

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/kjss>

Effects of Facebook usage on English learning behavior of Thai English teachers

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 April 2016

Received in revised form 27 October 2016

Accepted 2 November 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

English language,

Facebook,

learning through Facebook,

teacher development

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the use of Facebook to enhance the effectiveness of English writing and learning among English language teachers. English language learning through Facebook design was evaluated using the results from data collected from 403 completed copies of a questionnaire. The questionnaire sought responses on the problems, needs, readiness, and suggestions of the respondents—Thai teachers of English in 437 Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) schools. Seventeen BMA teachers who exhibited a keen interest in using Facebook over other social media were selected as test subjects. One facilitator was included. All participants used the English language to interact on Facebook every day for six weeks. A mixed method consisting of qualitative and quantitative approaches was employed to analyze the collected data. The frequency, percentage, and content analysis were used to analyze the qualitative data consisting of the survey questionnaires, observations on interaction through Facebook sites, in-depth interviews, participants' reflections, and self-notes. A t-test was used to analyze quantitative pre- and post-test data. The findings of this study indicated that Facebook could significantly help improve writing skills, namely accuracy, meaningfulness, clarity, and relevance. It also effectively enhanced teachers' English learning attributes, namely fluency, confidence, satisfaction, value, and self-efficacy belief.

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Introduction

As one of the main contributors in the learning process, it is Thai teachers who teach English who have been given the burden to prepare Thai people to become members of the ASEAN community. However, previous studies have shown some problems regarding their skills, such as their

knowledge, ability to teach, and skills in daily English usage. These problems have been caused by a shortage in training budgets, resources in language learning, and information (Yodsinsin, 2009). They have affected the teachers' abilities to convey language content, to build a proper learners' attitude toward English, and to develop human resources to fit the context of the ASEAN community. Thus, a well-designed language learning approach to enhance their quality development must be created. Statistics show a high frequency of usage of online social networks, at 87.05 percent, in Thailand, especially in Bangkok (Bonk, 2002).

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Peer review under responsibility of Kasetsart University.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.03.007>

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Please cite this article in press as: Sirivedin, P., et al., Effects of Facebook usage on English learning behavior of Thai English teachers, Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.03.007>

Studies have also revealed the benefits of online social networks on learning, especially Facebook. The opportunity has been presented for a new language learning approach—the integration of the online social network with language learning (Lorsomrudee, 1999).

Online Social Network and Learning

Gagne (1971) indicated that appropriate and conducive external conditions can promote the process of learning in the brain. Online social networks can be a platform providing these appropriate and conducive external learning conditions. Previous studies showed evidence supporting this claim as follows.

Butcher and Gibson (2010) indicated that an online social network could provide a communication interface that is easy to use. The effective use of technology may assist with learners' overall satisfaction and develop intellect among learners outside classrooms. Liu, Horton, Olmanson, and Toprac (2011) reported that learners could mostly learn through online social networks. The new media technology environment can motivate better learning which in turn creates a much more effective development than traditional learning. It allows a free-learning, interactive environment regardless of time and place.

A summary of the studies also revealed that humans can achieve maximum efficiency in learning with the advantages of online technology (Butcher & Gibson, 2010; Kanthawongs, Thanapongpan, & Boripun, 2011; Wattanawong, 2004; Willis, 2008).

Facebook as a Learning Platform

Shih (2013) concluded that language learning through Facebook is also a way to effectively improve the grammar skills (tense and structure) of learners, while Kajornboon (2013) indicated that Facebook is a powerful tool to be used as a space for learning English and promoting learning attributes. It can make learning more effective especially when focused on the diversity of experience or knowledge of learners. Many studies reported the conclusion that, through Facebook, learners with different amounts of experience and knowledge could interact with each other. They exchange information, ideas and knowledge, and help assess or edit each other comments while learning together (Knowles, 1980; Troike, 2006; Yang, 2004). These assessment fulfilled learners' and teachers' demand for English excellence (Wongsothorn, 2010). Learners who received feedback while writing, achieved better results in their overall writing test scores (AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r, 2014).

Thus, the researcher believes that the integration of Facebook with English learning can be an alternative approach to improve the quality of English teachers as well as country development. Besides, there has been no study on the use of Facebook as a channel for the development of English language teachers in Thailand. Therefore, the research aimed to investigate the effect of Facebook to enhance the effectiveness of English writing and English learning attributes among English language teachers. Research questions asked whether Facebook effectively improves writing skills and enhances teachers' English learning attributes.

Methods

The mixed method consisting of qualitative and quantitative approaches was used in this study. The study was performed in two steps as follows.

Survey Step: the Development of a Learning Platform on Facebook

Four hundred and three completed copies of a questionnaire were collected and used as samplers in this stage. The collected data were synthesized along with the theories and results from related studies. English language learning through Facebook design was completed prior to the experiment by the researcher. It consisted of the definition of five principles for English learning through Facebook and a plan for learning platform on Facebook. The five principles focused on: participants' needs, freedom, and willingness; a relaxing environment; technology convenience; method diversity; and motivation. The plan consisted of five steps: preparatory, conformity, operation, evaluation, and changes in attributes. They were investigated by experts in three fields: Information Communication Technology (ICT), English Language Teaching, and Teaching English through Online Social Networks.

Experimental Step: the Implementation of Learning Platform on Facebook

Seventeen BMA teachers—Teacher Da, Teacher Yok, Teacher Mut, Teacher Pe, Teacher Mote, Teacher Wit, Teacher Rat, Teacher Diew, Teacher Wee, Teacher Joy, Teacher Thip, Teacher Honey, Teacher Preecha, Teacher Nit, Teacher Su, Teacher An, and Teacher Ruchwere—were purposively selected to be involved in the implement project. The one facilitator in the project was the present researcher. The implementation project was divided into five steps: preparatory, conformity, operation, objectives resolution, and changes in attributes. The learning participants were registered and the pre-test was employed. The facilitator and learning participants learned to understand the activities, agreement, and objectives prior to the operation step. Then, they were involved in group interaction using English language to communicate (chat, share, exchange, correct, motivate, discuss, debate, play, and enjoy) with each other in a relaxing atmosphere. Self-notes, observation, and group reflection were recorded regularly. A post-test was administered after the operation step had been completed. Then, the in-depth interview was performed. The learning period continued in the last step which was a time for new learning activities in a more authentic environment such as practicing with a native speaker and network building.

Participants

Participants 1

In total, 1,170 Thai teachers who teach English in 437 schools under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration were involved in the survey step.

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