*

The results of exploring the EFL Students' attitudes towards using online dictionary in improving English sentence stress pronunciation consisted of four components: Affective, Behaviour, and Cognitive Components as presented respectively in table 4, table 5, and table 6.

Table 4

### *Results of EFL Students' Attitudes: The Affective Component*

Items	Level of Attitudes		Level of Agreement
	M	SD	
1. I really like to use LDOCE online dictionary to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation.	4.20	0.71	Agree
2. I do not like to use LDOCE online dictionary to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation because it is difficult to access.	2.30	1.24	Disagree
3. I feel happy and comfortable when I use LDOCE online dictionary for improving my English sentence stress pronunciation.	4.10	0.76	Agree
4. I am afraid of using LDOCE online dictionary for practicing my English sentence stress pronunciation because it is a waste of time and effort.	2.17	1.23	Disagree

Table 4 (continued)

5. I feel more self-confident when I use LDOCE online dictionary for my English sentence stress pronunciation.	4.27	0.74	Agree
Total	3.40	0.94	Uncertain

As shown in Table 4, the results of EFL students' attitudes: the affective component were overall found at "Uncertain" level ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Considering each item of each component, it was found that item 5, "I feel more self-confident when they use online dictionary for their English sentence stress pronunciation" was first ranked at "Agree" level ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ), followed by item 1, "I really like to use LDOCE online dictionary to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation" at "Agree" level ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ), and the lowest mean score was item 4, "I am afraid of using LDOCE online dictionary for practicing my English sentence stress pronunciation because it is a waste of time and effort" at "Disagree" level ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ).

Table 5

*Results of EFL Students' Attitudes: The Behavioural Component*

Items	Level of Attitudes		Level of Agreement
	M	SD	
6. I use LDOCE online dictionary to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation when I am online.	3.93	0.79	Agree
7. I use LDOCE online dictionary at university to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation.	3.97	0.85	Agree
8. I use LDOCE online dictionary at home/at dormitory to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation.	3.80	0.85	Agree
9. I avoid using LDOCE online dictionary because it is a waste of time and effort to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation.	2.10	1.30	Disagree
10. I only use LDOCE online dictionary on purpose to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation.	3.27	1.11	Uncertain
Total	3.41	0.98	Uncertain

As shown in Table 5, the results of EFL students' attitudes: the behavioral component were overall found at "Uncertain" ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). Considering each item, it was found that item 7, "I use online dictionary at university to improve their English sentence stress pronunciation" was first ranked at "Agree" level ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), followed by item 6, "I use LDOCE online dictionary to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation when I am online" at "Agree" level ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), and the lowest mean score was item 9, "I avoid using LDOCE online dictionary because it is a waste of time and effort to improve my English sentence stress pronunciation" at "Disagree" level ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ).

Table 6

*Results of EFL Students' Attitudes: The Cognitive Component*

Items	Level of Attitudes		Level of Agreement
	M	SD	
11. LDOCE online dictionary is a fast means of improving my English sentence stress pronunciation.	4.33	0.71	Agree
12. I think LDOCE online dictionary is easily accessible to me for checking the correct English sentence stress pronunciation.	4.23	0.73	Disagree
13. I think LDOCE online dictionary has more disadvantages than advantages of improving English sentence stress pronunciation.	2.27	1.36	Agree



Table 6 (Continued)

14. I think LDOCE online dictionary is not helpful when I use it for improving English sentence stress pronunciation.	1.97	1.27	Disagree
15. I think LDOCE online dictionary is the best way for me to get additional practice for improving my English sentence stress pronunciation.	4.30	0.75	Agree
Total	3.42	0.97	Uncertain

As shown in Table 6, the results of EFL students' attitudes: the cognitive component were overall found at "Uncertain" ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ). Considering each item, it was found that, item 11, "I think that online dictionary is a fast means of improving their English sentence stress pronunciation" was first ranked at "Agree" level ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ), followed by item 15, "I think LDOCE online dictionary is the best way for me to get additional practice for improving my English sentence stress pronunciation" at "Agree" level ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), and the lowest mean score was item 14, "I think LDOCE online dictionary is not helpful when I use it for improving English sentence stress pronunciation" at "Disagree" level ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ).

Table 7

*Overall Results of EFL Students' Attitudes: The Affective Component, the Behavioural Component, and the Cognitive Component*

Items	Level of Attitudes		Level of Agreement
	M	SD	
The Affective Component	3.40	0.94	Uncertain
The Behavioural Component	3.41	0.98	Uncertain
The Cognitive Component	3.42	0.97	Uncertain
Total	3.42	0.97	Uncertain

As shown in Table 7, the overall results of EFL Students' attitudes: the affective component, the behavioural component, and the cognitive Component were found at "Uncertain" level ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ). Considering each overall component, the cognitive component was first ranked at "Uncertain" level ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ), followed by the behavioural component at "Uncertain" level ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) and the affective component at "Uncertain" level ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) respectively.

## Discussion

### *1. The Effects of Using Online Dictionary*

Regarding the effects of using online dictionary on improving EFL students' English sentence stress pronunciation, it was found that the majority of EFL students had English sentence stress pronunciation at a moderate level, compared to the level of score from 50% to 79%. It indicated that they had a little problem but not too much. In addition, they had the proficiency in pronouncing English sentence stress at a moderate level, compared to the level of proficiency at 3-level. It indicated that they put stress on stressed words (content words) and unstressed words (structure words) sometimes

while pronouncing English sentence stress. This might be because the following issues: 1) the period of time for EFL students' using online dictionary was too short; it is just for a week, 2) EFL students lacked self-disciplines in self-practicing using online dictionary in improving their English sentence stress pronunciation, and 3) their using online dictionary was not controlled by instructors or researchers.

## *2. The Reflection of Using Online Dictionary*

EFL students' attitudes towards using online dictionary in improving English sentence stress pronunciation could be overall reflected in three components: *affective*, *behavioural*, and *cognitive*, respectively. In affective component, most EFL students felt more self-confident when they use online dictionary for their English sentence stress pronunciation because the online dictionary contains native speakers' pronunciation audio feature for listening and practicing. In behavioural component, they used online dictionary at university to improve their English sentence stress pronunciation. This might be the fact that they were motivated and encouraged to use online dictionary by classmates and instructors. The internet is also available for free at university. In cognitive component, they thought that online dictionary was a fast means of improving their English sentence stress pronunciation because it has an audio feature for listening and practicing. Such pronunciation convenience by using online dictionary enables them to practice listening to and imitating the native speakers' audio feature of English sentence stress pronunciation directly. This was consistent with Metruk's (2017) results of the study that students often used electronic dictionaries for pronunciation practice relatively because of the most preferred choice. Moreover, the electronic dictionaries provided them with the pronunciation conveniences extensively. Similarly, Otaibi (2012) states that the most significant results were that the students had a positive attitude towards using of the Internet.

## Recommendations

### 1. Implications

The results obtained this study will be the useful guidelines for teachers from school and instructors from higher education who teach English pronunciation because they can apply the results of this study and this online dictionary with native speaker's audio feature in enhancing their students to improve English sentence stress pronunciation. In addition, they can motivate their students to practice English sentence stress pronunciation on their own via this online dictionary for communicating better with the foreigner in their daily lives.

### 2. Further Studies

The next research that is relevant to the pre-experimental design: pre-test and post-test, experimental group, and control group should be included for empirically comparing the significant difference of the results before and after treatment. The period of treatment should be at least 18 hours in order to be more effective. The sample as the target group should consist of more than 30 persons. The interview conducted in order to give more effective feedback.

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