



## **The Effects of Blended Learning on Thai University Students' Speaking Ability, Learning Motivation and Perceptions**

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This study aims to investigate the effects of blended learning on Thai university students' speaking ability, students' learning motivation, as well as to explore students' and teachers' perceptions towards blended learning. Utilizing a mixed-methods embedded experimental research design, 56 students in the treatment group received blended learning instruction. Meanwhile, the other 46 students in the control group received traditional teaching instruction. In this study, the pre- and post-speaking tests and students' learning motivation questionnaires were used to collect the quantitative data. The qualitative data were retrieved from students' online reflection blogs and students' and teachers' semi-structured group interviews. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were then used to analyze the data. The research results revealed that blended learning instruction helped improve students' speaking ability. Furthermore, the results indicated that students' learning motivation was at a high level. Additionally, a great majority of both student and teacher participants had positive perceptions towards blended learning. The research results, therefore, conclusively proves that blended learning implementation is effective in improving students' speaking ability and in attaining a high level of students' learning motivation.

**Keywords:** *blended learning, speaking ability, learning motivation, students' and teachers' perceptions*

### **Introduction**

Modern technologies and social media platforms have resulted in changes on how people interact and communicate. Blumer (1990) states that the influence of the internet and social media have created a significant impact on the emergence of the industry 4.0, in which smart digital technologies are incorporated in almost every field. As English is widely used in global communication, this new economic eco system has also created a strong demand in English studies globally (Block & Cameron, 2002). Since Thailand is part of the global market, the government has launched the new economic development framework, namely Thailand 4.0 to respond to this new economic environment. Besides the technological implementation in every field, one target segment for the economic development is the High Value Services or the lifestyle business segment. As enterprises in this segment appear particularly to have created a high demand for English proficient workers, it is imperative that Thai universities must have developed students' English abilities, especially the speaking skill, prior to their graduation

(Maesincee, 2016). In order for Thai students to thrive in the business environment, English communication competencies are, therefore, of the utmost importance.

However, the current situation of English language teaching and learning in Thailand's educational institutions, at all levels, seem unprepared to embrace this challenge. There still appears many problems about English education, both in terms of teaching and learning. As far as students are concerned, most Thai university students have so far graduated without sufficient English communication competencies. Noom-ura (2014) illustrates that causes of this problem are of two folds; students are unmotivated and are seldom exposed to English communication in their daily routines. Reasons being that, students have little motivation in using English, because they do not recognize the need for using it. Additionally, in their daily lives, they hardly hear anyone speaking English or encounter any English speaker. Yusica (2014) further indicates that one interesting psychological factor that contributes to Thai students' inability to speak fluent English is anxiety. Thai students often become anxious when being requested to speak English, both within the confinement of their classrooms or elsewhere. They often stumble to make smooth speeches, as they lack opportunities to practice speaking English. These psychological factors have generally prevented most Thai university students from becoming proficient in English communication. Their lack of English-speaking proficiency is manifested even more clearly than ever when they enter job markets.

In addition, according to the researcher's English teaching and learning experiences, it seems that causes of these problems can be broadly grouped into two dimensions. The first dimension is the teachers' dimension. In the researcher's Northern-Thai context, a lot of teachers still deploy the traditional method of English teaching, focusing on grammar, accuracy and native-like competencies. In the classroom, some teachers still purely use a lecture-based instruction. As a result, students may find it uninteresting. This can reduce their interests and motivation in participating in classroom's activities. This aligns with the research results, concerning Thai teachers' teaching from Noom-ura (2014) which claims that there is an insufficient number of qualified English teachers in Thailand. It seems that Thai teachers still adopt the concept of monolingualism, which contradicts the notion proposed by Krachu (1992), stating that teachers should shift a teaching paradigm from the monolingualism to the bilingualism or multilingualism. Also, the current teaching should be moved to a more functionally oriented and culturally authentic practices (Krachu, 1992). The second dimension concerns students. Apart from the lack of both inside and outside classroom's motivation, it seems that students in the researcher's context study English just to pass the exams. They do not think about the future usage of English language that they may encounter in their daily activities. These factors, hence, do not help promote English-speaking ability amongst students.

As evidence suggests, the current English teaching in Thailand is neither efficient nor effective. Consequently, a better alternative is needed, especially during the current global pandemic that has halted the traditional teaching, and educators must use technologies to aid their teaching. Fortunately, blended learning can serve as that better alternative to help educators embrace this challenge more successfully. Stein and Graham (2014) suggest that blended learning is a kind of learning that occurs both in the confinement of physical location and in the virtual world, allowing for productive and adaptable learning activities. As students nowadays are keen in using technology, Khan (1997) also suggests that teachers can increase students' motivation by taking advantage of a blend of technology into their instructions. Although English educators throughout the world have conducted research on blended learning and even implemented it, its effectiveness appears inconsistent, and the teaching and learning outcomes are inconclusive. For instances, results from the study by Bataineh, (2017) indicated that students' English development was improved significantly, while research results from Maulan and Ibrahim, (2012), and Tosun, (2015) revealed the opposite.

Regardless of inconclusive research results on blended learning studies, one is not yet able to rule out its effectiveness. Hence, this learning approach remains a subject of debate and further research. In today's environment, it is possible that blended learning can be implemented more successfully than in previous attempts. This is due to the facts that new generation students are more familiar with technology and have greater access to the internet and online applications, including social media, than their

predecessors. The mixed results on the effectiveness of blended learning studies and implementations, coupling with the new kind of students and the new kind of environment create further needs for research to assess its effectiveness and applicability. Therefore, it is imperative that this research is conducted to find answers to the following questions:

1. How effective is blended learning in improving Thai university students' speaking ability?
2. How does blended learning affect Thai university students' learning motivation?
3. What are students' and teachers' perceptions towards blended learning practices?

It is believed that this study would be beneficial for students, in terms of helping them improve their English-speaking proficiency. It can also benefit practitioners who wish to implement this teaching technique into their teaching contexts. The findings can also guide educational administrators on ways to prepare students to become qualified for work markets. Furthermore, the findings can provide administrators some guidelines for future educational management, such as budget planning, learning material preparation, as well as technology and facilities required to support the blended learning implementation.

## Literature Review

### Blended Learning

Blended learning is a learning mechanism that integrates technology into the learning protocol by implementing e-learning activities to supplement face-to-face teaching (Allan, 2007). Furthermore, as stated by Stein and Graham (2014), this approach helps enhance learning access and flexibility, as well as increasing students' learning engagement and motivation. In addition, teachers can track and evaluate students' learning easily. Besides, students' communicative ability can also be improved through blended learning. Although there are many blended learning models implemented by educational practitioners such as flex model, a la carte model and enriched virtual model, the model that seems to be applicable and practical in various contexts is the rotation model invented by Horn and Staker (2015). As the name implies the rotation model is the learning model that requires students to rotate their learning experiences between two or more learning environments, settings or even instructions. There are four rotation types or sub-models within this learning model, including station, lab, flipped, and individual rotation models. While blended learning carries a generic definition that is easy to understand to the general public, in this study, the operational definition of blended learning refers to the mixture of the traditional in-class pedagogy, coupling with online teaching and learning implemented through rotation models, including the station rotation model, the individual rotation model and the flipped rotation model.

### Speaking Ability

Bailey (2005) demonstrates the viewpoint regarding speaking skill by defining that it is the spontaneous and productive verbal ability. In the present study, English speaking ability refers to students' capabilities to participate in a role-play presentation, particularly in relation to the use of appropriate grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and interactive communication. In order for a meaningful conversation to occur, Ur (1998) states that four signs must be present. The first sign is a display of the high level of talking amongst learners. The second indicator is the distribution of the class participation. The third factor is the high motivational level amongst learners, and the fourth characteristic of a successful speaking activity is an acceptable level of the language use that suits particular learning levels. Furthermore, in regards to the speaking instruction, Brown (2001) suggests that one way of teaching speaking is through the interpersonal speaking. Unlike the transmission of facts and information, this

method is more authentic, since students perform oral activities in the form of social interactions. In this way, students are encouraged to use more complex language features like idioms, slangs or even sarcasm. However, in order for teachers to successfully implement the interpersonal speaking method, they have to keep students' speaking capability levels and their performances into a careful consideration (Brown, 2001).

## **Learning Motivation**

It is important to also stress that for the second language learning to be successful, learning motivation plays a significant role in helping learners to accomplish their learning goals. Gardner (1985) defines learning motivation as a human's drive and an attempt to individually work or learn. However, the learning motivation in this study refers to factors that can be a combination of both students' intrinsic desires and external influence that effectively steer students towards achieving their learning goals. Gardner (1985) suggests that there are two major classifications of motivation including integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. He provides the explanation of integrative motivation as learners' attempts in learning the language, resulting from their own desire to be a part of that language community. Additionally, the author clarifies that unlike the integrative motivation, the instrumental motivation involves more with goals and outcomes.

## **Related Research Studies**

A critical analysis of the studies related to the concept of the current blended learning research identifies relations amongst several studies while also points out contradictions and inconsistencies amongst other research. Several studies published results that depict language skill improvement relations. While Bataineh (2017) stated that blended learning helped improve reading comprehension and grammar competence amongst student participants, Tosun (2015) also published related results that illustrated vocabulary improvement amongst the students participated in the study. Additionally, Ehsanifard, Ghapanchi and Afsharrad (2020) suggested that this learning approach helped improve participating students' speaking ability which further emphasizes a strong relation amongst these studies. Overall, these researchers agreed that blended learning help improve various elements of the students' language skills. In addition to demonstrating the improvement in students' language skills, Hubackova and Semradova (2016), along with Maulan and Ibrahim (2012) also revealed that the perceptions of students participated in the study were positive. They derived a similar conclusion that a majority of their participants had positive viewpoints towards blended learning and thought that the course was beneficial, friendly to use and convenient for them.

However, in addition to the positive relations in many blended learning studies, teachers wishing to implement blended learning should also consider other aspects, such as students' characteristics, learning styles, attitude and motivation. Kintu, Zhu, and Kagambe (2017) conducted the study that aimed to investigate the effectiveness of blended learning when taking students' characteristics as key predictors. The results revealed that students' self-regulation and their attitudes towards blended learning played a significant role in supporting the success in learning. The results align with studies of Mahmud (2018) and Hiasat (2018), stating that practitioners should take students' belief, attitude and motivation as key indicators when implementing the blended learning intervention. Besides, Soler (2017) recommended that educators should take teaching contexts, course objectives, contents, methodology and assessment into consideration when planning the blended course, as well.

Although there are relations amongst many study results, contradictions in research results were published by a few authors. Their results illustrate contradicting outcome in the studies about teachers' perceptions toward blended learning, and these studies also suggest inconsistencies in the research results. In the study conducted by Kosar (2016), the teacher participants perceived blended learning positively, because it helped them reduce the time and space constraints while also improving students' learning

motivation. Similarly, the teachers participated in the study conducted by Capo and Orellana (2011) also perceived blended learning positively, as they enjoyed the use of social media to facilitate students' learning activities. However, in contradiction to the results published by these three researchers, Waluyo (2020) stated that the teachers participated in the study perceived blended learning negatively, because it increased their workload. Similarly, the research results published by Tamim (2013) indicated that teacher participants had negative perceptions towards blended learning, as they had difficulty using technology required in this learning approach.

Based on the outcome of the critical analysis of the related studies, as described above, this current research aims to either dismiss or confirm the relations, the contradictions and inconsistencies of the previous studies. The mixed results on the effectiveness of blended learning implementations, coupling with the mixed perceptions of students and teachers create further needs for this research to assess its effectiveness and applicability within the researcher's own context.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This research utilized a mixed-methods embedded experimental research design introduced by Creswell (2003). The elements of quantitative and qualitative research were combined to ensure proper integrations of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and data analysis. Within the scope of this study, the quantitative data set assumed the primary role, supported by the qualitative data set that occupied the secondary role. The research results were then integrated for a thorough and well-rounded interpretation. The research was designed such that all students in the treatment group were taught via blended learning. In contrast, students in the control group were taught using the conventional teaching method. This research design was chosen, as it helped increase the internal validity by taking the participants' perspective, received from questionnaires and interviews to support the experimental findings. Therefore, it elaborated higher levels of understanding of the phenomenon, since the researcher could investigate the study from different angles (Dörnyei, 2007).

### **Research Context**

The setting of this research study was located at the autonomous community university in the North of Thailand. Under the department of Western Languages, the English department offers both English major students and non-English major students a wide variety of courses. In this study, two classes of English for communication course were selected to be the experimental section and the control section. The reason for choosing this course is that the course's focus is on the oral communication ability, which is the construct of investigation. In regards to overall learning conditions, students' learning engagement and motivation are presumably low, as many students perceive that English is not relevant to them, especially for those who are non-English major students. Speaking of learning supports, the university offers students English language learning supports through a wide variety of free courses that students can enroll, according to their interests. On technological supports, the university has two self-access centers, equipped with useful e-learning programs and skilled technical staffs. However, due to a large number of students, all technological supports are sometimes insufficient, and some students have to seek other alternative options.

### **Participants**

The research participants comprised of 56 Thai university students from the general sciences major and 46 students from the physics major. The majority of the student participants were female (79 students),

whereas the rest of them were male (23 students). The age of the student participants ranged from 18 to 20 years old. All of them have been studying English since their primary educational level and graduated from high schools in Thailand. In terms of computer literacy, students are familiar with the internet technology and social media platforms. In addition, they appear to have adequate knowledge in required devices used in this research including mobile phones, laptops and computer desktops. All student participants enrolled in the English for communication course in their second semester of the 2019 academic year, at a public university in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The participants were selected by using a convenience sampling method. Prior to participating in the study, the participants' English proficiencies were assessed through the university placement test and the Cambridge English test. The results showed that their proficiency levels were similar, as most of the participants' English proficiencies were at A1 and A2 CEFR.

In addition to these student participants, there were also seven English teachers, participating in the research. The majority of the teacher participants were female (6 teachers), whereas the other teacher participant was male (1 teacher). The age of the participants ranged from 35 to 55 years old. In terms of computer literacy, most of the teachers are familiar with the internet technology and social media platforms. They have adequate knowledge in using mobile phones, laptops and computer desktops. Regarding their experiences in teaching English, their years in the career ranged from 10 to 25 years. These teacher participants were selected through a purposive sampling method. There were three selection criteria. First, the participants had taught this subject before. Second, they had the experience in using internet technology and technological tools in various degrees. The last criterion was their willingness to join the study. All research participants were requested to sign the consent form, prior to participating in the study. The form indicated that their participations were totally voluntary. The purpose of these consensual agreements was to ensure that scoring and grading of participating students' regular courses would not be affected. Additionally, the participating teachers would not also be affected professionally, by joining this study.

## **Research Instrument**

### **Pre- and post-speaking tests**

The pre- and post-speaking tests were constructed based upon the research objectives. The direct test was chosen for this study, since this kind of testing method requires students to perform the actual target skill, namely the speaking skill. The role-play presentation, one form of the direct test, was then selected for the pre- and post-speaking tests, as this type of oral test form generally depicts real-life situational scenarios that all students may encounter in their job markets. Once this specific test form was chosen, the test specification and the overall test structure were then developed. After that, the test task, along with test items were constructed accordingly. However, before the test was actually implemented and administered to participating students, it was going through the pilot stage to solicit feedback which was incorporated into the research-ready version.

In terms of test quality, the test was evaluated in combined effects for the overall usefulness of the test, consisting of reliability and validity. In regards to the speaking skill evaluation, a speaking rubric, together with an analytic scoring adapted from the speaking rubric of Cambridge's A2 speaking assessment were used for this study. As far as the test administration was concern, the pre-test was administered to all participating students at the beginning of the first period, whereas the post-test was administered to them during the last class period. All tests, together with the speaking rubric were validated by three experts in terms of reliability, validity, authenticity and practicality. Particularly, the tests and the rubric were certified for the IOC of Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977), in order to assess whether all elements were congruent and appropriate. All three experts unanimously confirmed that all tests and the speaking rubric were congruent and appropriate. However, they pointed out grammatical

errors in the scoring rubric and made corrective suggestions which were then incorporated into the speaking rubric accordingly.

### **Learning motivation questionnaires**

Students' learning motivation questionnaires appeared in the five Likert scale questionnaires adapted from the Gardner's Attitude-Motivation Test Battery. The questionnaires consisted of 20 close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The respondents were required to state their level of preferences, ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree to strongly disagree. In this study, the developed questionnaires were piloted to uncover and eliminate most, if not, all weaknesses. The questionnaires' questions, sequences, formats and wording were validated by three experts. The issues of leading questions, complex questions, double-barreled questions, questions with jargons or technical languages were carefully examined. The questionnaires were then revised according to the experts' recommendations and distributed at the end of the treatment.

### **Students' online reflection blogs**

Students' online reflection blogs were used as another research instrument to elicit their learning motivation and their perceptions of blended learning. This instrument was used to provide additional support as to whether or not the results obtained revealed the same inclination towards those from the questionnaires and interviews. In the study, students were assigned to create their own blogs in which they were required to write the reflection of their learning. The reflection topics and sub-topics were distributed to all participants so that they could stay focused. The participants could write their reflections in English or Thai to mitigate language barriers. The reflection topics and sub-topics were validated for appropriateness and for suitability by three experts. After that, the reflection topics and sub-topics were revised, according to the experts' recommendations.

### **Students' and teachers' semi-structured group interviews**

Another source of the qualitative data was collected from the semi-structured group interviews, which was conducted at the end of the treatment. The semi-structured group interview was chosen, because this kind of interview format enabled the interviewer to elicit well-rounded information from interviewees (Lichtman, 2013). Both participating students and teachers were randomly divided into groups consisting five to seven persons each. The rationale of dividing all participants into groups was that it could provide opportunities of interaction and thinking stimulation amongst members of the same group (Lichtman, 2013). The researcher developed a set of questions and sent them to all interviewees, prior to the interview session. All participants were informed that they would not be academically and professionally affected by the given responses. All interview questions and formats were also validated by three experts. The questions were then revised, according to the experts' recommendations.

## **Instructional Instrument**

### **Sixteen-week lesson plans**

In this research, all lesson plans were developed with careful consideration to suit the course description and course objectives, whereas the blended learning instructional model was meticulously integrated into the course design as the main focus. All lesson plans applied the pre-, while-, and post-speaking instruction developed by Cohen, Weaver and Li (1998), together with the blended learning rotation model proposed by Horn and Staker (2015). The course was designed to include both in-class

learning on campus and online learning. During a three-hour on-site learning period, the station rotation model was implemented to induce both offline and online learning. The class life cycle went through different stages, as described hereafter.

Each on-site class period started with a warm-up activity. After completing the warm-up activities, the teacher introduced the pre-speaking stage in which the first station rotation model was blended in. In this first station, the teacher conducted a review of a set of vocabulary and the relevant language use, necessary for students to perform the speaking tasks that usually appeared in forms of a role-play presentation, a mini conversation or a small group discussion. When moving to the second station, through the use of available online resources, students were required to further study necessary language elements and then to create their own contents for the assigned speaking tasks. In the second station, students could utilize available technological tools, containing contents relevant to students' speaking tasks, that were linked to the several webpages.

During the while-speaking stage, the third station was blended in, as students recorded and posted videos to demonstrate their speaking skills online, on the closed Facebook group. The post-speaking stage occurred at the end of each class. At this stage, the teacher then applied the individual rotation and flip rotation model into the learning activities. In the individual rotation, the teacher provided feedbacks to individual students' videos and made suggestions on how they could improve their speaking abilities. At the same time, students were encouraged to ask questions or comment on any aspect, as much as they were comfortable doing so. The teacher would then, answered questions or respond to their comments accordingly and courteously.

As for the flip rotation model, the teacher posted the next learning topic including website links on the closed Facebook group, for students to study prior to attending the next class on campus. This task was of importance, as students were required to study the content in the provided websites and be prepared to participate in the upcoming class. The class life cycle went on like this until the end of the semester. Last but not least, it is critical to also note that this instructional instrument was assured of its validity prior to the implementation. Before the instrument was implemented, all lesson plans, along with validation forms were submitted to three ELT experts for a careful verification. These experts first verified the lesson plans for validity and reliability and made suggestions for improvement. After that, the experts' recommendations, regarding the lesson plans' format, teaching processes, and the evaluation protocol were taken into consideration and revised accordingly to derive the valid and reliable instructional instrument for this research.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Phase I: Preparation of blended learning instruction**

The researcher first reviewed the current situation that he encountered within his own teaching context. After that, the researcher studied and consulted related theories, principles and frameworks until reaching the actual conceptual framework. All information acquired were then used to find and bridge research gaps. Prior to the launch of blended learning, all research instruments were carefully developed.

### **Phase II: Pilot study**

In order for the actual blended learning class to be effectively implemented, there was the pilot stage of the research experimentation to help predict whether the full-scale study was likely to be feasible as planned. In this research, the main aspects of this pilot stage focused on the feasibility of the research process, resources and management. The results obtained from this procedure were used for the adjustment of the actual data collection process afterwards.

### Phase III: Implementation of blended learning instruction

During the first class, the consent forms were distributed to all students. After that, their English-speaking proficiencies were measured through the use of the pre-test. Then, students were taught via blended learning instructions. The instructions took place both onsite and online, and lasted 16 weeks. During the study, the researcher started collecting the data, beginning the first day of the teaching onward. The data loads were then be collected again at the end of the treatment.

### Phase IV: Evaluation of blended learning instruction implementation

All participants' English-speaking proficiencies were measured through the use of the post-test. In the last period, the speaking post-test was administered to all participants in order to investigate the overall effectiveness of this teaching model. The evaluation of students' learning motivation was also employed through the use of students' learning motivation questionnaires, distributed to all participants in this last period as well. In addition, students' and teachers' perceptions were investigated through the use of the semi-structured group interviews and students' online reflections.

### Data analysis

Due to the nature of a mixed-methods research design, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The mean, standard deviation and *t*-test were used to analyze the quantitative data, which included students' pre- and post-test scores of their English-speaking ability. In order to assure raters' reliability, scores were rated by two raters. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was used to ensure that the two raters awarded resemble scores. Another set of the quantitative data, retrieved from students' learning motivation questionnaires was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and percentage.

Additionally, the qualitative part of the data obtained from students' and teachers' semi-structured group interviews and students' online reflections were analyzed, using qualitative methods. The qualitative data were systematically coded and grouped into themes. Then, all data types were blended together for well-rounded interpretation and triangulation purpose.

## Results

This first section reports the research results obtained from student's pre- and post-test scores of their role-play presentations. It responds to the first research questions, regarding the effectiveness of blended learning in improving Thai university students' speaking ability.

TABLE 1  
*Comparison of Students' pre- and post-test scores*

|           | Control Group<br>(n = 46) |      | Treatment Group<br>(n = 56) |      | Mean<br>Dif. | t-test for Equality of Means |                |
|-----------|---------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|--------------|------------------------------|----------------|
|           | M                         | SD   | M                           | SD   |              | t                            | Sig.(2-tailed) |
| Pre-test  | 2.83                      | .797 | 2.91                        | .721 | .085         | .563                         | .575           |
| Post-test | 3.11                      | .737 | 3.98                        | .863 | .873         | 5.426                        | .000           |

Note. Significant at \* $p < .05$  level.

The results of the independent samples *t*-test in Table 1 indicates that before the intervention, the control group and the treatment group were identical as there was no statistically significant difference between the pre-test mean scores of the two groups ( $p = .575$ ). However, after the intervention, the

treatment group outperformed the control group, since the post-test mean scores demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $p = .000$ ). It could, therefore, be interpreted that blended learning instruction helped improve students' speaking ability.

TABLE 2  
*Intraclass Correlation Coefficient*

|           | Intraclass Correlation Coefficient |                   |
|-----------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
|           | Control Group                      | Treatment Group   |
| Pre-test  | .936 <sup>c</sup>                  | .947 <sup>c</sup> |
| Post-test | .854 <sup>c</sup>                  | .932 <sup>c</sup> |

As shown in Table 2, the intraclass correlation coefficient results show that the two raters tended to give similar scores in the pre- and post-tests as the ICC values were higher than .800. It also demonstrates high level of raters' reliability.

To answer the second research question, regarding the effects of blended learning on Thai university students' learning motivation, the results retrieved from the learning motivation questionnaires are presented in this following section.

TABLE 3  
*Mean Scores of Students' Learning Motivation*

| Motivation Types        | Treatment Group |           |                    |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|
|                         | <i>M</i>        | <i>SD</i> | Motivational Level |
| Instrumental Motivation | 3.78            | .44       | High               |
| Integrative Motivation  | 3.62            | .59       | High               |
| Overall                 | 3.70            | .51       | High               |

As presented in Table 3, it is evident that after studying in the blended learning environment, the respondents possessed a high level of both instrumental motivation ( $M = 3.78$ ) and integrative motivation ( $M = 3.62$ ). The overall mean score of students' learning motivation is 3.70 which can be interpreted as a high motivational level.

The third section responds to the third research question, concerning students' and teachers' perceptions towards blended learning practices. The data obtained from students' and teachers' semi-structured group interviews and students' online reflections are presented in four different themes below.

## Learning Experiences and Teaching Management

The participating students revealed positive perceptions towards blended learning. They enjoyed the mixture of both online and offline modes that provided them with great learning flexibilities. However, the participating teachers revealed mixed perceptions towards blended learning. While they thought it provided positive learning experiences that greatly benefited students, they considered additional workloads a burden. Examples of findings are manifested in the following excerpts.

Student A4: *I feel like blended learning is a fun learning experience, unlike learning from textbooks alone which is a kind of boring. It has broadened my learning perspective, especially the online learning part.*

Teacher E: *Blended learning is more effective than merely using conventional lectures, because students are more engaged in classroom activities and they tend to like it more as long as technology is concerned. However, teachers have to be more dedicated and creative in preparing learning activities.*

## Availability of Technology and Facilities Required

The majority of participating students revealed that the available technology and facilities required were sufficient while on campus. However, some participating teachers stated that technological facilities were quite insufficient. Examples of findings are manifested in the following excerpts.

Student D3: *I think existing computers, mobile phones, and Wi-Fi access are already sufficient for this type of learning. However, sometimes, the signals are very poor.*

Teacher F: *The Wi-Fi connectivity provided at the university is not strong enough. There is also a lack of technological support from the university when online lessons are breaking down because of some technical problems.*

## Teachers' and Students' Readiness

The vast majority of students stated that they were ready to fully embrace blended learning. Nevertheless, only a portion of teachers shared the same enthusiasm as their students, while others needed additional time to learn and adapt. Examples of findings are manifested in the following excerpts.

Student C3: *We are ready to participate in blended learning as we are already using computers and mobile phones for daily life. Now, we only have to use them for the learning purpose as well.*

Teacher C: *As we are facing the COVID-19 situation in the new semester, I think all teachers must brace for online teaching, including blended learning. For me, I think I will try to apply blended learning more in my class such as recording my lecture and uploading it online for each course. I am not sure how it will turn out but I hope for the best.*

## Success Factors

Success factors of blended learning included availability of technological facilities, teachers' approachable and flexible personality, teachers' and students' positive attitude towards technology. Examples of findings are manifested in the following excerpts.

Student C4: *I think the lecturer has to win the heart of students by interacting with them more online instead of leaving them learning on their own. The teacher must also trust students when asking them to do online works.*

Teacher G: *Teachers should be open-minded and flexible. They should love learning new things and not afraid of taking risks or challenges.*

## Discussion

### Students' Speaking Ability

The results analyzed based on students' pre- and post-speaking tests indicates that there was a significant difference in students' speaking scores between the control group and the treatment group. It can, therefore, be inferred that blended learning helped improve the speaking ability of students in the treatment group. One possible factor, contributing to such improvement involves the fact that blended learning gave students more opportunities to expand their speaking practices, both in onsite class and in online sessions. The additional speaking activities might have helped them use a wider range of

vocabulary and grammatical forms, controlled phonological features and had more practices of verbal exchange. As a consequence, their speaking ability was improved markedly. On the contrary, the control group's speaking opportunities were limited to their in-class activities. Therefore, the additional speaking activities were deprived. These results were congruent with the statement of Stein and Graham (2014), which they point out that implementing blended learning can be advantageous in terms of granting students more learning access, as students are not required to only attend regular classes. The online learning allows for adaptable and productive learning, as students can access to all learning materials or course contents at anytime and anywhere.

Another probable factor is that blended learning provides more chances for the teacher to give immediate feedbacks, both in face-to-face interactions and in online interactions. The research results suggest that students' speaking improved, because they incorporated the teacher's feedbacks in their speaking revisions. Stein and Graham (2014) have mentioned that utilizing the ability to track students' learning is one of the benefits that this teaching model offers. Through the use of tracking and reporting information, giving feedbacks were done throughout the course. Students' time spending on tasks was more visible to the teacher, comparing to the onsite class, since the teacher could track every step of students' progress in the online learning platform. By using this approach, the teacher could see where each student stood and could, hence, catered appropriate instructions to each student's learning behaviors. The teacher could then analyze students' performance on assignments or scores and developed improvement plans, such as extra face-to-face sessions or personalize instructions. Consequently, these activities helped improve students' speaking ability. The study results aligned with those of Bataineh (2017), Hubackova and Semradova (2016), Kintu, Zhu, and Kagambe (2017), Kosar (2016), and Soler (2017) indicating that blended learning implementation yielded positive results in improving student's learning skills.

## **Students' Learning Motivation**

As presented in the previous section, after studying via blended learning, students possessed a high level of both instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Students' high degree of leaning motivation might have been caused by their positive attitudes towards blended learning. As stated by Stein and Graham (2014), blended learning approach helps students to be more engaged and more motivated in learning, as it gives them chances to spend more studying time. This present study also promoted learning engagement, amongst students in the treatment group, as a result of using social interactions. Unlike students in the control group that studied in the traditional learning model, blended learning provided both in class and online interactions, offering greater collaborations amongst the teacher and students. Reserved students who did not interact much in the traditional classroom setting became more active when participating in the online environment.

Moreover, having participated in blended learning, a wide variety of learning formats helped enrich students' satisfaction. Due to the fact that students participated in this research were digital natives and preferred to use various ways of learning, they perceived that blended learning was fun, and it also matched their learning styles and preferences. As students in the treatment group enjoyed participating in the blended leaning environment, it resulted in their higher level of motivation, comparing to those that were in the control group. This outcome correlates with Gardner's (1985) statement, which he indicates that the positive attitude contributes to the enhancement of the learning motivation and the success of language learning.

In regards to motivational types, it was found, during this study, that students possessed higher instrumental motivation than integrative motivation. This can be explained by the fact that participating students were generally motivated by the drive to accomplish learning goals. Because they were non-English major students, they did not have the desire to be a part of the English language community. Therefore, their integrative motivation was slightly lower than the instrumental motivation. This result is similar to the statement of Kachru (1992), stating that the instrumental motivation plays a more crucial

role in helping students to succeed in second language learning within various contexts, comparing to the integrative motivation.

## **Students' and Teachers' Perceptions**

Students and teachers' perceptions can have direct impacts on the achievement of learning and teaching. Therefore, it is important to explore how they perceive blended learning. In this study, the overall qualitative results demonstrate that the majority of research participants perceived blended learning positively, although a number of them displayed a negative perception. The first probable indicator of the positive perception amongst research participants is a high degree of adoption. The majority of participants claimed that because they had already used technology and social media regularly in their daily lives, they could easily adopt blended learning. These participants also stated that blended learning made their learning easier and more convenient. As a result, they were willing to use it. This outcome corresponds to the research results conducted by Capo and Orellana (2011) as they point out that the ease of use of social media have direct positive impacts on participants' willingness to use them.

Another possible indicator of participants' positive perception is their acknowledgment of the blended learning effectiveness. When social media platforms were integrated into the traditional classroom teaching during this study, interactions between the teacher and students were increased. The increase in such interactions resulted in better knowledge and skill acquisitions than otherwise. This is in line with the study of Capo and Orellana (2011), which revealed that higher chances of interactions resulted in participants' positive perception. In addition to increased interactions, the majority of participants also elaborated that the use of technology could facilitate both learning and teaching processes. Consequently, it further helped improve their learning and teaching effectiveness. The study by Tamim (2013) confirms this claim by stating that when students and teachers realize that blended learning helps improve learning and teaching, they perceive it positively.

However, the use of technology in this research also sparked mixed perceptions amongst participants, and it warrants a discussion. The teachers' positive perceptions emerged when they witnessed that the use of online tools could help their students understand teaching materials more easily while also increasing their motivation. In contrast, some research participants displayed negative perceptions towards blended learning. Such participants appeared to have difficulties in using technology. This was evident in the complaints by both students and teachers that when they faced technical problems, they felt uncomfortable to continue the use of technology. Such discomfort contributed to their negative perceptions towards technology as well as blended learning, as a consequence. This research result aligned with the study by Tamim (2013) in which he pointed out that some teachers had negative perceptions on technology such as YouTube when they faced challenges, pertaining to certain contents and technical problems while using it.

## **Conclusion**

The demand for effective English-speaking skill amongst professionals in many industries is eminent in today's world. This research aims to find out the effectiveness and practicality of blended learning when implementing in the Northern Thai university context. The outcome of the research including both quantitative and qualitative angles has provided meaningful answers to the three research questions. It can be concluded that blended learning is proven to have improved English-speaking skill amongst students. Also, students' motivation was at high level. Additionally, both students and teachers perceive blended learning positively. In regards to pedagogical implications, this study can be beneficial to students, in helping them improve their English-speaking proficiency. It can also benefit practitioners who wish to implement this teaching technique into their teaching contexts. Furthermore, the findings can provide administrators guidelines for future educational management. Most, if not all, research typically

encounter certain limitations, this particular research is no exception, as it faces three major limitations, including university policy, number of students versus the allocated time slot and the availability of reliable technology. For this research, because there are many context-specific factors, the results cannot be generalized to other research contexts. It is recommended that further research be conducted to understand different applicability of the blended learning phenomenon.

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