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Is Blended Learning in The Students' Favor? Exploring Thai First-Year Students' Readiness to Learn English through Blended Learning

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Abstract

It is crucial for the successful implementation of blended learning to understand students' attitudes towards the various aspects of learning. This study is aimed to evaluate students' readiness and investigate the benefits and challenges of learning English through blended learning of 322 first-year undergraduate students in their second semester of the 2021 academic year at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The data collection instruments were a questionnaire developed from Tang and Chaw's (2013) six dimensions of learning readiness, and a semi-structured interview regarding the benefits and challenges of blended learning. Means and standard deviations were used to analyze levels of readiness from the questionnaire. According to the study results, the participants believed that classroom learning was more beneficial than online learning. Although the results indicated that the participants were not ready to study independently, they valued the flexibility of online learning. It is suggested that learners with positive views toward learning flexibility are more likely to adapt to blended learning. Nonetheless, various factors contributing to the difficulty of implementing blended learning, such as low motivation, lack of self-discipline, internet connection, and workload, should also be considered to offer learners the opportunity to adapt to blended learning.

Keywords: Students' readiness, Blended learning, Benefits of blended learning, Challenges of blended learning

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Introduction

Education in the twenty-first century has prioritized technology-based learning. Several studies have shown that technology improves both teaching and learning while also significantly increasing productivity (Banditvilai, 2016; Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018; Dziuban et al., 2007; Inpin et al., 2015; Namyssova et al., 2019; Suwannasom & Catane, 2016; Thongsook & Kaowiwattanakul, 2022; Yudhana, 2021). Thus, technology is both a barrier and an opportunity to adapt learning, improve pedagogical techniques, lower costs, broaden access, and improve learning efficacy.

The practice of delivering education and learning experiences by integrating face-to-face and technology-mediated learning is known as blended learning (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018). The basic purpose of blended learning is to employ technological advancements to adequately facilitate learning environments. Some students, however, may struggle to acclimate to online instructions. As a result, it is vital to guarantee that students are prepared for blended learning implementation. Students' experiences and perspectives should be examined after engaging in a blended learning environment. This evaluation aims to optimize the learning experience, foster successful learning outcomes, and provide the requisite resources for upcoming courses.

Blended learning played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged for the first time in December, 2019, and swiftly spread worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed the pandemic status of COVID-19 on March 11, 2020. By the end of July, 2020, about 17 million cases of COVID-19 had been documented around the world. It caused more than 660,000 deaths and put much strain on the health systems of many countries (Gomes, 2020). The epidemic wreaked havoc on the world's social and economic infrastructure. Thus, national governments took many different approaches in response to the pandemic. Lockdown procedures were implemented to reduce the outbreak's spread and prevent cases from overwhelming the healthcare system. Furthermore, the education and healthcare industries were irrevocably damaged. Businesses, schools, and other establishments were closed. Residents were asked to stay at home except for necessities such as food purchases and medical help. COVID-19 was contained through social isolation and the use of face masks. As a result of this epidemic, the closure of schools, universities, and other educational institutions, more than sixty percent of the world's student population was affected. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported in 2020 that the closing of schools and universities in 138 countries had interrupted the education of approximately 1.37 billion students, which was more than three-quarters of all children and young adults in the world (UNESCO, 2020). In Thailand, the Thai Ministry of Education proclaimed a countrywide effort to halt the spread of COVID-19 in schools and other educational institutions. During this time, schools were strongly encouraged to utilize online learning tools. Rajamangala University of Technology Chiang Mai adhered to the Thai Ministry of Education’s regulations**,** aligning its strategies to bolster digital learning support. To comply with these regulations, the university expanded the utilization of broadcast media within its online learning platforms. A blended learning approach was introduced during this challenging

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period of online education. Blended learning enables students to increase their capacity to study independently and to tailor their learning experiences to meet their specific needs. The Jedlin Language Centre collaborated with the Office of Academic Resources and Information Technology to establish the English Proficiency Development (EPD) program, offering first-year and second-year students the opportunity to independently practice English. The university's Learning Management System (LMS) complements this effort by providing instructional videos and activities tailored to students' English language proficiency. The EPD program serves as supplementary support for students enrolled in English courses as part of the general education curriculum, alongside their mandatory 45-hour face-to-face classroom session. Consequently, students benefit from a blended learning experience, engaging in both classroom and online settings to enhance their English proficiency.

This report assesses students' readiness and analyses the benefits and obstacles of learning English through blended learning. The findings of this study are expected to lead to a better understanding of students' readiness for English language acquisition through blended learning. Furthermore, it aims to assist instructors in better organizing their courses in order to maximize the benefits of blended learning. Ultimately, these discoveries will assist universities in setting benchmarks and developing plans for the implementation of online courses.

■ Research Objectives

The following are the research's objectives:

1) To evaluate students' readiness to learn English through blended learning.
2) To investigate students' benefits and challenges in learning English through blended learning.

■ Literature Review

Blended Learning

The business world coined the term "blended learning" to describe corporate training, as it shifted away from traditional residential seminars. This approach provided training through a combination of self-study materials, videos, and internet-based resources. (Sharma, 2010). It was later embraced by higher education. Blended learning mixes traditional classroom instruction with online instruction for the same class of students. Blended learning, in other words, is the practice of offering training through a combination of in-person and online instruction. According to Garrison and Vaughan (2008), blended learning was founded on the advantages of face-to-face and distance learning. As a result, traditional classroom lectures and online learning are incorporated into the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, Neumeier (2005) stated that the principal purpose of a blended learning design is to determine the most efficient approach to mix the two modes of learning for each subject, environment, and objective. Blended learning, according to Senffner and Kepler (2015), is a versatile and adaptive teaching

and learning technique. This method places an emphasis on adaptability, flexibility, and relevance. Essentially, the online component of blended learning allows students to learn at their own pace and convenience, without regard for group or partner constraints. Blended learning extends opportunities for student participation beyond the traditional classroom. Physical presence is not mandatory for the technology-mediated components in blended learning; instead, students can connect digitally through online communities. For instance, in a blended learning course, students may attend regular classroom sessions while also completing online course components on a digital learning platform. Online experiences can either replace or supplement traditional classroom instruction, involving varying degrees of engagement and independent study. In a successful blended learning experience, both face-to-face and online learning content and activities are seamlessly integrated to achieve the same learning goals.

A brief overview of the definitions reveals that “blended learning” is described in numerous ways. Although blended learning is defined in a variety of ways, the vast majority of definitions in the literature are variations on a few key concepts. According to Driscoll (2002), blended learning is characterized by four key concepts in the literature:

1. To accomplish a learning objective by merging or combining several web-based technologies, such as live virtual classrooms, streaming video, synchronous, and asynchronous learning.
2. To combine multiple pedagogical methods (such as constructivism, behaviorism, and cognitivism) to help students learn as much as possible. This can be done with or without the assistance of instructional technology.
3. To integrate instructor-led face-to-face training with any instructional technology.
4. To establish a cooperative learning and working environment by combining instructional technologies with actual job responsibilities.

In conclusion, blended learning seamlessly integrates traditional classroom interactions with online resources as well as promoting internet-based learning methods. This approach aims to reduce in-person meetings while augmenting the frequency of online sessions, providing a versatile and effective learning experience

Benefits and Challenges of Blended Learning

Blended learning is an innovative educational strategy that combines traditional teaching methods with digital tools to create a rich learning environment. It contains numerous benefits that significantly improve the educational experience, as evidenced by recent research conducted by Cleveland-Innes & Wilton (2018), Dziuban et al. (2007), and Namyssova et al. (2019). Firstly, it facilitates collaborative distance learning by allowing students to participate in remote teamwork and collective intellectual endeavors. Learners collaborate to solve problems across geographic boundaries, fostering a sense of community and shared learning. Furthermore, a notable characteristic of blended learning is its flexibility. By utilizing technology, it provides students with the autonomy to determine the pace and environment of their studies.

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This empowers individuals to take charge of their learning journey, accommodating diverse learning styles and schedules. Interaction is another key benefit of blended learning platform. These environments foster student-teacher engagement, personalized guidance, and learning community connection. Interactions across physical boundaries create a dynamic learning environment. Furthermore, the approach diversifies learning activities, increasing student engagement and promoting better learning outcomes. Students interact with various materials using a variety of resources, improving their understanding and application of concepts. Blended learning also fosters digital citizenship. It prepares students for a tech-driven world by providing them with essential digital skills. Finally, the scalability of blended learning allows for cost-effective educational opportunities. It can accommodate larger student populations without the need for extensive physical infrastructure, ensuring accessibility and affordability.

Blended learning emerges as a transformative pedagogical approach by fusing traditional teaching methods with technological innovations. Its ability to foster collaboration, flexibility, interaction, diverse learning experiences, digital proficiency, and cost-effectiveness highlights its critical role in modern education. Teaching online involves delivering instruction through digital platforms; however, simply integrating technology doesn't inherently create a blended learning approach. Technology integration alone does not define a class as "blended." For instance, if online learning remains a minor component within a predominantly classroom-based course, lacking independence, convenience, and ample interaction opportunities, it may not truly reflect a blended learning pedagogy. Blended learning extends beyond technology integration, aiming to provide a mix of in-person and online experiences that provide students with flexibility, autonomy, and meaningful interaction.

Within the context of online education, the Community of Inquiry model provides a valuable framework for facilitating a deep and meaningful collaborative-constructivist learning experience. This model emphasizes the development and interdependence of three crucial elements – social, cognitive, and teaching presence. Teaching presence, as defined by Anderson et al. (2001), involves effectively designing courses, actively engaging with students' work to maintain their interest, and providing intellectual guidance. Instructors play a critical role in creating engaging learning experiences, facilitating discussions, and supporting students' progress through ongoing communication in an online environment.

As highlighted in Caskurlu et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis, the vital role of teacher presence in online learning is evident, revealing strong positive links between teaching presence and student satisfaction, as well as perceived learning. Thus, teaching presence extends beyond the students' perception of the teacher's physical or virtual existence. It encompasses deliberate actions and interactions by instructors to skillfully guide, facilitate, and support learning within an online environment. However, Preisman (2014) found that efforts by instructors to increase their presence in online courses didn't significantly impact student grades or evaluations. Students valued feedback over direct interaction with the instructor. Therefore, instructors might benefit more by focusing on personalized activities and providing progressive feedback.

Creating an effective blended learning environment requires making the right decisions and overcoming obstacles associated with the use of technology. In a recent study conducted by Athabasca

University and the Commonwealth of Learning (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019), several challenges and corresponding solutions were identified. Initially, one prominent challenge is technology infrastructure, which includes issues such as limited bandwidth, unstable internet connections, and insufficient access to devices such as laptops or smartphones. These technological barriers hinder the seamless implementation of blended learning. Effective pedagogical design emerges as another critical component in addressing these challenges. In this context, learning activities, both in-person and online, must be designed in accordance with solid pedagogical principles. Using technology to improve the meaning and effectiveness of the learning process should result in a more cohesive and impactful educational experience. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of cybersecurity awareness. To protect against cyber threats, instructors must educate students and implement strong security measures. This includes protecting students against unethical practices, academic dishonesty, identity theft, and cyberbullying, as well as maintaining a secure online learning environment. Another barrier is a lack of skills and training. Both students and instructors require a certain proficiency in order to effectively use technological tools. Providing comprehensive training ensures that everyone involved has the necessary skills to successfully navigate the world of digital media. Finally, it is critical to address motivation and engagement. Maintaining interest and involvement in a program, particularly as initial enthusiasm declines, is an important consideration for educators.

Gedik et al. (2012) also identified several challenges associated with blended learning, providing valuable insights into the complexities of this educational approach. Increased workload is a notable challenge. As people juggle tasks in both environments at the same time, their overall workload may increase. For example, in addition to their traditional in-class responsibilities, students may have online assignments or activities to complete, which increases their overall work demands. Another major issue is the presence of cultural and technical barriers. Students and teachers may have different cultural perspectives about learning and teaching when it comes to blended learning environments. In addition, technical barriers, such as a lack of technology or tools, can obstruct the seamless integration of these learning environments, posing challenges that must be overcome for effective implementation. The study also emphasized the interdependence of learning environments in blended learning. Because online and face-to-face components are integrated, changes in one environment may have an impact on the other. A technical problem during an online session, for example, might disrupt the in-person learning experience, and vice versa. This interdependence highlights the critical importance of seamless coordination between both environments in order to ensure a seamless learning journey.

To summarize, successful blended learning requires overcoming these challenges through strategic decision-making, addressing technological challenges, fostering effective pedagogical designs, and assisting both instructors and students in navigating the complexities of a blended learning environment. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities, educational institutions can create an environment that maximizes the benefits of blended learning while mitigating its drawbacks, paving the way for a more robust and effective learning experience.

Blended Learning in Thailand

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand, Somsathan and Sanjaiprom (2021) investigated the barriers to online learning faced by both students and teachers. These challenges involved student attitudes toward e-learning and the concept of Thai-ness. Imsa-ard's study (2020) revealed a notable statistic: 80.64% of Thai university students expressed a preference for traditional classroom settings over online learning. Moreover, Pagram and Pagram's research in 2006 uncovered a lack of motivation and self-discipline among Thai students due to a predominantly teacher-centered pedagogical approach. These traits were considered inadequate for effective e-learning, especially given the insufficient technical support and infrastructure available at that time. Todd (2020) studied teachers' perceptions of transitioning from classroom to online teaching. The findings initially highlighted teachers' concerns regarding several problems, which they swiftly addressed by restructuring lessons into smaller, more manageable units. Despite encountering numerous significant challenges in the initial phase of adapting to online teaching, teachers managed to resolve many of these issues within a few weeks. This unexpected progress indicates that the innovation might have been more successful than initially anticipated. In addressing these challenges, blended learning emerges as a strategic solution, particularly in the context of adapting to online education.

Additionally, several studies have explored the effectiveness of blended learning in Thailand, particularly in the development of diverse skills among students studying English as a foreign language. Yudhana's (2021) research focused on the efficacy of a blended learning approach in enhancing the reading skills of undergraduate students. The findings suggested that the integration of blended learning significantly improved students' English reading abilities, which is consistent with similar conclusions drawn in Inpin et al.'s study (2015). Their research affirmed that blended learning not only enhances students' reading proficiency and skills, but also effectively prepares them for independent study and lifelong learning, addressing both occupational and academic objectives. These findings are consistent with the outcomes of Thongsook and Kaowiwattanakul's (2022) study, which explored the effects of a blended learning model on self-regulated learning among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The study demonstrated that students' self-regulated learning was positively developed through a blended learning approach, where students take control of their learning, employ strategies to achieve goals, interact with peers for knowledge acquisition, and continually assess their tasks for improvement.

Also, Suwannasom and Catane (2016) investigated students' attitudes toward blended learning and the strategies employed to achieve learning goals. The findings indicated a positive and motivated outlook among students regarding learning English through online activities. Participants perceived blended language learning as convenient and supportive of self-directed learning. Online activities were seen as offering students greater control over their learning process and fostering a sense of responsibility in language practice. However, the researchers suggested that while blended learning and online activities showed promise in promoting autonomous language learning, the study highlighted the necessity of teacher guidance and peer assistance for effective implementation.

Additionally, the study on blended learning in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class in Thailand, as conducted by Banditvilai (2016), highlighted the positive impact of incorporating online practices alongside traditional methods. The comparison between the control and experimental groups revealed that online practice significantly enhances language skills, fostering learner autonomy and motivation. This underscores the broader positive influence of technology on language learning outcomes and student engagement within the context of blended learning.

Blended learning, as emphasized in the aforementioned research, integrates digital platforms with in-person instruction to cater to diverse learning styles and enhance language acquisition. English language learners gain from a range of strategies, such as online modules, interactive activities, multimedia resources, and virtual collaboration. The application of blended learning proves beneficial in the Thai EFL context, utilizing technology to complement classroom instruction, enabling self-paced learning, and expanding access to a diverse array of language resources.

Students' Readiness and Student Attitude toward Learning Aspects

Although the significant advantages of blended learning have been previously described, it is vital to understand that its effectiveness relies on several factors, with students' readiness being one of the most critical. Tang and Chaw (2013) stated that in a blended learning environment, students' readiness can be evaluated based on their perspectives on six aspects of learning: classroom learning, online learning, online interaction, technology, learning flexibility, and study management.

The first aspect of learning is classroom learning, where students experience a sense of community within the physical classroom environment. This sense of belonging is unique to face-to-face interactions. Consequently, students and instructors may not experience the same level of real and meaningful engagement in an online setting as in a regular classroom, as highlighted by Howard (2009), who emphasized that students preferring face-to-face interactions are more inclined to withdraw from online classes. The second dimension of learning is online learning, offering students more time for self-reflection and improvement. This accommodates learners who may feel reserved or nervous about expressing their ideas publicly, consistent with Miniaoui and Kaur's (2014) research on using discussion forums as blended learning assessment tools to enhance student learning experiences. The third aspect is online interaction. Interactive and discussion are essential to learning and should be seamlessly integrated into a blended learning environment. Asynchronous web-based discussion forums foster open dialogue and critical debate. Osborne et al. (2018) highlighted their value in facilitating in-depth discussions and robust engagement. This approach accommodates diverse schedules and time zones, encouraging thoughtful participation and deeper exploration of course content. Technology, the fourth aspect, is fundamental in blended learning. Students need not only simple access to digital tools but also a profound understanding of their usage, as argued by Greene et al. (2014), emphasizing the importance of digital literacy beyond technical skills to encompass critical thinking and information integration. Learning flexibility, the fifth aspect, offers advantages in terms

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of efficiency in time and location. Tsai (2010) highlighted how internet access provides students with on-demand educational resources, empowering them to direct their learning with guidance from their teachers. The final aspect, study management, is facilitated by blended learning, promoting student responsibility, self-discipline, and self-motivation. These skills are crucial in online classes to maintain motivation and adhere to schedules.

Among the six learning components, Firdaus et al. (2020) found that if students viewed learning flexibility, online learning, study management, technology, and online engagement favorably, it was more likely that they would adapt to blended learning. In contrast, students with a positive attitude toward classroom learning were less likely to adjust to blended learning because they preferred to interact with their instructor and classmates in person rather than online. This was because they preferred to learn in a traditional setting.

Staying current on educational trends, particularly the rise of blended learning, is critical for creating a vibrant, adaptable, and personalized learning environment that prepares students for the future. While there has been extensive research on blended learning in Western education, a significant gap exists in understanding how Thai students perceive, prepare for, and evaluate their readiness for this approach. Given Thailand's unique educational and cultural context, as well as the diverse perspectives of Thai learners, it is critical to empirically examine student attitudes across various learning aspects, in line with Tang and Chaw's (2013) assertion that attitudes reflect readiness. The purpose of this study is to assess students' readiness, and to identify potential barriers when implementing blended learning in the Thai EFL contexts. Through an exploration of student perspectives, this study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by providing a comprehensive understanding of how blended learning is perceived and practiced in Thai educational settings. The following research questions directly align with the outlined research objectives.

1. How do Thai students perceive their readiness for learning English in a blended learning environment?
2. What are the specific advantages that Thai students associate with learning English through blended learning?
3. What challenges do Thai students face while learning English through blended learning?

The initial question is intended to assess Thai students' readiness for blended learning by examining their attitudes toward this specific learning environment. It aims to investigate Thai students' perceptions of their readiness and approach to learning English in a blended setting. The subsequent two questions are designed to investigate the benefits and limitations that Thai students face when learning English through blended methods.

■ Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, including a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was utilized to evaluate students' readiness for learning English through

blended learning in this study. These findings were supplemented with qualitative data derived from open-ended interview questions. The researcher was able to gain insights into students' views, benefits, and obstacles in blended learning by collecting data from multiple sources.

Participants

In the second semester of the 2021 academic year, from November, 2021, to March, 2022, there were 1,640 students enrolled in English classes for general education. Using Yamane's approach, this study obtained 322 samples with a 95 percent confidence level and a 5% error (P = 0.05). It is important to note that the Research Ethics Committee of Rajamangala University of Technology approved this research before data collection. After finishing the 15-week course, the participants were invited to complete a questionnaire and 7 participants voluntarily engaged in a semi-structured interview. Participants were also notified that their questionnaire scores would not in any way be a factor in their course grades, and they were free to withdraw from the study without this affecting their final grades.

Research Instruments

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, as Creswell and Creswell (2017) asserted that combining quantitative and qualitative data collection enhances understanding of a research problem. Recognizing the strengths and limitations of each data type, qualitative and quantitative, the integration of these methods provides a more comprehensive view of the issue than either approach alone. The research utilized Tang and Chaw's (2013) framework, focusing on six factors determining learning readiness: classroom learning, online learning, online interaction, technology, learning flexibility, and study management. A questionnaire based on this framework was created to assess students' readiness for blended learning, using a five-point Likert scale. Participants responded to this questionnaire in an online format at the end of the semester. Additionally, qualitative insights were obtained through open-ended questions during focus group interviews. This approach aimed to thoroughly evaluate learners' attitudes and readiness across various aspects of blended learning.

Table 1

The 5-point scale, its mean range, and its interpretation.

Mean Range	Readiness Level Interpretation
5 = 4.51 - 5.00	high level of readiness
4 = 3.51 - 4.50	a slightly high level of readiness
3 = 2.51 - 3.50	moderate level of readiness
2 = 1.51 - 2.50	slightly low level of readiness
1 = 1.00 - 1.50	low level of readiness

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Validity and Reliability Tests

Three experts analyzed the questionnaire's validity using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC). The level of IOC was 0.92. A reliability test was undertaken to evaluate the study instrument's internal consistency. The questionnaires were presented to ten students to test their reliability, and the result of Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.98.

Data Collection

In early March, 2022, participants received online surveys via Google Forms to complete the questionnaires. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams meetings application. To optimize the research tools' effectiveness, data collection was conducted in Thai. Individual interviews, each lasting approximately 20 minutes, were only conducted once. All interviews were recorded to facilitate subsequent data analysis. The interview protocol encompassed four primary questions and corresponding sub-questions, all focusing on exploring students' experiences with blended learning:

1. Can you describe your overall experience with blended learning?
    a) What aspects of blended learning do you find most beneficial?
    b) Have you encountered any difficulties with blended learning?
2. Based on the six factors outlined in the questionnaire (classroom learning, online learning, online interaction, technology, learning flexibility, and study management), how do you evaluate your readiness for blended learning?
3. In what ways do you believe blended learning has influenced your study management and flexibility?
4. Can you recommend ways to improve the blended learning experience?

■ Findings

Finding 1 Levels of Readiness for Six Aspects of Blended Learning in Learning English Through Blended Learning from a Questionnaire.

Table 1

The following table reveals the extent to which students are prepared to study English through blended learning. There were 322 participants representing three faculties. The majority of the participants were from the Faculty of Engineering (66%, or 211 students). The second-largest proportion of students came from the Faculty of Business Administration and Liberal Arts (29.5% or 95 students). The Faculty of

Art and Architecture had the least number of participants (4.5 %, or 16 students).

No.	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level of readiness
	Classroom learning			
1	I feel like a part of a group when I'm in class with other students.	3.54	1.08	Slightly high
2	When I meet my instructor in person, I appreciate that I can get immediate feedback on my performance.	3.60	1.00	Slightly high
3	I believe face-to-face collaboration is the most effective way to learn.	3.89	0.99	Slightly high
4	I learn more successfully when the instructor directs classroom activities.	3.79	1.03	Slightly high
5	When I am individually guided, I learn best.	3.78	0.93	Slightly high
	Total	**3.72**	**1.01**	**Slightly high**
	Online learning			
1	I think that teaching in person is better than teaching in a virtual classroom when it comes to effectiveness.	4.08	0.92	Slightly high
2	I am confident with independent study.	3.51	1.05	Slightly high
3	I am not opposed to having my classes online.	3.60	1.20	Slightly high
4	I enjoy online learning since it provides more learning materials.	3.16	1.32	Moderate
5	I would like to see less time spent on lectures in the classroom.	3.50	1.09	Moderate
6	I would instead take classes online rather than in a classroom.	2.79	1.19	Moderate
7	When I study online, I get bored.	3.72	1.16	Slightly high
8	It is pretty difficult for me to study online.	3.58	1.15	Slightly high
	Total	**3.49**	**1.13**	**Moderate**
	Online interaction			
1	In an online learning environment, I feel alone.	3.34	1.25	Moderate
2	I am confident in sharing my knowledge with others via the Internet.	3.11	1.17	Moderate
3	I prefer to communicate with my instructor online.	3.31	1.09	Moderate
4	I would like to engage in discussion with other students outside of the classroom.	3.36	1.07	Moderate
5	I find it simple to interact with others online.	2.88	1.23	Moderate
6	I enjoy the fact that I can easily access my lecturer online.	3.09	1.13	Moderate
7	I can work effectively with a virtual team to complete assignments.	3.10	1.16	Moderate
	Total	**3.17**	**1.16**	**Moderate**

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	Technology			
1	I believe the Internet is an excellent learning tool.	3.55	1.05	Slightly high
2	I am acquainted with Web technology.	3.50	1.01	Moderate
3	I find Web technologies to be user-friendly.	3.54	1.10	Slightly high
4	I believe we should incorporate technology into education.	3.66	1.05	Slightly high
	Total	**3.56**	**1.26**	**Slightly high**
	learning flexibility			
1	I prefer unrestricted access to all lecture materials.	4.15	0.97	Slightly high
2	I prefer to choose where I want to study.	4.19	0.95	Slightly high
3	I enjoy studying at my own pace.	4.20	0.90	Slightly high
4	I prefer to choose when I want to study.	3.93	1.00	Slightly high
	Total	**4.12**	**0.96**	**Slightly high**
	Study management			
1	It's more likely that I'll miss the deadlines for my assignments in an online environment.	3.37	1.32	Moderate
2	The online study improves my time management skills.	3.29	1.13	Moderate
3	I can study online indefinitely.	3.81	1.11	Slightly high
4	Online learning inspires me to work hard in my studies.	2.95	1.18	Moderate
5	Online learning motivates me to plan ahead.	3.20	1.12	Moderate
6	Online learning helps me be more accountable for my studies.	3.13	1.14	Moderate
	Total	**3.29**	**1.17**	**Moderate**

Based on the questionnaire, several results of the students' readiness towards the six aspects of blended learning have been found.

First, the overall mean score of students' readiness for classroom learning was slightly high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.72, S.D. = 1.01). The item with the highest mean score was No. 3. Participants believed that learning through face-to-face collaboration with others was more beneficial than learning through other means ($\bar{x}$ = 3.89, S.D. = 0.99). The item with the lowest mean score was No. 1. Participants feel a sense of community when they are with other students in the traditional classroom setting ($\bar{x}$ = 3.54, S.D. = 1.08).

Second, on average, the students' readiness for online learning was moderate. ($\bar{x}$ = 3.49, S.D. = 1.13). No. 1 was the item with the highest mean score. Participants viewed face-to-face learning as more efficient than online learning. ($\bar{x}$ = 4.08, S.D. = 0.92). No.6 was the item with the lowest mean score. Participants preferred to take classes online rather than in a traditional classroom setting ($\bar{x}$ = 2.79, S.D. = 1.19).

Third, in terms of online interaction, all seven items were moderate ($\bar{x}$ = 3.17, S.D. = 1.16). No. 4 was the most highly ranked item. Many learners wished they could socialize with one another outside of the formal classroom setting ($\bar{x}$ = 3.36, S.D. = 1.07). No. 5 was the lowest-ranked item. It was simple for participants to connect with others over the internet ($\bar{x}$ = 2.88, S.D. = 1.23).

Fourth, all items were ranked slightly higher than average for students' readiness toward technology, except for No. 2, which was rated slightly lower. Participants were familiar with Web technologies ($\bar{x}$ = 3.50, S.D. = 1.01). The overall mean score for this aspect was somewhat above average at 3.56 (S.D. =1.26).

Fifth, the learning flexibility aspect had an average score of 4.12 (S.D. = 0.96). No. 3 was the item with the highest mean score. Participants preferred to learn at their own pace ($\bar{x}$ = 4.20, S.D. = 0.90). The item with the lowest mean score was No. 4. Participants would rather design their own schedules. ($\bar{x}$ = 3.93, S.D. = 1.00).

Finally, the students' readiness for study management was moderate on average ($\bar{x}$ = 3.29, S.D. = 1.17), except for No. 3, which was rated significantly higher. The item with the highest mean score was No. 3; Online learning enabled learners to study repeatedly at their own pace. ($\bar{x}$ = 3.81, S.D. = 1.11). The item with the lowest mean score was No. 4; Online learning motivated participants to prepare well for their studies ($\bar{x}$ = 2.95, S.D. = 1.18).

Finding 2 Interviews Regarding the Benefits and Challenges of Blended learning

Seven students voluntarily participated in an interview. The goal of the interview was to discover more about the advantages and disadvantages of blended learning.

The Benefits of Blended Learning

- Flexibility and accessibility: Blended learning significantly enhances access to learning resources, ensuring availability anytime and anywhere. This advantage was underscored unanimously by all participants. Moreover, it enables students to access resources irrespective of their location or schedule, complementing in-person teaching and support. As one participant expressed, “The flexibility is fantastic — I can learn whenever and wherever I want, which is incredibly beneficial.”
- Cost and time savings: Participants mentioned that blended learning saves money and time that would otherwise be spent commuting to physical classrooms. This includes avoiding daily transportation costs such as gasoline and public transportation fares. “I choose online learning because I don't have to attend class every day, saving money on gasoline,” one participant stated.
- Personalized learning pace: Some participants emphasized the benefits of self-pacing for both slower and faster learners, such as stress reduction and increased retention through repeated

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access to resources. “I appreciate having internet resources available anytime for thorough review,” one participant said. Another participant said, “I do not have to be worried if I do not understand the lessons because I can go over them again.”

The Challenges of Blended Learning

- Self-discipline struggles: Participants expressed difficulty focusing during online sessions, citing instances of falling asleep or multitasking. According to one participant, “I find it hard to concentrate while learning online because I often rely on searching for information later, even though I rarely do.” Another participant said, “Staying focused on my online studies is tough; I tend to either doze off or engage in multiple tasks simultaneously.”
- Access limitations: Participants discussed how insufficient technology or poor home internet forces students to rely on campus facilities, resulting in disparities in access to critical resources. This reliance is frequently caused by financial constraints or living in areas with limited internet access, which affects the consistency and quality of their learning experiences. One participant explained, “Without Wi-Fi at home, I have to use campus facilities. That is why I prefer to study in a classroom.” Another expressed, “I don't want to spend extra money on internet when I already pay tuition. It feels unfair.”
- Personal time intrusion: One participant reported feeling stressed and exhausted as a result of the demands of blended learning, highlighting the ongoing need to study online even at home. Balancing multiple tasks became time-consuming, resulting in severe exhaustion. The participant said “Even at home, the workload for online studies is extensive. Juggling multiple tasks drains me and leaves me exhausted.”
- Communication obstacles: Participants expressed difficulty in instantly connecting with instructors or classmates while studying online. One participant mentioned, “When I don't grasp a lesson online, I'm hesitant to interrupt the class for an explanation.” Another participant preferred immediate answers rather than leaving messages and waiting for responses, saying, “I’d prefer getting the answer right away without having to wait.” Moreover, the questionnaire data highlighted difficulties in communication between students and instructors. While instructors permitted various communication channels like email, chat, Line, and WhatsApp, responses were often insufficient, slow, or delayed. One participant expressed, “At times, I need immediate support, but the responses aren't always clear. I have to repeatedly ask for clarity until I get a clear answer.”

■ Conclusion

The study’s findings significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of students’ readiness to learn English in a blended learning environment, providing significant benefits. Understanding students’

readiness in this context is extremely important for optimizing educational strategies and improving learning outcomes.

The study's findings addressed the first research objective, examining the perception of readiness for learning English in a blended learning environment. The result indicated that participants perceived classroom instruction as more efficient than online learning. This observation suggests a potential lack of readiness among participants for independent study in the blended learning environment. This finding supports earlier research on similar premises, namely that learners preferred traditional classroom environments to blended classroom settings (Imsa-ard, 2020). Participants highlighted the value of face-to-face interactions with their lecturers, noting that this direct engagement significantly enhanced their understanding of the lessons. In contrast to online learning, classroom learning allows instructors and learners to interact face-to-face in the same environment. This teaching environment benefits learners with specific learning preferences, especially those who rely primarily on teacher-centered methods. Additionally, classroom-based learning fosters peer-to-peer interaction, making it easier for them to learn from each other. Furthermore, group discussions and practical exercises in a classroom setting not only enhances learning, but also adds an enjoyable dimension to topics. This significant discovery reveals that interaction and discussion are required for blended learning as they are the critical components of the learning process. Another factor contributing to the preference for classroom learning over online learning is the limitation imposed by the lack of physical presence. The absence of direct, in-person interactions between educators and students creates a barrier in an online learning environment. This lack of face-to-face contact presents difficulties for students seeking immediate dialogue and prompt feedback, both of which are readily available in a traditional classroom setting. Consequently, there is a greater demand for a teaching presence within an online learning environment. According to Wang et al. (2021), it is essential to build a teaching presence to establish engagement between instructors and learners and enhance social interaction. Lee and Recker (2021) stated that the availability of online learning resources, as well as the presence of instructors in the classroom, determines the success of online learning. It acts as a link between curriculum content and students, and it serves as a bridge between curriculum content and learners. Teaching presence does not imply that the instructor must respond to every student's post in an online setting; however, learners benefit from the instructor's role as mediator and guide. In other words, instructors should provide appropriate online activities to foster students' higher cognitive interactions. For example, Caskurlu et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between teacher presence and learning outcomes. They discovered a significant correlation between the teachers' presence in the classroom and the learning outcomes and the overall satisfaction of the students. According to Preisman (2014), the instructor plays a crucial role in facilitating online learning for students. When the instructor plans and prepares the course as an instructional designer, teaching presence begins prior to the start of class. The instructor facilitates discussions throughout the course and provides direct feedback as necessary. Instructors can build an online teaching presence through the design of online courses, facilitation of discourse, and providing direct instruction. Giving students clear goals, setting expectations for student participation and activity in class, providing frequent feedback, fostering fruitful discussions by

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asking interesting and open-ended questions, and providing students with strong direct instructions are all guidelines for teaching presence.

Furthermore, the findings corresponded the second research objective regarding the benefits of learning English through blended learning. Despite indications from the survey suggested that participants were not fully prepared for independent study, they valued the flexibility of online learning. This discovery holds promise for readiness development, aligning with Tang and Chaw's (2013) study, which noted that learners who had positive views on learning flexibility were more adaptable to blended learning. The participants would instead learn at their own pace, according to the highest mean score from the learning flexibility element. This conclusion is supported by Gedik et al. (2012), who found that blended learning, incorporating an online component, empowered learners to navigate their pace and interacted with course materials with more flexibly. This increased flexibility provides learners with greater control over when and how they access content, ultimately fostering a heightened sense of readiness in their learning process. This underscores their potential for enhanced preparedness through the implementation of blended learning.

The findings also addressed the second research question concerning the challenges encountered in learning English through blended learning. The data shed some light on various barriers that participants encountered in the blended learning environment, such as difficulties with online communication and a lack of motivation for virtual learning, which may have an impact on students' readiness. Addressing these issues creatively involves strategically employing discussion boards. Online discussion boards have been a longstanding and effective means of information exchange. Implementing discussion boards, as highlighted by Howard (2009), cultivates greater student accountability within a well-structured framework. Through reflective engagement, students assess their knowledge, identify areas for improvement, and develop the ability to evaluate their own work. These discussion boards also serve as platforms for reserved students to share their perspectives, fostering increased participation. Aligning with the findings of Miniaoui and Kaur (2014), the utilization of discussion boards enhances student learning by establishing a structured framework that encourages responsibility and self-reflection. It enables students to assess their strengths and weaknesses, encourages reserved students to actively participate in discussions, and facilitates the practical application of subject concepts, thereby refining research and analytical skills. To further engage learners, instructors can introduce open-ended dialogue prompts, encouraging students to submit examples or prompting them to consider subjects from multiple perspectives. Alternatively, instructors may organize student-led discussions, empowering students to formulate discussion questions and lead subsequent conversations. Additionally, non-task interactions, occurring outside the context of direct learning, play a crucial role in building a supportive learning community. These interactions can be facilitated through the social networking features available in many Learning Management Systems (LMS). Such tactics involve regularly updating with interesting stories or trending topics, and incorporating comments from social networking sites into class discussions. Another significant challenge for learners in blended learning is that they must be self-directed in order to complete their studies remotely. It is undeniable that some students require more time than others to acquire skills. Like any academic skill, self-direction is challenging and requires scaffolding for students. Moreover, individuals skilled in self-management tend to succeed, while

those lacking these skills are falling further behind. Todd (2020) proposed solutions recommended by online teaching teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand, including the strategy of breaking lessons into smaller units. Chunking, emphasized as the key to fostering motivation and collaboration in a self-paced setting, enables students to manage their learning within each study unit rather than allowing unproductive time. This approach empowers students to pace themselves through the course material effectively. Moreover, participants notably expressed their displeasure with the overwhelming number of assignments, highlighting the crucial need for a balance of activities. To establish a healthy work-life balance and maintain progress, it's essential to schedule and thoroughly analyze activities. Suwannasom and Catane (2016) underscored the necessity for blended learning tasks to be well-structured and purposeful in order for students to effectively reach their learning goals. A key aspect of this process involves the teacher taking on the role of a facilitator or coach, guiding students through exploratory learning. As the classroom transitions to an online setting, it becomes crucial to provide students with appropriate scaffolding, ensuring that each activity has clear objectives, and outlining the process to attain these objectives. Such a clear framework not only helps students maintain focus but also prevents them from falling too far behind, thereby contributing to a more effective and balanced learning experience. Finally, to address the issue of internet connectivity, learners should know exactly what kind of technical support they have available and what they will need to successfully complete the course. Institutional authorities should aid learners by giving them access to a technical officer who can assist them with problems and provide a robust network device on campus to ensure their Internet functions properly.

In summary, the exploration of students' readiness within blended learning reveals significant insights into its intricacies and potential opportunities in education. These findings lay the foundation for ongoing refinements and enhancements of pedagogical practices. However, amidst these positive findings, a prevalent trend surfaced — the initial resistance or hesitancy among learners toward online interaction due to their familiarity with face-to-face instruction. This underscores the importance of proactive measures to prepare Thai EFL students for a seamless transition to blended learning. To facilitate this readiness effectively, several key factors must be addressed. Motivation cultivation, promotion of self-discipline, purposeful task design, and ensuring equitable and reliable internet access for all learners are paramount. These initiatives aim not only to bridge the gap between traditional classroom settings and online learning, but also to empower students to embrace the advantages of blended learning, fostering a more engaging and effective educational experience.

■ Limitation and Recommendation

Limitation

Although the findings contribute to a better understanding of students' willingness to learn English in a mixed learning environment, a small sample size in this study can limit the generalizability of findings to a larger population. In this case, the fact that only 322

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samples were drawn from a total of 1,640 first-year students may have an impact on the study's representativeness and the extent to which the findings can be applied to the entire student body. If the results were drawn from a larger number of people, the discovery would be more scientifically reliable. Another issue was the length of the research. Allowing students to participate in blended learning for at least one academic year may help them appreciate its benefits and adjust to the blended learning technique.

Recommendation

A future study could examine more aspects of blended learning to better understand its implementation and effectiveness.

- Instructors' role: It is critical to investigate how instructors adapt their teaching methods to the blended environment. Understanding their training, pedagogical approaches, and engagement strategies in both online and face-to-face settings could have a significant impact on the success of blended learning.
- Institutional support: This includes investigating how institutions facilitate blended learning, the technological infrastructure they provide, and the policies they implement to improve student learning experiences.
- Technological integration: Research could concentrate on the types of technology used, their effectiveness, ease of use, and how they contribute to a seamless learning experience.
- Learner support: This involves assessing student support in the blended learning environment, resources, technical support, and learner autonomy strategies.

A future study that focuses on these elements can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of blended learning. It can also provide insights into how various components interact with one another and influence the overall effectiveness and sustainability of blended learning initiatives. This in-depth understanding is essential for improving educational practices and ensuring optimal learning outcomes for students in blended environments.

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