

Technologies in English Online Learning for Vendors

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Abstract—The purposes of the present investigation were: 1) to scrutinize whether, after using the English for Vendors (EV hereafter) program, the vendors improve their language learning achievement; and 2) to explore vendors' attitudes toward learning through the EV program. There were twenty participants involved in this investigation. The main research instruments were EV program and a questionnaire of vendors' attitudes toward EV program. After completing the EV program, the participants were asked to answer the questionnaire about their attitudes toward learning through the EV program. The results of the present investigation revealed that the participants' performance scores between the pretest and the posttest were statistically and significantly different at $p < .00$. Consequently, the EV program is shown to have improved the vendors' performance in their communicative competence. According to their attitudes toward learning through the EV program, the results obtained from the questionnaire showed that the vendors believed the EV program was appropriate ($\bar{X} = 3.43$) and they had very positive attitudes ($\bar{X} = 3.74$) towards learning through the EV program.

Keywords—English online learning, English for vendors, Thai vendors

1 Introduction

In Thailand, it is obvious that people who work in the tourism industry should know at least some English. English is a tool of communication among Thais and most travelers to Thailand. Several past research works [2][7][11][15] [16][17][18] have looked into on the English communication problems of Thais in various sectors (e.g. education, investment, and tourism). Most prior efforts [2][7][11][15] have revealed Thais found English to be crucial for their present jobs. They needed to develop their English skills especially listening and speaking skills. However, few past research works have been carried out on Thai vendors' English communication problems [6][7][15].

These days, technology has become a part of our lives. The use of multimedia technology has been used for different purposes, for example, surfing the Net, social networking, and language learning. The uses of technology allow language learners to acquire English ability easier and faster than before. Learners are able to access lessons through a variety of electronic devices such as PCs, laptops, tablets, or mobile phones. Technology also enhances learners' motivation as well as a wide range of language learning and teaching activities.

Providing an online learning environment and organizing a virtual learning environment, have similar meanings. Both learning environments are designed and facilitated for an Internet system that is conducive to learning through websites. The nature of the online learning environment and the setting of the learning environment are different from the classroom environment. At present, the internet learning resources are well-organized, useful, and motivated to meet the learners needs [12] [20][21].

Over decades, a great number of researchers [1][3][4][5][8][9][10][13][14][19] have attempted to investigate learners’ attitudes and achievement through online learning. Many programs and sources have been used for stimulating language learners’ motivation as well as their communication competence.

Hence, in order to solve vendors’ communication problems and improve their English skills, this present study aimed to investigate development of English Communicative online learning for vendors in the northeast of Thailand. The results obtained from this study would be beneficial for service providers in various related sectors such as government sector to appreciate the nature of communication problems that Thai vendors usually encounter. To strengthen the English listening and speaking skills of Thai vendors, the government may design and implement an appropriate English program for them. This can help authorities understand the obstacles being faced and to find ways for improvements to generate more incomes for the Thai economy.

2 Methodology

2.1 Sample for the experiment

Twenty Thai vendors were chosen by using purposive sampling. This research focuses on Thai vendors who sold goods or provided services to travelers. The participants will be divided by the following categories:

Table 1. Types of goods and services and the number of Thai vendors of each type

Types of Goods and Services	Number of Thai Vendors
Food & Beverages	4
Clothing	4
Accessories	4
Handbags & Shoes	4
Others (decoration, cosmetics, souvenirs, etc.)	4
Total	20

2.2 Variables

The theoretical framework from the research design relies on two main types.

Independent variable. The independent variable in this research study was the EV program designed to allow the vendors to learn independently online.

Dependent variables. There were two dependent variables: 1) the vendors’ learning outcomes measured by the exercises and test scores and 2) their attitudes toward learning through the EV program explored by the questionnaire.

2.3 Research instruments

In this present investigation, there were two main research instruments: the EV program which included 9 lessons (i.e., Unit 1 Greeting customers; Unit 2 Stating prices; Unit 3 Presenting products and giving sales promotions; Unit 4 Selling souvenirs; Unit 5 At a restaurant 1; Unit 6 At a restaurant 2; Unit 7; At a clothing shop; Unit 8 At a coffee shop; and Unit 9 At a toy shop.) and the questionnaire of their attitudes toward learning through the EV program.

2.4 Data collection

The experiment took 10 weeks followed the pretest. After the final session of the experiment, the post-test was administered. Then, the scores of both pre-test and post-test were compared to scrutinize the extent to which whether the participants’ language achievements before and after the experiment were different. Lastly, the participants’ opinions toward the EV program were explored through the questionnaire.

2.5 Data analysis

To answer research objectives 1 and 2, basic statistical analyses (means, SD and paired t-test) were done. Meanwhile, the students’ opinions toward the EV program, the arithmetic means from the questionnaire data were ascertained. The computer software program, SPSS was used to analyze the data in this study.

3 Results

3.1 Results of students’ learning achievements before and after using the EV lessons

Table 2 shows that the average score of the pre-test was 53.60 (SD=8.15), whereas the average score of the post-test were 64.95 (SD=4.25).

Table 2. Results of the students’ English learning achievements

Classes	N	Pretest		Posttest	
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Experiment class	20	53.60	8.15	64.95	4.25

To determine the level of significance of these results, both sets of scores were used to calculate significance using the Paired t-test, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of a paired sample T-test for the Experimental group

Dependent T-Test									
Classes	Tests	Mean	S.D.	Mean Dif-ference	95% Confidence In-terval of the Differ-ence		T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Experiment class	Pretest-Posttest	-11.350	9.132	2.042	-15.624	-7.076	-5.558	19	.000

*p<.01

Table 3 shows the distribution of the differences between the paired scores, the confidence interval (95%), and the values of t, Df and the 2-tailed p values. Based on the results obtained from a paired-samples t-test conducted to compare the pretest score and the posttest score, it can be concluded that the participants gained significantly higher scores after learning through the EV program.

3.2 Results of the attitudes toward the EV program

A questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-three items which were organized into three parts. The first part comprised four questions pertaining to personal information (i.e., gender, age, level of education, and English language learning experience). The second and third parts consisted of thirteen and six opinion statements using a four-point Likert form. They were statements regarding attitudes toward the EV program and attitudes toward learning through the EV program, respectively. The questionnaire was distributed to 20 respondents. The results of the questionnaire presented in basic descriptive statistics were found by calculating an arithmetic mean.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of four questions with fixed responses about the respondents' personal information. These questions concerning gender, age, level of education, the number of years of English learning experience. Their responses are summarized below.

Table 4. Results of Part 1 – Personal information

Personal Information	Frequency (N=20)	Percentage (100%)
1. Gender		
• Male	7	35
• Female	13	65
2. Age		
• 16-25	3	15
• 26-35	10	50
• 36-45	1	5
• Over 45	6	30
3. Education		

Personal Information	Frequency (N=20)	Percentage (100%)
• Junior High School	10	50
• Senior High School	6	30
• Diploma	2	10
• Bachelor	2	10
4. Language Learning Experience		
• 6-10 years	10	50
• Over 10 years	10	50

Twenty respondents, seven males and thirteen females, fit within four different age brackets. Three respondents (15 %) were between 16-25 years old, ten (50%) were between 26-35, one (5%) was between 36-45 years old, and six (30%) were over 45. Ten respondents (50%) had graduated from junior high school, six (30%) from senior high school, two (10%) held a diploma degree, and two (10%) had a Bachelor’s degrees. Ten respondents (50%) had six to ten years of English language learning experience; while, 10 (50%) had more than 10 years of English language learning experience.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of thirteen opinion statements according to a four-point Likert scale measuring the respondents’ levels of agreement toward the EV program. The Likert-scaled responses were assigned values as 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3= agree, and 4 = strongly agree. The criteria for interpreting the mean score of each statement, the criteria for the overall opinion statements, and the results in Part 3 are illustrated in Table 5, 6, and Table 7 respectively.

Table 5. Criteria for interpreting the four-point Likert scales for individual items

Ranges	Statements
3.50-4.00	Strongly Agree
2.50-3.49	Agree
1.50-2.49	Disagree
1.00-1.49	Strongly disagree

Table 6. Criteria for interpreting the four-point Likert scales for Part 2

Means	Interpretation
3.50-4.00	The EV program is very appropriate.
2.50-3.49	The EV program is appropriate.
1.50-2.49	The EV program is not appropriate.
1.00-1.49	The EV program is not at all appropriate.

Table 7. Part 2-Attitudes toward EV program

Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Content			
1.1 The learning objectives in each module are clear.	3.50	.51	Strongly agreed
1.2 The content is in line with the objectives.	3.55	.61	Strongly agreed
1.3 The amount of the content in each program is appropriate.	3.45	.69	Agreed
1.4 The content is accurate.	3.50	.61	Strongly agreed
1.5 The content is appropriate in terms of difficulty level.	3.50	.51	Strongly agreed
2. Assessment			
2.1 The tests are in line with the content and the objectives.	3.45	.76	Agreed
2.2 There are a variety of test formats.	3.25	.91	Agreed
2.3 The number of test items is appropriate.	3.35	.81	Agreed
2.3 The number of test items is appropriate.	3.35	.81	Agreed
2.4 The tests are appropriate in terms of level of difficulty.	3.20	.62	Agreed
3. Outlook of the EV Program			
3.1 The log-in is not complicated.	3.55	.51	Strongly agreed
3.2 The e-learning is user friendly and easy to navigate.	3.35	.86	Agreed
3.3 The quality of text, graphic, and audio is appropriate.	3.50	.76	Strongly agreed
3.4 The type, size and color of fonts are clear and readable.	3.45	.83	Agreed
Total	3.43	.55	Appropriate

There were thirteen opinion statements in Part 2 of the questionnaire that asked the respondents about the content, assessment, and outlook of the EV program. In terms of content, they strongly agreed that the learning objectives in each module were clear; the content was in line with the objectives, the content was appropriate; and the level of difficulty of the content was very appropriate. Even though these statements about the content were rated as very appropriate, the mean score of item 1.3, the appropriateness of the amount of the content in each program, was the lowest at 3.45 despite the mean scores of other statements being over 3.50.

The next four items relating to the assessment of the EV program were statements 2.1-2.4. They concerned the assessment regarding this connection with the content and objectives variety of question types, and the suitability of the number of items and the difficulty level. All respondents agreed that tests were consistent with the content and the objective ($\bar{X} = 3.45$, $SD = 0.76$), were of a variety of types ($\bar{X} = 3.25$, $SD = 0.91$), and were appropriate for the number of items and difficulty level ($\bar{X} = 3.35$ and 3.20). The mean scores of these four statements were positively interpreted as appropriate.

The last four statements (items 3.1-3.4) concerned the general appearance of the EV program, for example the login, navigation, visual, and audio media. The mean scores for two statements in this part were rated as very appropriate. The respondents strongly agreed that the login was not complicated ($\bar{X} = 3.55$, $SD = 0.51$) and were very appropriate for the quality of visual and audio media ($\bar{X} = 3.50$, $SD = 0.76$). Meanwhile, they agreed that the EV program was user-friendly ($\bar{X} = 3.35$) and readable ($\bar{X} = 3.45$). The mean score of items 3.2, the e-learning is user friendly and easy to navigate, was the lowest at 3.35.

In summary, Part 2 of the questionnaire, the overall mean score from Table 6 about the results of the attitudes toward the EV program was at 3.43, signifying that all of the respondents agreed that the EV program was appropriate.

The last part of the questionnaire comprised six statements concerning the vendors' attitudes toward learning through the EV program. A four-point Likert-scale of responses was used to measure levels of agreement. The format of the scales are 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The criteria for interpreting the mean score of each statement in Part 3 were the same as in Part 2 (See Table 7). The criteria for the overall statements and the results about the attitudes toward learning through the EV program are illustrated in Table 8 and Table 9.

Table 8. Criteria for interpreting the four-point Likert scale for Part 3

Means	Interpretation
3.50-4.00	Vendors have very good attitudes toward learning through the EV program.
2.50-3.49	Vendors have good attitudes toward learning through the EV program.
1.50-2.49	Vendors have bad attitudes toward learning through the EV program.
1.00-1.49	Vendors have very bad attitudes toward learning through the EV program.

Table 9. Results of Part 3 – Attitudes toward learning through the EV program

Statements	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1. The content in the EV program fits your needs as a vendor.	3.85	.37	Strongly agree
2. You have gained more vocabulary and phrases that are useful for communicating with travelers.	3.90	.31	Strongly agree
3. The audio files help improve your pronunciation.	3.70	.47	Strongly agree
4. The section 'Grammar Focus' helps you form better sentences when communicating in English.	3.55	.69	Strongly agree
5. The EV program helps you communicate more accurately.	3.65	.49	Strongly agree
6. The EV program increases your confidence when communicating in English.	3.80	.41	Strongly agree
Total	3.74	.28	Very good attitude

All statements rated as 'strongly agree' according to the data present in Table 9 regarding attitudes toward learning through the EV program. The range of response was narrow; the highest mean score was 3.9 while the lowest was 3.55. Firstly, the participants were satisfied and have gained more vocabulary and phrases that are useful for communicating with travelers. ($\bar{X} = 3.90$, $SD = 0.31$). Secondly, they also strongly agreed that the content in the EV program fits their needs. ($\bar{X} = 3.85$, $SD = 0.37$). Lastly, they strongly agreed that the EV program increases their confidence when communicating in English ($\bar{X} = 3.80$, $SD = 0.41$). The respondents strongly agreed that the audio files helped them pronounce words more correctly ($\bar{X} = 3.70$, $SD = 0.47$). They strongly agreed that the EV program helped them communicate more accurately ($\bar{X} = 3.65$, $SD = 0.49$) and the section 'Grammar Focus' helps you form better sentences when communicating in English ($\bar{X} = 3.55$, $SD = 0.69$). The overall mean score of the last part of the questionnaire was calculated at 3.74 which indicates that all respondents had very good attitudes toward learning through the EV program.

4 Discussion

4.1 Discussions on the learning achievement before and after using the EV program

After the vendors learned through the EV program, their performance was improved. Average post-test scores were higher than pre-test (64.95 over 53.6) at a level of significance of $P \leq 0.00$, which indicates a positive contribution of the EV program. This indicates that the EV program had a positive effect on students' learning achievements. This finding was consistent with many studies [3][6][7][9] that e-Learning helps improve knowledge and skills.

There were plausible reasons that the students' learning achievements were significantly greater after using the EV program. First, the contents in nine units of the EV program were related to their work. Second, the vocabulary and phrases that were part of the EV program enabled them to learn and gain sufficient knowledge and understand to apply them in practice. Third, students were able to acquire and learn by themselves because of the potential of internet accessibility, so they could get and learn as much as they wanted. Last, as they could learn anywhere or any time, quick feedback also allowed them to know the results. As a result, they were able to practice better as well as attaining better learning achievement.

4.2 Discussions on the attitudes toward the EV program

The vendors revealed that they found the EV program appropriate and they had very good attitudes toward learning through the program. The vendors believed the EV program was flexible and convenient for independent learning. Previous research [3][8][10] has documented that e-Learning is recognized for its high flexibility in time, place, and pace of learning.

There were plausible reasons why the EV program was beneficial for the students. Firstly, the program was flexible and convenient, so the students could access and gain from using the EV program. This finding was in line with the studies by [3][8][10]. Second, the students realized that the contents were related to their job, as a result, they appreciated the benefits of the contents they gained from using the EV program. However, inadequate computer/IT skills should be taken into consideration. Although students were able to access and learn how to use the program, it did not mean that they could use it successfully. So, it is suggested that students should be guided or trained to use the EV program. Finally, an issue of time constraint may have affected students' learning and their unfamiliarity with e-Learning. As a result of it, in order to maintain learners' positive attitudes toward online lessons, it is recommended that instructors/designers should design the units to be simple and easy to use.

5 Limitations of the study

There are three major limitations of the present study. Firstly, the generalization of the study's outcomes will be very limited due to the participation of only 20 vendors. Secondly, a control group is excluded due to the limited number of the vendors selling goods in the northeast of Thailand. Furthermore, the inconvenience of time and location contributed to traditional classroom-based learning. Finally, not all merchants have smartphones. It is therefore necessary to select a sample group that can use smartphones to take online lessons.

6 Implications of the study

This study indicates areas of concern for programs that focus on English for specific purposes. The first concern is learners' needs. It should be taken into consideration because if we create a tool to be used, we need to know the potential users think and what they are interested in. In terms of teaching materials, people tend to learn language in different ways. Some people enjoy studying from workbooks, TV, movies, and songs; some prefer learning through online English language links because of their learning styles and convenience. Thus, it is suggested that teaching should be chosen and used based on not only the target group but also the context. Lastly, in terms of evaluation, for the present study, the pretest and post-test, the questionnaires, and the semi-structured interviews used were verified by the experts and accepted as effective. Hence, all of these research instruments are potentially applicable for further inquiries.

7 Conclusion and recommendations for future research

The present study adds to the body of work on the use of technology for the teaching of a target language for specific purposes. This study has shown the effective application of online aids to enhance the communicative skills of adult language learners. It is recommended that the use of technology for effective learning should be investigated in further research in language learning areas. Lastly, autonomous learning with a variety interaction is highly recommended for stimulating and allowing learners to perform self-learning independently at every opportunity. Therefore, to develop the instruction or conduct future research, teaching materials like textbooks, pictures, audio, VDO, particularly technology should be integrated.

After the spread of COVID-19 has decreased, the travel of tourists around the world will certainly improve and possibly return to normal. Particularly for the countries in ASEAN, English is the principal medium of communication among the 10member countries. If the vendor can learn the language it would be an advantage for business with ASEAN travelers. Learning is not limited to only in the classroom. Online learning through technology is a very convenient method for today's people.

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