

Effects of Using a LINE Messaging Group as a Medium for Written Conversation of Thai EFL MBA Students

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อสำรวจผลการใช้โปรแกรม LINE ในการสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษในรูปแบบการส่งข้อความ เพื่อเพิ่มทักษะการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักศึกษาปริญญาโทชั้นปีที่ 1 สาขาบริหารธุรกิจ (MBA) มหาวิทยาลัยตาปี จำนวน 15 คน ที่ได้ลงเรียนรายวิชา “ภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับผู้บริหาร” นักศึกษากลุ่มนี้ ได้ทำแบบทดสอบพื้นฐานไวยากรณ์สองชุด เนื้อหาทั้งสองชุดเหมือนกันทุกประการ ผลปรากฏว่าผู้เข้าร่วมในการวิจัยได้คะแนนสูงขึ้น หลังจากได้ใช้ โปรแกรม LINE ในการส่งข้อความเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ และจากการวิเคราะห์บทสัมภาษณ์ พบว่า โดยรวมแล้วนักศึกษาเหล่านี้มีทัศนคติเอนเอียงไปในทิศทางที่ต้องการให้มีการสนทนาทางโปรแกรม LINE เป็นภาษาอังกฤษ งานชิ้นนี้สะท้อนให้เห็นว่าควรมีการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการส่งข้อความถึงกันโดยผ่านโปรแกรม LINE เพื่อพัฒนาการใช้ทักษะภาษาอังกฤษ

คำสำคัญ: การส่งข้อความในไลน์กลุ่ม บทสนทนาในรูปแบบการเขียน นักศึกษาที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the effects of using a LINE Messaging Group as a medium for written conversation. Participants were 15 first year students of the MBA program (Master of Business Administration) at Tapee University. The students, enrolled in “English for Administrator” in 2014, were asked to complete two sets of basic English grammar tests which shared an identical paper. The result showed that the students got high scores after sending English messages through Line Messaging Group. In order to examine EFL Thai students’ attitudes towards a LINE messaging Group, a follow-up interview was conducted. The analysis of 15 responses revealed that they interchanged

text messages and greatly benefited from the application to enhance their English ability. The findings suggested that *LINE* played an important role in English learning.

Keywords: a *LINE* messaging Group, written conversation, EFL students

Introduction

English has become the recognized international language of communication due to the influences of globalization and increased interactions between people who speak different languages. Today, we refer to this language either as International English or Global English (Crystal, 2003). In the era of globalization, the ability to use English is a huge asset in the increasingly local and global workplace (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010). Thus, to meet the demands of global economics, English becomes the medium for ease of communication (Khamkhien, 2010).

As part of the global community, Thailand cannot deny that English ability is one of the strategic keys to survive both locally and globally. Pitsuwan (2012) stressed the need for Thailand to urgently produce human resources for the ASEAN market so as to enhance its competitiveness. In addition, the importance of learning English is maximized for Thais in terms of the establishment of the ASEAN community in the year 2015.

English proficiency is a key factor for employment success and advancement. Many jobs require that the applicants be fluent in English (Pitsuwan, 2010). However, Thai students' English ability does not meet the standard required (Atagi, 2011). In this regard, as pointed out by Foley (2005), factors responsible for limited success of English language teaching as a foreign language in Thailand include a lack of proper curricula and dry teaching styles.

English grammar learning is a complex process, and if teachers use outdated techniques, they will probably reduce a learners' intention towards studying it. Consideration must be made with respect to the fact that the present student base was born within the realm of the digital world. Evidently, the old way of teaching, namely the teacher as "sage on the stage", is not effective with new generations of students (Skiba, 2008). Teachers who follow only the textbook are likely to be called "old hat." Thus, teachers should have the ability to adapt digital instruction to the needs of today's students.

Prensky (2001) reveals that the new generation of students are comfortable with technology, and thus are commonly referred to as digital natives. Sandars and Morrison (2007) found that this generation has grown up in an environment of information and communications.

Learning through digital technologies is an alternative way to study English. It is widely accepted that advances in technology provide "opportunities to create well-designed, learner-centered, interactive, affordable, efficient, and flexible e-learning environments" (Khan, 2005, p.168). The electronic tools offer new modes of delivery, and are a particularly suitable tool for education (Wright 1976; Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2007).

LINE application is a messaging service that allows people to interchange written messages. The messaging users usually find that *LINE* is a good alternative to communicate quickly effectively with other people. Short message service sending via *LINE* can be used to communicate with one student or one group of students. This technique can be applied out of the class to improve English use amongst students. Furthermore, Prensky (2004) suggested that these mobile devices are new modalities of interacting between people and can be used to learn.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the need for English use, a number of studies (Pongsiriwet, 2001; Wiriya-chitra, 2001) reported that English usage by EFL Thai students is still far from satisfactory. Thai students do not possess an adequate level of English communicative ability. The findings of these studies were supported by Bolton's (2008) research which pointed out that Thai students' English use was somewhat limited, compared to that of other ASEAN country members.

In the Thai context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), most of the Thai students have low English proficiency according to an Education First (EF) survey. It was found that Thailand ranked 42nd out of 44 countries for adult English proficiency (Bangkok Post 2012). Similarly, Tapee University students' English speaking ability is no different from the norm, with English ability at the basic level and far from satisfactory.

Nowadays, visual teaching materials come into full play in English teaching. It's been proven that multimedia technology plays a positive role in promoting activities of

English use and arouses students' interests in learning English (Zhang, 2006). The researcher is highly interested in the effectiveness of the *LINE* application to teach English. It's use might be one of the flexible techniques to improve English ability and increase motivation. Thus, this technique might be a good choice for MBA students to practice English language out of the classroom. As the use of mobile technology is increasing; why not offer students the possibility to study anytime, anyplace and at their own convenience through this application?

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at finding out how beneficial a *LINE* Group is to the improvement of written English conversation of Thai EFL MBA Students that have a low ability in English. Thus, the research questions were as follows:

1. Could students with limited English proficiency use written conversation at a communicative level?
2. Could students illustrate the proper grammar usage?
3. What were student's attitudes towards the use of a *LINE* Group to enhance their English proficiency?

Significance of the Study

The findings on the study would determine the usefulness of using a *LINE* messaging group as a medium for written conversation by Thai EFL MBA students at Tapee University. This technique subsequently would be used in other English subjects if found useful. Student participants were not expected to reach a native like proficiency level, but rather be able to communicate quite well in various daily life topics. Furthermore, this technique might also help to increase a students' confidence and motivation to speak.

Scope of the Study

A group of fifteen MBA students took a compulsory English course (113 5101 English for Administrator) in the first semester of the 2014 academic year, from June 7th to 22nd, 2014 at Tapee University, Suratthani, Thailand. The course emphasizes English use for administrators, and by its completion students should be able to communicate in meaningful written English conversations effectively.

Limitations of the Study

With regards to the present study, there was a notable limitation with respect to the sample group that must be acknowledged. The limitation concerned the sample size which was too limited for a broader generalization of student bodies throughout the country. The experimental course had only 15 students and the outcome of the findings could not be generalized to other students who were at the same or different level of English language ability in other colleges or universities.

A *LINE* Group Application

LINE is an alternative application used for chatting. It provides easier and faster communication between family, friends and colleagues. *LINE* is an instant messaging service for smartphones and personal computers.

When writing dialogue, a message writer must adhere to specific grammar rules. Simple grammar rules could be created clearly for readers. Paying particular attention to grammar rules for dialogue will help readers keep an English conversation moving (Hassler 2014). *LINE* can hide the user from face to face communication, thus reducing students' shyness that commonly occurs with fear of using wrongly written communication.

Using a *LINE* Group as a Medium for Written Conversation

Preparing students for potential future needs in communicating with people is the purpose of university EFL writing. Employers who do not already require this skill for their employees today, will most definitely tomorrow (Belisle, 1996).

Grammatical accuracy refers to the ability of the learner to produce correct sentences. *LINE* allows students to practice English writing in becoming familiar with EFL, ESL and native speakers. Message learning from *LINE* empowers students to actively participate while sending written conversation. Via mobile technology, learners engage in conversation and share information (Nyiri, 2002; Sharples et al., 2007).

LINE saw its introduction into the world of messaging in 2011, and as a result of its relative newness, there are few studies that have investigated its beneficial effects on language instruction and learning. *LINE* has seen particular growth in Thailand, where there are presently some 10,221,282 users, making it the 3rd largest user in the world after Japan & Taiwan (Barrow, 2012).

Findings from the students' self-reports revealed that the electronic writing approach was a positive strategy that helped improve students' foreign language learning and attitudes towards English (Ma, 2006; Shang, 2007; Jou 2008). McDowell (2004) supported the idea that electronic writing can support learning opportunities. Blackmore-Squires, (2010) notes that the use of similar messaging applications has encouraged writing through collaboration and reactions. Students feel free during written conversation within this digital medium which spurs learning anywhere and anytime.

Research Design and Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative approach was used in the evaluation of pretest, posttest and written conversations. The interview was employed in a qualitative approach. Both sets of data were combined to increase a more in-depth understanding of the role of a *LINE* Group application, rather than a quantitative or qualitative approach alone would have done.

Participants of the Study

Three types of participants were involved in this study: 1) 15 graduate MBA students and 2) one EFL speaking teacher and 3) one foreign teacher.

Research Instrument

Three instruments were employed in this study:

1. Written conversations among students were assigned and evaluated. These were written over a span of seven days. The teacher noticed an improvement in written skills by analyzing how the process of writing requires. A good understanding of the rules of English grammar was noticed.

2. This study was devoted to one group's pretest-posttest results. A pretest was administered prior to the introduction of this study. The pretest consisted of 30 items addressing the students' knowledge of grammar. The total score on the test was 30 marks and the time allocated was 30 minutes. At the end of the course, the participants were also given a posttest of grammatical knowledge. The purpose of this test was to compare its score to that of the pretest. The test consisted of 30 multiple choice items and had a time limit of 30 minutes. The effectiveness of using a Line Group teaching technique was determined by comparing the pretest and posttest scores of the participants.

3. Information was gathered via a structured interview to determine the opinions of students towards the use of the *LINE* messaging services. The interview was developed by the researchers. An additional literature survey was used to gathered general information for the background of the study.

Table 1 Summary of Data Source, Data Collection and Data Analysis

Research Question No.	Data Source	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1. Could students with limited English proficiency use written conversation at a	Written conversations from <i>Line</i> application	Screens of a LINE Program Application (Content of Written Conversations)	Qualitative data analysis (Content analysis)

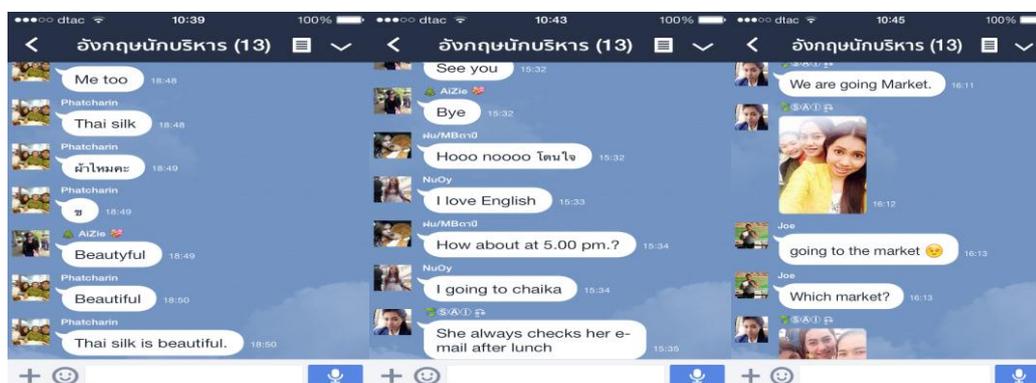
communicative level?			
2. Can students illustrate the proper grammar usage?	Paper evaluation	Pretest and posttest	Descriptive statistics :percentage
3. What are student attitudes toward a LINE Group to enhance their English proficiency?	Individual participant's attitudes	Structured Interview	Qualitative data analysis (Content analysis)

Results

This study attempted to find out whether the use of a *LINE* Group helped to improve written conversation of Thai EFL MBA Students. In order to fully answer the three research questions, the responses to each individual question were presented below.

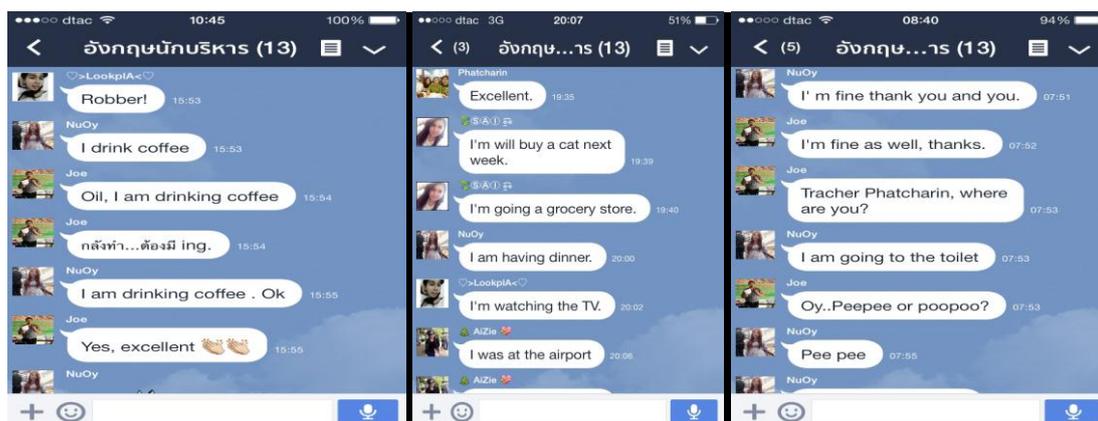
Research Question 1: Could students with limited English proficiency use written conversation at a communicative level?

The content of written conversation illustrated that the students could communicate understandingly. The process of conversation was said to be at an acceptable level of written communication. On the first few days, there were common grammatical errors. The screens of conversation are shown below.



As shown on the above screens of a *LINE* chat during the first few days of use, the written conversation indicated Thai language in the speech pattern. The language used was less correct, less complex, and less coherent than standard written language. They used short constructions and grammar mistakes were noted.

After they were familiar with using English conversation through *LINE* and the teacher suggested and encouraged them to write correct grammatical rules, their English writing improved. For example, the teacher gave students some example sentences using the present continuous tense. The teacher showed students that the present continuous was formed with the present of the verb *to be* + the present participle of the main verb (verb in -ing form). The final result showed correct usage of English in their conversation. The three following screens show conversations with an improved use of English towards the last few days of the course.



The later screens showed that the students could write longer sentences. Students progressively made it easier for readers to understand the story more effectively. Their sentences were composed of subjects and predicates and they could use correct grammar. The sentences were correctly comprehended and easy and enjoyable to read. Based on the screens above, the students improved their written conversation in comparison with the first three screens taken towards the beginning of the course. They could use correct grammar rules to express their ideas and opinions and were able to keep their written conversation clear and easy to understand.

Research Question 2 : Could students illustrate the proper grammar usage?

To illustrate the results clearly, the raw scores from both the teacher and researcher's evaluation were presented. The pretest and posttest raw scores of the student's grammar usage are demonstrated in the table below.

Table 2 Students' Pretest and Posttest Scores

No.	Student Code	Pretest	Percentage	Posttest	Percentage
		30	100%	30	100%
1	5613010001	16	53.3	20	66.66
2	5613010003	14	46.6	18	60.00
3	5613010004	13	43.3	18	60.00
4	5613010005	13	43.3	19	63.33
5	5613010006	14	46.6	16	53.33
6	5613010007	15	50	19	63.33
7	5613010008	13	43.3	17	56.66
8	5613010009	14	46.6	18	60.00
9	5613010010	16	53.3	22	73.33
10	5613010011	14	46.6	18	60.00
11	5613010012	13	43.3	18	60.00

Table 2 Students' Pretest and Posttest Scores(continue)

No.	Student Code	Pretest	Percentage	Posttest	Percentage
12	5613010013	12	40	17	56.66
13	5613010014	12	40	16	53.33
14	5613010015	10	33.33	13	43.33
15	5613010016	10	33.33	14	46.66

According to the data in Table 2, there were only two students passing the pretest (53.3%). The remaining students received scores less than 50% or less than 15

raw marks out of a total of 30. When considering the percentage of the posttest, 13 students obtained scores above 50%. This means that the *LINE* activity had the potential to improve students' grammar usage, as the results indicated 86 % of the participants passed the posttest. Students were able to develop basic sentences into well-organized and detailed paragraphs. At first students misused the English structure of modification due to the influence of the Thai structure of modification. Later, they put the adjective before the subject with the use of Verb to be and used the English structure of modification. They knew that the time and tense in English resulted in the change of verb forms. Affirmative and negative sentences presented the correct use of structure.

Research Question 3 :What are students' attitudes towards a *LINE* Group to enhance their English proficiency?

After the students had finished the course, a structured interview was given in order to examine their perception towards the use of a *LINE* group application. A set of 4 opened questions was used to gather data for the analysis of students' opinion and to answer the third research question. Table 3 shows the individual participant's attitudes towards a *LINE* Group to enhance their English proficiency.

Table 3 Students' Perception towards a *LINE* Group

Question No.	Responses
3.1 What are the benefits of a <i>LINE</i> group in a MBA class?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - practice writing and reading - learn new vocabularies - increase ability to use grammatical rules - apply lessons for daily life - communicate appropriately and quickly - add new teaching material - contact with the teachers and friends anytime and anywhere - ask the teachers without shyness - increase interaction with the teachers and students - exchange their English lessons

Table 3 showed that this digital technology helped learning. It took great advantages of English usage development. It was a service that allowed the students to interchange text messages. The students greatly benefitted from a *LINE* group application to enhance their English ability.

Question No.	Responses
3.2 Would you continue to use this device as a medium for written conversation?	All of them said that they used it because this technique supported them to practice written conversation and lead them to practice speaking English.
3.3 Can you compare your English development before and after practicing it with a <i>LINE</i> group application?	All of them said that after the <i>LINE</i> activity, their English ability was improved. They could make correct sentences and speak English in their daily lives.
3.4 Are you confident in speaking English after finishing the course?	After using a <i>LINE</i> group program, Most of them overcame shyness and became more self-confident. This technique helped the students reduce negative feelings to maximize their learning and to speak in English. Their fear of making mistakes did not influenced them. Their shyness did not play an important role in speaking performance after they were familiar with a <i>Line</i> Group as a medium for written conversation.

Conclusions and Discussion

Referring to the aims of the study, it can be concluded that the students can use written English conversation. They could keep a conversation going and ask follow-up questions. Common grammatical errors appeared on the first few days of using this *LINE* group because they had just started learning English. Continuous practice with the use of written conversation in English resulted in the reduction of common mistakes as seen on their mobile phone screens. According to the analysis of written messages, many

students were able to construct meaningful negative verb forms. Many errors in such areas as complete clauses, word forms, subject-verb agreement, and spelling reduced.

After using a *LINE* group program, fear of mistake, shyness, anxiety, and such factors that hindered them from practicing their English did not influence them in this class. The students believed that using a *LINE* group can motivate them to be more confident to speak English, which is worth considering. In this sense, motivating students to speak in English, to some extent, encourages them to actively participate in speaking in the classroom.

All these findings support the importance of creating a *LINE* group which supports an atmosphere of learning English anywhere and at any time. Finally, recommendations for further research are suggested in order to avoid the limitations of this study in terms of the number of subjects. Teachers should use this technique as an example in an English educational setting.

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