

# Using LINE as a Platform for Encouraging Students' Learning and Participation

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**Abstract** – Using online discussion forums and peer-to peer interactive learning currently becomes a common instructional proposition. Such social discourse is educationally adopted to enhance learning and through ideas interchanged in an online setting. The aim of this study was to investigate the use of LINE as an instructional tool complementing language practice to express opinions in an EFL course. In order to examine factors related to student learning performance in the online discussion activity, data were collected from learning score, quantity of interaction, as well as attitude from 83 students. Frequency, mean, and correlation coefficients were employed to analyze. The findings revealed students' positive attitude toward the online activity, with the highest mean score indicating an enjoyable learning environment. The students' learning outcome showed positive correlation with frequency of their interaction; however, it was disassociated with their attitude toward the assigned online task. Furthermore, students' engagement in the learning disclosed no relation with their attitude toward the online educational experience. The finding of the study can be beneficial for online activity course designs in the future. Apparently, student participation is considered a vital variable; thus, motivation strategies are to be carefully planned to facilitate effective online learning.

**Keywords**–social media, learning performance, language learning, online activity, LINE

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## 1. Introduction

An extensive spectrum of online intercommunication becomes a prevailing instructional strategy nowadays. Throughout a learning process, students get conversant with various aspects of instructional process on online platform, including course guidelines, teacher's management and planning, extracurricular activity, assessment, and general communication [1]. Coming to grips with this actuality, ESL teachers can resonate online communication and applications with the course contents to widen students' opportunities in language acquisition [2]. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) currently play a dominant role in students' involvement in learning [3]. Therefore, when online chat is embedded in an English course, and individuals' learning styles are tacit, students' augmenting conversation competence turns auspicious [4],[5]. The use of technology integration in university setting such as Moodle has been officially exploited to facilitate teacher preparation, incorporation of coursework, class management, and material delivery. Unofficial systems such as LINE and Facebook have been designed as alternatives to supplement instructional activities as well. These virtual learning systems are regarded as potential and challenging educational tools to develop engagement, learning, language proficiency, and connectedness of students in this generation. Students' reflection, discussion, communication, interaction, cooperation, and tracking can casually and simply take place [6],[7].

LINE is a friendly-user and cross-platform online application used to support teacher's class management and casual communication between teacher and students to students for instantly exchanging messages and images without charges. It also enhances, especially, students' language learning competence in and outside classroom via its practical functions such as voice calls and instant messaging anywhere and anytime. Horwitz mentioned that over three millions people worldwide use LINE in more than two hundred countries [8]. It has been the most popular free application in many countries, including Thailand. However, users necessitate to acquaint themselves with its systems

because it has an effect on users' willingness and enthusiasm on accessing the application to do the task designed [9]. The more frequently students interact with teachers and peers, the more learning proficiency they master. Interestingly, LINE can be implemented as an educational tool to promote students' critical thinking ability through the process of "social constructivism." The benefit of its instant communication enables students to respond, answer, give comments, or emotionally react more rapidly than writing on paper. In addition, students' collaboration and involvement are plainly recognized.

Learning and communication via the application lessens teachers and students' gap and generational difference. Stickers and emoticons sent back and forth by teachers and students create casual atmosphere. Stapa and Chaari mentioned that students have alternative ways to express their emotions by using facial expressions of emoticons such as surprise, excitement, or disappointment in a greater convenient and pleasant manner compared to personal confrontation [10]. LINE supports teachers to elevate students' participation, particularly those with low proficiency in English to easily get involved in the chat setting by choosing stickers and emoticons. LINE's new and various characters are available from time to time. It means more handful choices for students to express what they think and how they feel in a form of entertainment as well. According to Wee, students' choices of characters from stickers and emoticons assist their personality development in terms of self-expression identical to a personal avatar in three dimensional virtual reality to some extent [11]. Characters and emoticons allow users to substitute their behavioral traits in a particular moment in an easier way than using words. Students tend to feel more relaxed and connected when teachers respond their opinions or feelings with stickers and emoticons. It is like teachers taking a step into their world in online realm.

### **LINE: An Integrated Instructional Tool**

A challenging issue that teachers have been struggling is to encourage passive students to active learners. Since we are in the era of digital omnivore, LINE Application is able to make the shift possible. Learning through LINE allows students unprecedented mastery over the task assigned, at the place preferred, and the pace they are comfortable with. Information Technology integration practices provide considerable opportunities to actively engage in learning experience. Synchronous discussion on LINE platform is structured not only to get students' involved in conveying opinions, but also flexibly and

instantly interact with guiding teacher and their mobile phone-addicted peers. A well-designed model of LINE chat discourse is a useful tool to monitor and analysis students' interaction and discussion [12]. Each individual's response to the task and one another can be rigorously traced and assessed through specific features of LINE. Online chat and intercommunication among students in such social networking system permits active, immediate, and in-depth responses, which serves educational goals [13]. Research finding reveals students' positive attitude towards learning via LINE. This paper aims to study on effectiveness of LINE usage as well as academic purposes. Nevertheless, technology integration for educational aims will be greater effective if teachers take necessary steps in training, and curricula and evaluation methods are adjusted to this change [14].

LINE is considered a prominent tool to effectively stimulate intercommunication and collaboration among students. According to Miyazoe and Anderson [15], distinction of online learning setting depends upon constructivism and knowledge construction, together with synergy and collaborative acquisition reinforced by designed scaffolding. It means eminence of online learning experience goes hand in hand with condition of peer interaction. It means this online learning procedure can be not only a resolution of student dissociation, but also enhance student active engagement. Rovai recommends that a quality of online discourse and student motivation rely on course planning and design [16]. Effectiveness of student interaction is a result of teacher explicit expectation, objective, and rubric, especially. Similarly, Gikandi, Morrow and Davis mention that accuracy of comments together with honest evaluation play a compelling role in promoting meaningful engagement and social association, which creates a wealth of shared knowledge and an intellectual community [17].

In a regular classroom setting, student's behavior, facial expression and presence can be unambiguously and effortlessly observed and assessed whereas these assessment methods are impossibly implemented with students in an online learning setting [18]. Thus, in the study, student participation was a main channel to assess student learning behavior. A research finding showed tangible online practices such as student interaction in online discourse significantly correlate student performance [19]. Another study investigated online learners' behavior in relation to their participation, and the findings revealed that students' participation in online discussions improved their perceived learning [20]. It was also found that low levels of participation contributed to a failure of the online discussion [21],[22]. Additionally, Cheng, Paré, Collimore and Joordens found that free-willed participants in online

discussion activities succeeded in their exams with greater satisfaction compared to students with low motivation [23]. The suggestion is that students' advantages are undimmed after their vigorously debating with peers. In contrast, students with no interest in an online learning tend to apparently miss some good chances learned from peers. In this study, two research questions were addressed as follows:

1. What are students' learning score, participation, attitudes toward the LINE activity?
2. Are there any relationships between attitude toward the LINE activity, participation, and score earned?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Subject

The subjects in the research were two classes of 83 students from School of Communication Arts who registered for English for Communication Arts Professionals II in semester 1 of the academic year 2016. They were from two sections. The course carried 3 credits and lasted 14 weeks. The class met 2 periods a week (140 minutes). This course required students to perform many tasks and tests. One of the tasks assigned was a small group discussion which was a 10-point task with four main questions. The online assignment was designed to serve a goal of the course, which was to promote student critical thinking ability, a vital issue for this online task. Critical thinking as a conversational undertaking, according to Lang, generates a more and more well-balanced, cogent, and credible comprehension of a matter [24]. It empowers contributors to comparatively review and formulate their belief before exhibiting and debuting with other classmates.

### 2.2 Teaching & Learning Process

LINE was set up for two classes of students who were informed to join the group. This English course took an advantage of it as a platform for students to use English language and practice their critical thinking skills. This activity is called the "discussion activity." In each week, a question was posted on the "Note" of class LINE group. Students were requested to read teacher's each question, contribute their opinions, read peers' comments, contemplate, and debate with their personal reasons. Students, within one week, were to respond and engage in a

question as well as contributing to the class discussion. Scores were mostly allocated in the content of students' participation in each question, depth of their debates, and rational comments towards peers' opinions.

To express opinions, students exercised different techniques such as description, explanation, and indication of their likes and dislikes against their peers' posts. The students engaged in online discussion tasks by reflecting on the topics provided and retorting teacher and peers in the LINE Note, while teacher as a mentor facilitated student interaction back and forth and monitored the action plan to completeness. The more frequently interactions took place, the deeper student' critical thinking skill is activated. This learning strategy grants students to perceive "interesting choices" manifested through social interaction, discussion, variation of opinions, dispute, and justification in the online forum.

### 2.3 Instruments

The first instrument was a scoring rubric for the discussion activity assessing students' performance which focused on language proficiency, reasoning, and participation. The activity was a requirement of the course. As a performance-based assessment, all students were required to take part in it. Teachers gave marks using scoring rubrics. The assessment was conducted based on the total score of 10 points.

A list of questions for the activity was prepared as follows:

1. What do you think about DRESS CODES? Should university students wear uniform? Should there be dress codes to enter a night club?
2. What do you think about GOSSIP? Have you, or somebody you know, ever been the victim of gossip? If yes, how did it make you/them feel? Why do people gossip? What is the best way to deal with problems created by gossip?
3. Give an example of a successful/ unethical marketing event. Why was it successful or unethical? Have you ever seen a creative marketing event? Please share your experience.
4. Have you ever watched a moral theme in a movie that made you think and change how you feel about life? What was the movie?

Each question was worth 2.5 points emphasizing a quality of each individual's reflection and discussion with classmates. Language usage was not seriously assessed to make students more relaxed and freely express their minds.

Table 1. A scoring rubric for the discussion activity

| Criteria              | 0 point                        | 0.5 point   | 1 point                                      |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Individual's opinion  | Brief comment with few reasons | Detailed with a few reasons   | Detailed with interesting reasons            |
| Content of discussion | repeats points already made    | Not necessarily adding much to the debate reasonably understandable | Detailed, reasonable, and adds to the debate |
| English used          | Hardly understand              | English - although there are errors                                 |  |

40 students from Semester One of the 2015 academic year participating in a six-week experimental study course. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was implemented. For the first part, the value was 0.86, and the result of the second part showed 0.82. Furthermore, the current research study accentuated the benefits of participation in LINE. Therefore, scrutinizing students' frequency in involvement in LINE is inevitable because students were required to reflect their thoughts both on the topics provided and their peers' opinions.

2.4 Data analysis

The sources of data were the students' posts, evaluations of learning performance and the attitudinal questionnaire. The students' involvement with the activity was measured by the number of their postings. In this regard, frequency was used to analyze the data. The students' learning performance was evaluated by using the scoring rubric and demonstrated in the form of average score. The attitude scores toward doing the discussion activity in LINE were calculated by means and standard deviations. A mean score of 1-1.50 indicates having attitude at a very negative level, 1.51-2.50 at a negative level, 2.51-3.50 at a moderate level, 3.51-4.50 at a positive level, and 4.51-5.00 at a very positive level. The relationship of the students' score, frequency of their postings and attitude was scrutinized with Pearson Correlation Coefficients.

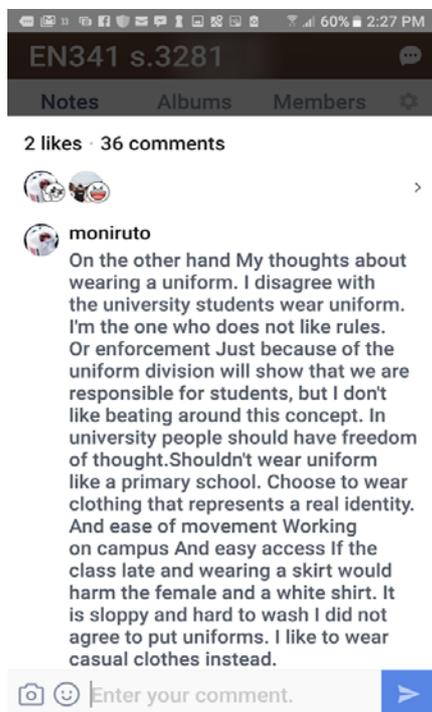


Figure 1: Interface showing a student's response to the teacher's question

A questionnaire was exploited as the second tool to determine students' attitude toward the online discussion task organized in LINE. The questionnaire was validated by three experts and set up in a layout of Likert five-rating scale, consisting of eight items to measure students' contentment of such networked activity. The students were requested to indicate the level of their satisfaction with the task they preoccupied with in LINE. The suitable IOC index for the individual item was above 0.6. The attempt to verify the questionnaire reliability was a testing by



Figure 2. Interface showing sticker usage to express agreement

### 3. Research Results

**Research Question 1:** What are students' learning score, participation, attitudes toward the LINE activity?

Students' learning performance was assessed from their scores obtained from the activity in LINE. According to Table 2., the mean score was 7.08 from 10 with standard deviation of 1.68. The highest score was 10 while the lowest score was 4. The mean score was rather satisfactory.

Table 2. The result of learning performance scores

| n  | Mean | S.D. | Maximum | Minimum |
|----|------|------|---------|---------|
| 83 | 7.08 | 1.68 | 10      | 4       |

Table 3. showed that there were twelve students (14.5 per cent) who participated more than five times throughout the course. Nearly one-thirds of the students (38.6 per cent) participated in the activity four times. Only three students joined the activity twice (3.6 per cent).

Table 3. Number and frequency of students' participation

| Frequency of Participation | Number of Participants | Percentage |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| 2                          | 3                      | 3.6        |
| 3                          | 17                     | 20.5       |
| 4                          | 32                     | 38.6       |
| 5                          | 19                     | 22.9       |
| 6                          | 11                     | 13.3       |
| 7                          | 1                      | 1.2        |

Table 4. showed that students had the overall positive attitude toward the discussion activity in LINE ( $\bar{x} = 3.94$ ). Interestingly, all of the items were also rated positively. The three highest mean scores fell on item no.1 (promoting an enjoyable learning environment/ $\bar{x} = 4.10$ ), followed by item no. 6 (promoting communication with teacher and classmates/ $\bar{x} = 4.02$ ), and item no. 8 (developing students' critical thinking skill / $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ). Meanwhile, the lowest mean score of attitude fell on item no. 7 (upgrading my learning motivation in this course/ $\bar{x} = 3.69$ ).

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation of students' Attitude toward the discussion activity in LINE

| Statement  | Mean        | S.D.       | Level           |
|--|-------------|------------|-----------------|
| 1. The online activity promoted an enjoyable learning environment.                   | 4.10        | .89        | positive        |
| 2. This online activity encouraged mutual rapport among students.                    | 3.83        | 1.03       | positive        |
| 3. This online activity enhanced my English language skills.                         | 3.98        | .84        | positive        |
| 4. This online activity widened and deepened my perspectives on diverse facets.      | 3.99        | .93        | positive        |
| 5. This online activity allowed me to exchange opinions with teacher and classmates. | 3.98        | .84        | positive        |
| 6. This online activity promoted communication with teacher and classmates.          | 4.02        | .98        | positive        |
| 7. This online activity upgraded my learning motivation in this course.              | 3.69        | .96        | positive        |
| 8. This online activity developed students' critical thinking skill.                 | 4.00        | .86        | positive        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>3.94</b> | <b>.76</b> | <b>positive</b> |

**Research Question 2:** Are there any relationships between attitude toward the LINE activity, participation, and score earned?

Learning performance scores were derived from the small group discussion, while participation was calculated based on the number of posted messages in LINE. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among three factors to see what were related the most. When a Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to determine the relationship between the students' scores and their participation, it was found that there was a positive correlation, which was rather high statistically significant ( $r = .766, p < 0.01$ ). That is, the more students participated in the activity, the higher their learning performance was. However, learning

performance was not found to be correlated to attitude ( $r = -.090$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). In addition, attitude was not correlated to participation ( $r = -.188$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ).

Table 5. Intercorrelations among learning performance, number of postings and attitude

|                                 | Participation    | Attitude        |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Learning Performance</b>     | .766**<br>(.000) | -.090<br>(.418) |
| <b>Participation (postings)</b> |                  | -.188<br>(.088) |

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

#### 4. Discussion

Quantity of student engagement in the online task is the first essence to be scrutinized. The regression analysis obviously reveals positive students' learning outcome correlated with the number of contribution. In the online learning environment, LINE, as a practical social network, might support the elasticity and productivity. Individual students could manage the assigned tasks on their pace and schedule. The online learning setting, compared to a traditionally instructional one, allows students much more freedom in self-expression and flexibility in instant response to peers at all time and everywhere. Besides, any inquiry for teacher elucidation concerning contents, tasks, or problems could take place instantaneously. As such, the outside class tasks rigorously invite students' participation in actual exercise of the instructional procedure on multiple platforms. As Laird and Kuh put up, the technology-supported out-of class activity becomes a "mechanism through which students engage in existing effective educational practices [25]. "The technology-based effort makes a difference and change in course implementation. In line with a number of research study reports, the finding of this study displays visible online participation as evidenced by students' comments and feedbacks in the online platform, which manifests a significant correlation with student learning achievement [19], [20].

Student attitude toward the designed online task is the second issue to be examined. The use of LINE meaningfully elevates both student acquirement and positive attitude. A possible reason might be due to students' familiarity with this popular application, its interface, and various functions. Significantly, LINE offers beneficially communicative platform for users' discussion. As stated by Stapa and Chaari, LINE properties and stickers depicting characters together

with dramatic emoticons not only illustrate users' expressions but also make the message a lot more interesting for teenage learners [10]. By the same token, Gikandi, Morrow and Davis refer to a vital part of validated feedbacks and reliable assessment, which influences a productive social interaction [17]. Through this medium, student collaboration is well recognized and promoted through teacher and peers' conversation, reflection and discussion. The intercommunication and idea exchange via this application release students from anxiety, embarrassment and discomfort to the full extent when compared to a face-to-face interaction in a traditional classroom. Since personal confrontation is not a common practice in Asian countries, EFL students tend to avoid direct argument and disengage in class when feeling criticized and uncomfortable. Thus, LINE can be served as a feel-free-to-talk platform [22]. In accordance with many findings of research studies, an increasing in critical thinking, problem solving, and team working skills take place in networking setting [26],[27].

Surprisingly, student attitude toward the online task and learning scores were not correlated. Three possible reasons can explain the uncorrelated relationship of the two variables; student learning performance and feeling toward the activity. First of all, students were obligated to participate in the online activity to purposely obtain 10 points. Their requirements were to post their reflections and contribute meaningful feedbacks to peers to earn scores according to the rubric given. Therefore, students' participation or posting could possibly become mechanical; it is not an indicator of their feeling. Secondly, all of the students, even as LINE users, never had educational experiences as English learners via LINE. They might perceive the academic task as additional duty and responsibility. The objectives of using LINE for doing an activity differed from when they used it in daily life. Lastly, there was no investigation concerning learning styles in the study. Each individual learner has a different cognitive, affective, and physiological style, including dissimilar preference such as flexibility or convenience. This unexamined matter might have an impact on attitude toward the online activity. Regardless of the mentioned factors, students' positive attitude toward the online activity was apparent, as well as their endeavor to complete the course requirements and to earn the highest scores possible. Obviously, scores meant a lot to the majority of the students. This could probably justify why student participation and attitude displayed no correlation; students unnecessarily got involved in the online assignment with positive attitude.

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