

**The use of a mobile instant messaging (MIM)  
application for English interaction in the Korean EFL  
context**

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## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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## Abstract

With the rapid development of mobile technology in South Korea, there is an expectation that smart phones (Internet accessible) can provide Korean university students with more opportunities to interact in English with others to assist in their learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). However, there has been little empirical research on how students interact with each other and negotiate meanings using the mobile instant messaging applications on their smartphones.

This study aimed to explore the feasibility of using the *KakaoTalk* mobile instant messaging (MIM) application to enhance the English communicative opportunities for Korean undergraduate students and to ascertain how communicative interactions in English via a MIM application can assist in English language learning through this platform.

To accomplish these aims, the study adopted a mixed method approach. The quantitative approach surveyed 103 university students to establish the current status of MIM use in English communicative activities. Qualitatively, a case study approach was used to investigate how Korean students interacted with English dominant and non-English dominant students using the MIM application. Data was collected through message observations of the students' interactions in English. Semi-structured interviews with 14 Korean students were conducted in the research to elicit benefits and issues with interacting in English using *KakaoTalk* on their smartphones.

The survey findings indicated that many of the Korean students were already communicating in English with peers from other countries. The findings from the case studies demonstrated that as they interacted with their partners using *KakaoTalk*, the Korean students made use of negotiation of meaning strategies such as elaboration and confirmation, similar to findings in face-to-face studies that indicate active engagement in language skills development. In a mobile technology-enhanced environment, the Korean students utilised multimodal representations (text, photos and video clips) as well as several language styles (emoticons, punctuation and onomatopoeia) to support their negotiated interactions. The research also showed that the level of interaction was dependent on how the students were paired. There was more engagement in the communicative activity when the pairs were comprised of culturally and linguistically

different students (i.e. between Korean–English dominant and Korean–non-English dominant groups) than when the pairs were culturally similar (i.e. Korean–Korean group). The level of interactive activity was also higher between opposite gender pairs than same-gender pairs. The Korean students’ perceptions of the benefits and issues related to the use of a MIM application to communicate in English and the implications of the research are reported.

The research provides timely understanding of how smartphone technologies could be used to provide much-needed opportunities for authentic interaction and negotiation of meanings between peers in order to enhance their English language development in South Korea. The knowledge gained will inform university educators and policy makers on how English communication via a MIM application can be implemented to assist in Korean university students’ English learning in the Korean EFL context.