Blended Learning and EFL Course Management at a Thai University

การเรียนรู้แบบผสมผสานกับการจัดการรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศที่มหาวิทยาลัยไทย

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Abstract

Difficulty of teaching English as a Foreign Language in large-size classes has been a challenge for many years. It is often associated with limited classroom interaction, insufficient student concentration, and ineffectual autonomous learning disciplines. In essence, traditional classroom settings fail to serve students' need for language practice and communicative-skill development. Due to the challenge, this study employed blended learning in an English undergraduate course by mingling multi-learning methods. The pretest-posttest results showed a statistical difference in students' learning achievements. The results from a survey of students' opinions towards class administration also supported the blended learning approach.

Keywords: University students, English language teaching, blended learning

บทคัดย่อ

ปัญหาในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในห้องเรียนขนาดใหญ่เป็นความท้าทายมาเป็นเวลาหลายปีปัญหามักเกี่ยวข้องกับการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ในชั้นเรียนแบบจำกัดความใส่ใจของผู้เรียนไม่เพียงพอและวินัยในการเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเองไม่มีประสิทธิผลที่จริงแล้วการจัดชั้นเรียนแบบดั้งเดิมไม่สามารถรองรับความต้องการในการฝึกฝนภาษาและพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารของผู้เรียนได้ด้วยความท้าทายดังกล่าว งานวิจัยนี้จึงศึกษาใช้วิธีการเรียนรู้แบบผสมผสานในรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษระดับปริญญาตรี โดยการรวมวิธีการเรียนรู้ที่หลากหลายผลจากการทดสอบก่อนและหลังเรียนแสดงให้เห็นถึงความแตกต่างด้านผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนของผู้เรียนอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ผลการสำรวจความคิดเห็นของผู้เรียนที่มีต่อการจัดการการเรียนการสอนก็สนับสนุนวิธีการเรียนรู้แบบผสมผสาน

คำสำคัญ: นักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษา, การสอนภาษาอังกฤษ, การเรียนรู้แบบผสมผสาน

Introduction

According to the 2000 Policy of English Instruction of Liberal Education, English and Information Technology (IT) skills are both currently placed at the forefront of Thailand's national intellectual development. In general, English education in Thailand often involves large classes. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at all levels have found these classes too big to meet all students' needs; it has been too difficult to gain their attention and participation in face-to-face activities provided in class, let alone outside the classroom. Furthermore, students generally make little effort to participate in interchanges between peers in a face-to-face classroom setting, particularly when the medium of communication is a foreign language. Since educators (e.g. Dewey, 1938, Vrasidas & Mclsacc, 1999) have viewed human interaction as one of the most crucial keys to learning success, learning EFL in large-size classes appears counter productive. Also, learning differences can result from a blended learning environment (Delialioglu, 2012). Nonetheless, several criteria should be taken into consideration vis-à-vis how to organize a blended learning environment.

One important factor to be considered in setting a learning environment is the student-teacher ratio. According to Thailand's higher education quality assurance criteria, the eligible ratio is 25 enrolled students per one full-time equivalent teacher. However, during the data collection period of this study, 3,762 first-year students were enrolled in *Developmental English*, a required general education course for all first-year undergraduate students, and only 16 lecturers of English were willing to teach the course. This resulted in the ratio of 235 students per one instructor, which was about a hundred times more than the expected student-instructor proportion (25 students per instructor). Thus, effective course management for large-size classes was in need.

One of the best pedagogic approaches for large-size classes is blended learning, which combines digital and online learning with traditional face-to-face classroom methods (Gudmundsson & Southey, 2012; Banados, 2006). Moreover, studies have shown that the use of technology in education does not impede students' learning process (Tang & Chaw, 2013). In reality, a blended learning approach can meet students' individual needs and create a satisfactory educational experience (Alrushiedat & Olfman, 2013). Today, blended learning, also known as hybrid learning and mixed-mode learning, has been adapted for use at all levels of the education system (Dias & Diniz, 2014; Tang & Chaw, 2013; Duhaney, 2012), including education for learners with disabilities (Serianni & Coy, 2014). In addition, it has been effectively employed in both national and international distance education (Jhansi, 2012), in many academic fields, for example, engineering (Mtebe & Raphael, 2013;Chang et al., 2014), business statistics (Alrushiedat & Olfman, 2013), geography (Perez-Sanagustin, Santos, Hernandez-Leo & Biat, 2012), surveying education (El-Mowafy, Kuhm, & Snow, 2013) foreign language studies (Sun 2014; Gleason, 2013; Banados, 2006), property education (Poon, 2014) course management (Chou & Chou, 2011), teacher preparation (Duhaney, 2012) and so forth.

Accordingly, to meet the needs of learners, a blended learning approach (Korr, Derwin, Greene & Sokoloff, 2012) was deployed by combining classroom learning and the use of technology, as well as extracurricular activities provided at a language center or a self-access learning center (SALC) which was unofficially initiated. In fact, a blended-learning approach was the first attempt to solve the problem of large-size classes, and up to now databases of published research articles have shown no results for blended learning utilization in any Thai university. The outcomes should consequently benefit teaching professionals and educators, as well as policy planners, at any university in a similar EFL context.

Propose of the Study

The study aimed to investigate whether or not an EFL learning management system for blended learning would be academically effective and well-received by first-year undergraduate students at a Thai university.

Blended Learning

Blended learning (also called hybrid learning) is a formal education program which includes online learning. It can also be designed to supplement a conventional face-to-face class in which students may not receive sufficient assistance and interaction with teachers due to the large size of the class or the limited number of class hours. Research (e.g., Argente-Linares, Carmen Perez-Lopez& Ordonez-Solana, 2017; Nakayama, Mutsuura& Yamamoto, 2017; Marcal, Andrade, Melo, Windson, & Eduardo, 2016) showed that the combination of online learning and traditional learning increases students' overall satisfaction and achievement. In this approach, a variety of meaningful authentic materials, social collaborative activities, and resources are provided in a buffet style (Hood, 2013) via various delivery modes or communication channels (Chou & Chou, 2011). Consequently, blended learning allows students to select what they prefer to learn at a time, place, and pace of their expediency (Jhansi, 2012). Furthermore, it helps improve students' learning performance and collaboration in group work (Gudmudsson & Southey, 2012). It also triggers students' self-confidence and independence, with less dependence upon teachers. Likewise, instructors can also benefit from blended learning (Chu & Chu, 2011), as they can guide students' learning by facilitating students to select appropriate materials to practice new skills and by providing a variety of assignments which meet learning objectives and which fit students' various learning styles.

In addition to technological tools and online resources that are obligatory in a blended learning approach, self-access learning (SAL) or self-access (SA) is advantageous as it includes systemized learning materials and resources (Sheerin, 1991) that allow learners to customize their own learning according to their

own desires. Thus, it can facilitate learners' self-directed study or learner autonomy (Cotterrall & Reinders, 2001). In effect, researchers (e.g., Cooker, 2010; McMurry, Tanner &Anderson, 2010; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Gremmo & Riley, 1995) suggest that universities establish a self-access learning center (SALC) that provides learners with meaningful self-access materials, as well as the right amount of guidance.

The Learning Management System

Previous studies indicated that learning management system indirectly affected students' perceived learning achievements. In fact, besides task value and achievement goals instructor support, and students' self-aptitude, the learning management system was one of the major factors that directly influenced students' learning achievement and satisfaction (Diep, Zhu, Struyven & Blieck, 2017) . By the same token, the learning management system using technology such as video and sound recordings of the actual activity in the classroom could also facilitate effective communication, cooperation and co-presence in both remote online learning and face-to-face classroom learning(Bower, Lee & Dalgarno, 2017). The learning management system in this study comprised human and technological factors like SALC, support from instructors and tutors, learning tasks and materials, and achievement goals. These were established and evaluated, as follows.

Recognizing SALC significance, the Thai university established a SALC to support learner autonomy for all students. The SALC managed self-study activities, i.e., English learning computerized programs (e.g., Tell Me More, Ellis, Quartet), additional materials (e.g., games, songs, movie clips), face-to-face interactions with native speakers of English, and English camps. The SALC staff members were responsible for helping students find and use the materials and equipment (e.g., computer, videotape/ CD players) in the SALC. Students are allowed to choose what they want to learn at their own pace and convenience.

The Compulsory English Course at the Thai university offered three credit hours, with weekly sessions as follows: a two-hour lecture, a two-hour laboratory session, and five hours of learning outside the classroom. It was an obligatory course for all first-year undergraduate students. In the data collection period, the total number of first-year undergraduate students in the regular programs enrolled in this course was 3,762, excluding the first-year students in the evening programs, those in the weekend programs, and those at the university's international college, whose courses were independently managed. According to fields of study, the first-year students in focus were grouped into 42 sections, each of which included various numbers of students ranging from 66 to 107. The registration, assignments of responsible lecturers, and remuneration were under the supervision of the Office of General Education.

The Teaching Faculty and the Supporting Staff

As students perceived that instructors' support (Diep, Zhu, Struyven & Blieck, 2017), along with tutorials (Morton, Saleh, Smith, Henami, Ameen & Bennie, 2016) were essential, sixteen lecturers and twelve teacher's assistants were assigned to take the teaching and tutoring roles for 3,762 students, respectively. In addition, supporting staff members at the SALC oversaw language learning supplements such as computerized devices and programs, as well as extracurricular activities.

Course Instructional Materials

A blended learning environment required both online and face-to-face learning materials. Thus, course instructional materials included a commercial textbook and student workbook, teacher book, as well as associated software from the publishers. Besides, additional online and paper-based tasks and materials were prepared by lecturers, teacher's assistants, and SALC staff members and provided to students at no cost.

Classroom Setting

In addition to desks and chairs, each classroom was equipped with a computer, Internet access, a monitor, a projector, a visualizer, a removable screen that covers a white board, a microphone, speakers, and air conditioners.

Lecture Session

Students were required to attend a two-hour lecture session each week for 7 weeks of this study. The instructional medium used in class was supposed to be entirely English. The lesson and activities in each lecture session was video recorded and the video clip, accompanied by the power point slides, was posted on the university's web site in order to help students who missed the class and to enable all students to review the lesson. However, some lecturers may sometimes use Thai, the students' first language, to expedite their understanding. Lecturers and teacher's assistants could also add any online learning support materials, post questions on the web board, and set discussion topics for their own students. Participation in lecture sessions was assessed at 10 percent of final marking via class attendance and completion of class assignments.

Laboratory Session

Blended learning was acceptable and of interest to undergraduate students learning this subject if provided with tutorials (Morton, Saleh, Smith, Henami, Ameen & Bennie, 2016). Hence, in this study, a two-hour laboratory session or a tutorial session was offered every week. It was conducted by a teacher's assistant who helped review the lessons in the students' mother tongue and provided explanations of the correct answers to the assignments in the student's workbook. Students' attendance and assignment completion in the laboratory sessions was assessed by the SALC staff at 10 percent of final marking.

Independent Study

As online communication, collaboration, and learning was effective to the majority of remote and face-to-face learners (Nakayama, M., Mutsuura, K. & Yamamoto, H., 2017), this study stipulated that independent online study was obligatory for all students enrolled in this course. It included students' participation in online learning course materials and in extracurricular activities, as well as computerized programs for English learning such as Tell Me More, Ellis, and Quartet. Furthermore, the first-year students were obligated to converse with volunteer native speakers of English from overseas (i.e. Australia) at the SALC during a one-week period of time and/or join the English camp activities offered. This independent study was assessed at 10 percent of final marking. Additionally, students were required to spend time outside class conducting a creative group project such as role playing, drama recital, comedy, concerts, in which English was used as a medium and all of the group members took part. The final group project was submitted on a CD or DVD and it was assessed at 20 percent of final marking.

Course Assessments and Evaluation

The course assessments included 100 percent of final marking, comprising 10 percent from lecture attendance and class activity participation, 10 percent from laboratory attendance and class activity participation, 10 percent from participation in the extracurricular activities, 20 percent from a group project outcome, 25 percent of the midterm examination, and 25 percent from the final examination.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 3,762 first year students. All of them completed the pretest while 3,761 students completed the posttest because one was absent. Nevertheless, 3,485 students out of 3,571 examinees voluntarily

filled the questionnaire of the inclusive course management, which was distributed along with the final paper-based examination.

Instruments

Two types of instruments used in this study: two tests (a written pretest and a written posttest) and a written questionnaire were used as research tools for data gathering. The pretest and the posttest were used to assess the participants' learning achievements, whereas the questionnaire measured their perceptions of the overall course administration.

The pretest and the posttest were conducted by the teaching faculty members using the contents listed in the course syllabus. They consisted of 80 multiple-choice items, each of which was worth one point.The tests had four parts: vocabulary, grammar, conversation and reading. The time allotment was two hours. The validity of the tests were checked and verified by two English native speakers and a Thai EFL-teaching expert. The tests were then piloted with a class of thirty first-year Twilight students. The Cronbach's alpha value of the pretest-posttest results was .899, indicating that the tests were reliable.

In constructing the course management questionnaire, the author informally interviewed ten first-year undergraduate students taking the course, five lecturers of the course, three teacher assistants of the course, as well as the director of the SALC. The information obtained from the interviews was analyzed and categorized, and subsequently used to develop a questionnaire. The questionnaire was written in the student's first language to avoid confusion. It comprised three parts: 1) information about course management, 2) information about classroom instruction, and 3) information about course assessment and evaluation. In each part of the multiple-choice questionnaire, the students were asked to circle the option responding to their answer. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, and it was piloted with a class of thirty first-year undergraduate students studying in the twilight program at the same university. The Cronbach's alpha (α-coefficient) value was 0.92, meaning that the questionnaire was highly reliable.

Data Collection

In the midterm examination period, the pretest was distributed to 3,762 students. The posttest, together with the questionnaire, was given to 3,761 students because one was absent in the final examination period. The students had seven more weeks of blended learning after the pretest period.

Results and Discussion

Regarding the students' learning achievements after the blended learning treatment, a t-test was used to compare the posttest scores with the pretest scores, and the results were demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Statistic comparison of the posttest and pretest scores earned by 3,761 first year students

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Posttest - Pretest	5.69	8.93	.15	5.41	5.98	39.12	3760	.000

The pretest-posttest results in Table 1 below show a statistically significant difference between students' test scores with different time amounts of access to blended learning ($t = 39.12$, $p < .001$). This can be inferred that blended learning used as the course management for EFL large-size classes was significantly effective.

For the questionnaire results, the total number of students taking the final exam was 3,761. However, 3,485 students (92.66%) completed the questionnaire. The missing values ranged from 1 to 7 or 0.03% - 0.20% of the total responses expected. Below are the results from student opinions toward the *Developmental English* course managed by the General Education Office, as shown in Tables 2– 9.

Table 2 Student opinions towards course management of *Developmental English*, arranged in frequency order: Part1, item I and II

Opinions	**Acceptability Judgments**	
	Freq.	**Percent**
Part 1 Course management		
I. How do you find studying in a large class?	3484	100.00
1. I feel motivated because there are more people to share ideas about the lessons.	1557	44.69
2. I feel motivated because I have a lot of classmates.	794	22.79
3. I feel secure because I am in the crowd and not attracting attention.	495	14.21
4. I fear making a mistake or answering a question.	446	12.80
5. I am distracted because there are too many people in the class.	192	5.51
II. What is your opinion about the networked lecture system?	3480	100.00
1. It does not matter how the class is organized. There is no difference.	1388	39.89

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	Percent
2. The technical issues (e.g. screens, sounds) have strong effects on my learning.	699	20.09
3. I learn from many lecturers who have different styles of teaching and English accents.	651	18.71
4. I am confused because there are too many lecturers.	613	17.61
5. There is not enough face-to-face interaction between the lecturers and the students.	129	3.71

The results in Table 2 show that the majority of the students (81.69%) felt motivated in a large-size classby ideaexchanges (44.69%) and secure (14.21) among many peers (22.79%). According to responses to item II, students showed various answers; however, no answer received the score above 50 percent, indicating that students had no opinion positive or negative towards the networked lecture system.

Table 3 Student opinions towards lecture sessions of *Developmental English*, arranged in frequency order: Part 2, item III

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	%
Part 2: Classroom Instruction	3480	
III. In lecture sessions, to what extent should lecturers use English as a medium of instruction?	3480	100.00
1. Lecturers should use both Thai and English because using Thai can help students understand the similarities and differences between Thai and English, especially the grammar points.	2632	75.63
2. Lecturers should always use English because students can have more language input and practice listening skills.	438	12.59
3. It depends on the level of students' English language proficiency.	360	10.34
4. It does not matter what language they use. There is no difference.	50	75.63

Table 3 shows the majority of the students (75.63%) needed the use of both Thai and English in instruction, especially for the grammar explanation, while far less than one fifth of all the respondents (12.59%) had sufficient English background knowledge to feel comfortable studying English via the English-medium instruction.

Table 4 Student opinions towards the laboratory sessions and tutorials of *Developmental English*, arranged in frequency order: Part 2, item IV

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	%
IV. For the lab sessions or tutorials, what do you think about the exercises in the workbook or supplementary exercises and answer keys that the teacher assistants (TAs) explain in Thai.?	3473	100.00
1. They help me understand the lecture sessions better.	1566	45.09
2. The TAs' give me an opportunity to use the language.	1084	31.21
3. They neither help me understand the lessons nor give me any further knowledge.	432	12.44
4. The tutorial sessions don't make any difference in my learning.	391	11.26

The results for item IV in Table 4 show that the majority of respondents understood the lessons better (76.30%), with the help of TAs (45.09%) and the chance to use the English language in the lab sessions (31.21%). On the other hand, the respondents did not think that they gained any further knowledge (23.70 %), from the TAs (12.44%) and the tutorial sessions (11.26%).

Table 5 Student opinions towards supplementary materials of *Developmental English*, arranged in frequency order: Part 2, item V

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	%
V. How do you find supplementary materials (songs, stories, videos, and online exercises) in the lab sessions?	3472	100.00
1. I find them quite pleasant because they create a positive classroom atmosphere.	1924	55.41
2. I find them very useful and entertaining.	1011	29.12
3. I hardly learn anything from them though they are entertaining.	402	11.58
4. The materials do not make any difference in my learning.	135	3.89

Table 5 shows that the majority of the students (84.53%) found the supplementary materials very useful, quite pleasant, and entertaining, indicating that they helped promote a positive classroom atmosphere.

Table 6 Student opinions towards class sizes and learning modes in the *Developmental English* course, arranged in frequency order: Part 2, item VI

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	%
VI. What type of English class would you like to attend in the next semester?	3482	100.00
1. I would like to attend a small multi-learning class.	2277	65.51
2. I would like to attend a small lecture class.	524	15.07
3. I would like to attend a large or networked multi-learning class.	400	11.51
4. I would like to attend a large or networked lecture class.	275	7.91

Table 6 shows that the students would like to attend a small multi-learning class (65.51%), followed by a small lecture class (15.07%), a large or networked multi-learning class (11.51), anda large or networked lecture class (7.91), respectively. This obviously indicates that many students preferred a smaller size class (80.58%) to a larger one (19.42%).

Table 7 Student opinions towards computer-assisted programs provided for the *Developmental English* course, arranged in frequency order: Part 2, item VII

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	%
VII. How do you find learning through computer-assisted language programs (e.g. Quartet, Tell Me More) at SALC?	3482	100.00
1. They help me improve my English language ability.	1296	37.22
2. They provide me additional resources and language content for my language learning.	999	28.69
3. They are not useful for my language learning because I didn't learn anything from them.	634	18.21
4. I enjoy learning the language from them.	542	15.57
5. They do not make any difference in my language learning.	11	0.32

Table 7 shows that the majority of the students (81.48%) found the computer-assisted language programs useful (see options 1, 2, 4) as they helped improve their English ability (37.22%), provided additional

langue learning resources (28.69%), and motivated students to learn (15.57%), respectively. However, according to 18.53 percent of the respondents, the programs were not useful. Nor did they help make any difference for language learning. The results imply that, while the computer-assisted language learning programs were useful for many students to improve their English skills, a significant portion, almost 20%, did not gain any benefits from them.

Table 8 Student opinions towards group activities in self-study sessions of the *Developmental English* course, arranged in frequency order: Part 2, item VIII

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	**%**
VIII. In self-study sessions, what do you think about group activities such as performing a play, giving a speech, singing in English, or making a video clip in English?	3483	100.00
1. I learn how to work with others and be responsible.	1723	49.47
2. I learn how to search for information for conducting a project.	781	22.42
3. I use English in real life communication.	566	16.25
4. It is a waste of time because it takes time to manage the tasks and members.	278	7.98
5. I do them just for the sake of my grade, not for learning.	135	3.88

Table 8 demonstrates that the majority of the students (88.14%) valued group projects because they could learn how to work with others and be responsible (49.47%), search for information for a project (22.42%), and use English in real life communication (16.25%), respectively. In contrast, some students (11.86%) found group activities time-consuming and useless for learning. This reflected students' thoughts of the group activities in a sense that they promoted collaboration, communicative use of the English language, and language learning development. However, the reason why some students thought group activities were not useful might be because the large number of members in each group did not support individual language development.

Table 9 Student opinions towards evaluation criteria of *Developmental English* course, arranged in frequency order: Part 3, item IX

Opinions	Acceptability Judgments	
	Freq.	**%**
Part 3 Assessment and Evaluation		
IX. What do you think about the course evaluation, 50% from the tests and 50% from activities including projects and class attendance?	3478	100.00
1. I agree with the equal scores on tests and activities.	1975	56.79
2. I would like to have a higher score on activities.	623	17.91
3. I would like to have a higher score on tests.	585	16.82
4. I am OK with any option.	281	8.08
X. Which of the following do you agree most from doing English projects (performing a play, giving a speech, singing in English, or making a video clip in English)?	3482	100.00
1. I gain skills in collaborative learning and group work.	1346	38.66
2. They encourage creative thinking.	935	26.85
3. I gain more knowledge and practice in English language.	889	25.53
4. I just do them for the sake of my grade.	172	4.94
5. I do not gain anything from them.	140	4.02

As seen in Table 9, item IX, the students preferred an equal scoring percentage for tests and activities (56.79%), followed by a higher percentage for activities (17.91%), and a higher percentage for tests (16.82%), respectively.

Regarding item X, Table 9 reveals that by doing group projects, the students gained skills in collaborative learning and group work (38.66%), creative thinking (26.85%), and more knowledge and practice in English (25.53%), respectively.

Nonetheless, the results disclosed that the minority of students (8.96%) did not see project completion beneficial. In fact, they did the group work just to finish the task in order to meet the course requirement (4.94 %), and learned nothing from doing so. (4.02%).

Conclusion and Discussion

This study was conducted to assess students' EFL learning achievements and to survey their opinions toward blended learning. The results showed that the learning management system on the basis of blended learning was beneficial for students' learning achievement. The results complied with those in the study of Bower, M., Lee, M. J. W. & Dalgarno, B.(2017). In addition, the blended learning environment provided could enable EFL learning in a large-size class, and the students felt secure and comfortable learning with others in a large class, as they had opportunities to share ideas of learning with many classmates. Large classes created a comfortable atmosphere for students starting their undergraduate programs, which helped them to get along with others and adjust themselves to the environment. However, they would rather attend a smaller-size class when studying EFL. The findings indicate that face-to-face instruction is irreplaceable and a small-size lecture class of EFL learning is always preferred. From these results, it can also be inferred that blended learning may require more of students' commitment and involvement, as well as instructors' guidance and immediate responses to students' inquiry (Ishtaiwa & Abuibdeh, 2012).

Although the students in blended learning environment tended to prefer a smaller class over a larger one, certain results support the benefits of blended learning and a large-size class. First, most students could tolerate technical trouble occurring in a large-size class and how the class was organized. This supports the result from the study conducted by Tang & Chaw (2013) in that utilization of technology did not hinder students' learning. In addition, the students' motivation and performance in a larger class could result from peer support learning for they mentioned that they had many students with whom they could share their ideas (Gudmudsson & Southey, 2012). As students were required to learn from a variety of resources outside the classroom, they might seek peers to remind them what to do and where to go or just to be their companions to different learning resources. Their learning, which was independent from an instructor's assistance, reflected what the instructor could benefit from blended learning (Chu & Chu, 2011).

The findings imply that the students realized the prominence of alternative sources to learn EFL, for instance, tutorials, SAL, group projects, and native speakers. In fact, their preference of the instructors' use of both L2 and their L1 in class indicated that their English proficiency was at a low level. In contrast, the students who would like to have all instructions to be presented in English might be more proficient than the ones who preferred the use of both L1 and L2. These results confirm the aforementioned benefits of blended learning approach in which students should be able to choose what they wanted to learn at their own place, time, and pace (Jhansi, 2012). In addition, the group project was perceived as a crucial tool to learn about socialization and collaboration. This result goes in line with the benefit of social, collaborative activities (Hood, 2013; Perez-Sanagustin, Santos, Hernandez-Leo & Biat, 2012).

Students' preference for instruction in both Thai and English, as opposed to English-only, triggered more elaboration of the definition and execution of blended learning. That is, apart from mixed-mode learning, a mixture of L1 and L2 as media of instruction in a classroom setting should be seriously considered in a blended learning environment of a foreign language course if learners are still at beginning and low-intermediate proficiency levels. Future research should be carried out to verify this implication.

The students' perspectives on supplementary materials and the computer-assisted language learning programs showed that the materials and programs were beneficial, entertaining, and interesting, and they also helped promote the positive atmosphere of learning the language. These results mirrored the importance of the SALC and blended learning in course management, which are in accord with the results in previous studies (e.g., Nakayama, M., Mutsuura, K. & Yamamoto, H. 2017; Alrushiedat & Olfman, 2013). Furthermore, the results of students' satisfaction with material contents, delivery channels, and presentation methods provided in this course management go in line with the aforementioned claim that SAL helped promote student's autonomous learning (McMurry, Tanner & Anderson, 2010). Using the computer-assisted language learning programs gave students additional knowledge and practice opportunities which were enjoyable for this group of learners. This was because the programs offered a variety of contents in different levels of difficulty and allowed learners to choose the one that met their interest and proficiency level. Hence, it can be concluded that the use of technology supports classroom instruction reasonably well (Alrushiedat & Olfman, 2013; Korr, Derwin, Greene & Sokoloff, 2012).

Additionally, the teacher assistants' tutorials were regarded as important for learning the English language and offering more opportunities to practice the language. In addition, the facilitations they received from the TAs helped them understand the lessons better.

For the group activities, students understood that working together improved their language ability, creative thinking, and cooperative skills. This finding is compatible with what Haller et al. (1998) stipulated in that group work encouraged thinking through peer interaction in order to meet their common goal. In addition, their shared need of project fulfillment elicited their critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as metacognitive and collaborative strategies (Banados, 2006). Furthermore, conducting a group project allowed them to practice the target language in a more communicative way when they worked together to write a script for every act of their role play or performance. This goes well with the suggestion by Jhansi (2012) in that an effective assignment should accommodate learning objectives and different learning styles. The group project assignment also encourages the learners to collaboratively manage time, place, and work in order to complete their work within a given time limit and scope of content. Besides teamwork skills, the project also required planning and organizing, as well as managing skills. Seeking useful guidance for project-related information (McMurry, Tanner & Anderson, 2010), students themselves were to arrange meetings with the instructors for

approval of contents, materials, and resources essential for project implementation, with the SALC staff for extracurricular activities, with TAs for help of script writing and editing, and with peers for their cooperation and participation in finishing the collaborative work.

The most essential result of the survey regarding assessments was that equal weights for the tests, and the group assignments were preferred.

Implication of the Findings

Blended learning has been accepted to facilitate traditional classroom learning of several subjects in several fields, regardless of class sizes. Thus, any university confronted with management difficulties in English language courses owing to a large number of students per class and a limited number of lecturers should investigate the effectiveness of such factors as instruction types (i.e., lectures, tutorials, and a combination of lectures and tutorials), course contents and language skills, medium of instruction, classroom equipment, teaching aids (i.e., computer-assisted media or programs), classroom activities, extracurricular activities, and so forth. The factors pertinent to blended learning, which were found effective in this study, are recommended. However, whether or not each recommended factor works in a different context should be explored.

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