

Thai as a Foreign Language Learning in the Facebook Era: Go Beyond Brick-and-Mortar

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Abstract

Social media are currently the most influent technologies in Thailand making social interaction through a variety of formats. Participation through them provides many opportunities for learners to interact socially by communicating with each other in new contexts, not limited to just in school, at home, at Internet cafés, or at a specified time. Social media can be for promoting the higher quality of learning by adopting as communication supports of the foreign learners. This article aims to present the new instructional model for teaching Thai as a foreign language using 21st Century technology or social media for enhancing language skills. It presents a new learning strategy to use technology with modern teaching methods in classroom, offline, and online. The researchers designed and proposed the blended learning model for Thai language skill development of non-native Thai learners. The study additionally provides a synthesis of the Communicative Approach, Instructional Model, and Social Media to expand the understanding of the model's origin. The result of the primary study showed that the model consisted of three main phases, P.1 Presentation (online), P.2 Practice (in-class), and P.3 Production (offline and online), and fourteen learning steps.

Key Words: Thai as Foreign Language Learning, Communicative Approach, Social Media, Blended Learning Model

Introduction

At present, each country recognizes the importance of foreign languages teaching. This is why the number of foreigners interested in studying Thai as a foreign language is increasing in order to communicate with each other in various fields, whether political, social, economic, commercial, or educational. Teaching Thai as a foreign language today has many institutions both public and private increasingly open the Thai for foreigner courses. However, the educators only developed Thai language or Thai studies curriculums for foreign learners, they do not develop the Thai as a foreign language ones preparing to produce a qualified instructor with great knowledge, skills and high expertise in the design of teaching Thai for foreign learners directly. Mostly curriculum is developed for undergraduates and have opened in few universities such as Srinakharinwirot University, Dhonburi Rajabhat Univerisity, or Huachiew Chalermprakiet University.

Students who graduated from the field of teaching Thai as a foreign language curriculum are not enough. There was a shortage of teachers who have expertise in teaching this field. According to Ponmanee (2009), although teaching Thai as a foreign language is now more important, teachers lack the knowledge and skills. The pre-service teacher production system has not realized the importance of education in this field seriously, only added in the course of only a few universities.

Apart from the problem of shortage of qualified teachers, the restrictions on the time and location of both learners and teachers are another problem. Yuwanich (2007) discussed the problems of teaching Thai as a foreign language from the experiences as a care taker of foreign students in international programs, Chiang Mai University and from the interview with Associate Professor Sriwilai Ponmanee, Ms.Mayuree Anukamol, and Ms.Suthalee Thongmee, she has found a consistent problem of staff shortages in the issue of teaching, or a shortage of teachers. Foreign learners had not enough time to study or duration of the course between the teachers and learners did not match. The learners did not study in full time, no free time for practice, no efficient instructional media which are flexible and able to use anywhere at any time.

In conclusion, the issue of Thai as a foreign language teaching is the old teacher-centered instruction, and none of technology in classroom. The findings of literature review related to the use of technology in Thai classroom for foreigners revealed that these researches were developed computer-assisted instruction, e-Lessons and various e-media (Ritthisorn, 2003; Yuwanich, 2007; Dissorn, 2009; Thanunchai, 2009), but found none of Thai research to develop new instructional strategies with the use of technology in Thai as a foreign language teaching, so the researchers developed the new instruction model applying social media to enhance language skills of foreign learners.

However, besides the shortage of effective teachers, the old style of teaching and learning, and restrictions on the time and place, it has found the problems of the language used in the classroom as not consistent with the real language used in social context. As Hiranpradit (2002) has studied the status of Thai language learning and teaching for foreigners in Thailand showed that teaching Thai for foreigners in the class did not respond to the use of Thai language in the real situation because they study grammar or formal language, not for social communication. Teaching Thai as a foreign language should be taught the language to be used for communication or conversation, should not be taught specific format or language structure. According to the nature of human language learning, it should begin with developing the listen and speak ability to be well enough, then coaching read and write ability respectively in accordance with Tuaycharoen (2004) discussed how children learn language that they would hear those intimate talked. Although he initially did not catch the meaning, when heard and saw repeatedly with different poses, then he understands the meaning, imitate simple speech, learn to read and write at school.

According to the opinion of Wilkins (1973 cited in Lonkhleng, 1993), said that listening and speaking skills are used more than reading and writing. In one day, we might read a book, newspaper ads, and may write letters depending on the activity or work. Listening and speaking is meaningful communication that receivers get feedback immediately. The importance of teaching Thai as a foreign language should take into the development of listening and speaking skill first because the primary function of language is to communicate and interact. As a result, communicative approach is the importance of teaching Thai as a foreign language. The approach is to teach a foreign language that aims to provide learners with interaction between one student and another or a student and a teacher, practice the target language as given situations appropriately with the social context in which the students are involved, allows them use language to communicate as a social condition (Angwattanakul, 1988), be confident and courage to use the language outside the classroom with native speakers. It is the language used to communicate in daily life rather than memorizing grammar or structure and develop language proficiency efficient as the nature of language learning. Students appreciate and have positive attitude towards learning goals at a higher level.

With the importance and necessity of such problems, the researchers therefore aim to develop the Thai as a foreign language instructional model based on communicative approach on social media to enhance language skills of foreign learners. This developed instructional model will be useful for teaching Thai as a foreign language teaching in the 21st century curriculum of higher education.

Research Objectives

To develop the instructional model based on communicative approach on social media to enhance Thai language skills of foreign learners.

Theoretical Framework

To strengthen the skills of listening and speaking, learners should have opportunities to learn the language as freely as possible. The class is truly a community where they must be familiar with working in pairs or small groups. The instructor must not watch or control too much but serves only to clarify what each work comprises of and the time that should be used. The teacher needs to plan in advance. There is a practice in pairs or in group (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983) and learners should be taught to use the language to communicate or chat but should not be taught specific format or structure of languages. According to the nature of human language learning, it should start from developing the ability to listen and speak well enough before. Then learners practice the skills of reading and writing, respectively. Using the language for communication to develop, the students will have the ability to communicate using language or language interpretation correctly when they are connecting with others in society and will always know what to say to whom, where, when and how. In addition, learners focus on the concepts taught in the language interaction between teachers and students and between the student and learner centered and on encouraging students to express language to convey their ideas as a spoken language which will allow students to practice listening and speaking skills, including the use of body language, gestures and facial expressions. Language development will be effective and natural while the instructor serves as a trainer for the students, to create a friendly conversation, let them react to each other in several skills, and facilitate pair work or group work. Teachers may assess learners based on the expression of which is involved in various activities and may be evaluated as official results by writing.

However, the current state of teaching Thai as a foreign language found that teachers have mainly used traditional instruction emphasis on teacher-centered and had restrictions on the time and place of both learners and instructors (Yuwanich, 2007), and a shortage of teachers with the knowledge and skills in teaching Thai as a foreign language (Ponmanee, 2009). In reducing the problems and these limitations, it should have developed an instructional model that reasonable and effective, combined with the use of social media for teaching anywhere at any time via the internet. Students are taught according to their abilities and interests. All classmates can consult and exchange ideas with each other as well as students in regular classes (Malithong, 2005; Thepduangkaew, 2008) by using social media as tools to communicate through web browser to encourage everyone to take action and make a real common solution and to be responsible and involved in their learning, able to develop the skills and requirements in a real environment.

From theoretical framework above, it can be constructed and shown below.

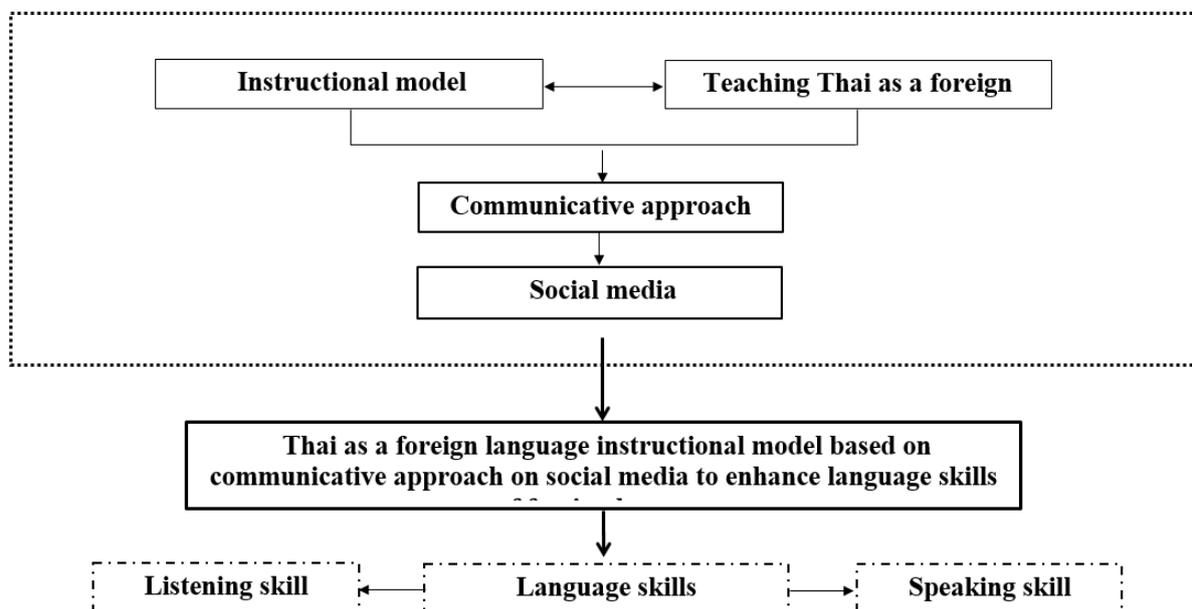


Figure 1 the Framework of Language Skills Enhancement through Social Media

Research Results

The results from gathering and integrating theoretical framework of Language Skills Enhancement through Social Media can be developed instructional model as detailed: 1) Orientate course, purposes, teaching methods, activities, and evaluation. 2) Get learners into pairs. 3) Introduce social media such as social networking, content communities, and etc. as well as train to operate it manually. 4) Teach reading phonetic alphabets to those classes and allow them to practice reading with couples. 5) Distribute Basic Thai conversation textbook and blog (<http://learnthai4u.wordpress.com>) and assign learners to study the content of each chapter before at least one week. 6) Do the pretest to measure the skills of listening and speaking.

Phrase 1 Presentation

1. Learners listen to word pronunciation related to the conversation situation from video clip on blog, then pronounce them.
2. Study the conversation situation from video on blog.
3. Describe grammar structure, additional vocabulary, language remark, and cultural remark related to the conversation.

Phrase 2 Practice

5. Study the conversation in textbook and practice speaking along the conversation but change to their own information.
6. Call a pair of learners to speak out on the topic. When finished, call another pair to conclude the former pair about speaking, then speak out on their topic, do this until the last pair.
9. Summarize listening and speaking results of learners and give advices as a whole.

Phrase 3 Production

10. Each pair use language in real-life situations by choosing only one situation in textbook (part 3 of exercise) and establish a dialogue on the situation from grammar structure and additional vocabulary as important guidelines with self-practice.
11. Inform learners to know that there will be the test before the start of class next week, each pair will have a conversation on the chosen situation.
12. Assess and score the conversation and provide feedback for each couple to know.

Note: according to the instructional model, Student must study all situation in textbook before the start of 7).

- 7) Provide an opportunity for students to ask questions on various issues.
- 8) Do a posttest to measure the skills of listening and speaking.

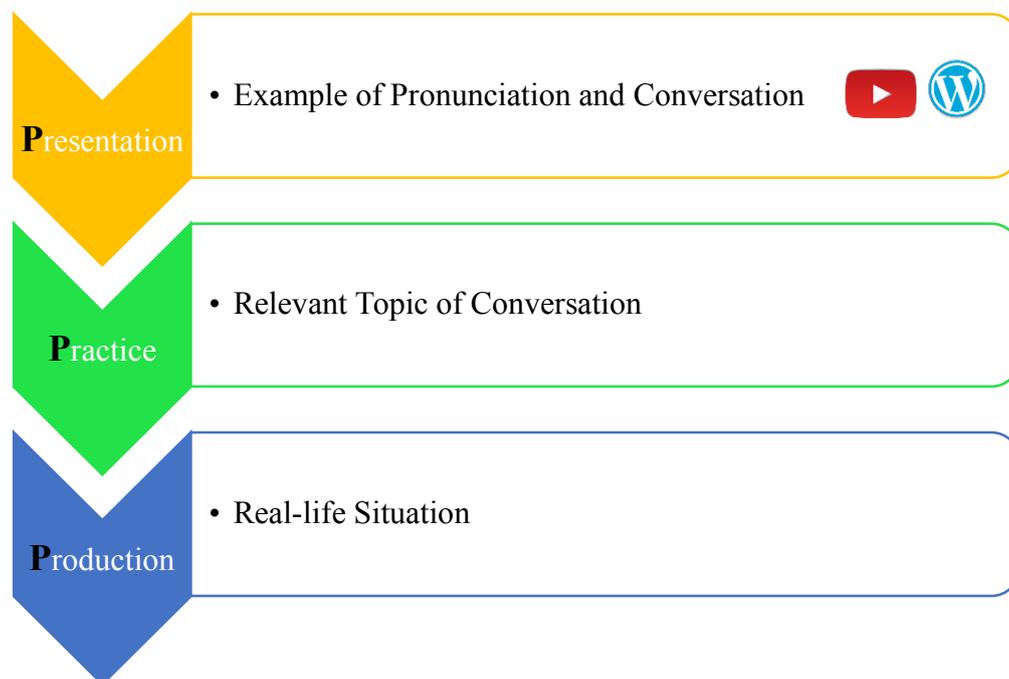


Figure 2 the briefly Thai as a foreign language instructional model

Conclusion

Social media especially Facebook and YouTube are the current technology that can make social interaction through a variety of formats. Interacting through social media can occur in many ways such as surfing to the internet via web browser using a computer or mobile phone. The engagement through social media provides an opportunity for foreign students to take part in social interaction by communicating with each other in Thailand context, which is not limited just in university, at home or at a specified time as we can say it goes beyond brick-and-mortar. Participation "to" and "through" Social media is not only no restrictions on building relationships, but also be driven by the specific interests of each users. The learning today can use social media to manage teaching to promote the learning of the students. In particular, adoption of communication support of the foreign students which contributes to the development of language skills as well. It can be said that the introduction of social media use in teaching learners can be linked together, lower the gap and the barriers of time and place, as a result, learning is not confined to the classroom anymore. Moreover, social media application is consistent and in accordance with the National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999) and Amendments (Second National Education Act. B.E. 2545 (2002) of Thailand, chapter 9 on Technology for Education in Article 65, the importance of human resource development in both the manufacturer and the users of technology in education that should have knowledge, ability, and skill to produce appropriate technology with quality and performance.

The teacher, hence, must be the person of knowledge, capacities, and skills in manufacturing educational technology with efficiency and students must know how to use the technology appropriately. It is the mission of one of the Thai instructors in the allocation of quality technology for teaching in Thailand. The language learning process for all foreign students must take action, make a real common solution, study on their self-paced, encourage to be responsible, participate in their own learning, and those considered to be most important.

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