Student Satisfaction with Hybrid and Face-to-Face Teaching Approaches in an English Course

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Abstract

Hybrid courses combine technology with innovative teaching practices to facilitate learning. This paper studied satisfaction of students who experienced a hybrid learning environment (online classes + face-to-face classes) and compared the perceptions of hybrid and traditional face-to-face delivery approaches. The data were collected from 300 students enrolled in a fundamental English course at a private university in Thailand, using two sets of questionnaire. A semi-structured interview was also conducted at the end of the course to elicit more information. The results of the study revealed that students were satisfied with both hybrid delivery approach and its components designed to suit the target group at a high level in almost items. It also found that students had higher perception of hybrid format employed the first time at the university when compared to the traditional face-to-face classroom. This can be concluded that hybrid instruction can be used as an alternative in other English courses. A few obstacles of hybrid instruction were also discussed in the paper after they were investigated by the semi-structured interview.

Keywords: hybrid teaching, blended learning, satisfaction, language teaching

Introduction

The advancement in communication and network technologies has created more innovative instructional delivery and learning solutions for learners at all levels. Learners now have opportunities to access the learning resources from anywhere at any time. They are no longer working only on stand-alone computers and CD-ROMs, but now they are also able to access mass of resources on the web. With the help of Internet, there are many ways of becoming autonomous learners (Chapelle, 2001). These applications of technology are consistent with language acquisition theories that emphasize a natural language environment and authentic communications, and have been found to be effective in achieving instructional goals in language development (Hempel & Stickler, 2005). In contrast to a conventional class setting, the use of technologies can support the theoretical and practical requirements of language instruction without the physical presence of both teacher and learners.

As a result of increasing support from most educational institutions on the use of technologies as a medium and tool for language learning, language teachers have shifted their practice in using computers for their teaching. Therefore, many tools of on-line learning such as discussion forums, synchronous CMC, and emails are more introduced to many courses. Among many instructional delivery methods, hybrid instruction is growing rapidly because it can deliver meaningful learning experiences. Hybrid instruction is a combination of online and face-to-face (FTF) methods. Many researchers have expressed an interest for hybrid learning since this is a new and untested fad in education (Clark & Mayer, 2007). Hybrid learning and blended learning are two terms that have been used synonymously (So & Brush, 2008). The concept of hybrid learning, however, is not simply a combination of online and FTF instruction. Rather, it focuses on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the "right" learning technologies to match the "right" learning to the "right" person at the "right" time (Graham, 2005).

Hybrid courses show great potential over the other course modalities in several aspects. First, hybrid mode has the potential benefits of making courses more accessible and learning more convenient for students, providing faculty with greater flexibility in how they structure their time, and increasing classroom space for institutions to serve more students without building more classrooms (Clark & Mayer, 2007). Second, providing students with a choice of communication tools greatly increased student satisfaction (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Computer technologies have made it possible for students and teachers to meet virtually any time anywhere such that distance has become irrelevant when it comes to oral interaction (Hampel & Hauck, 2004). Huge flood in Thailand in October 2011 which affected classroom meetings caused our university to implement a hybrid course to facilitate learning. So, it was the first time our faculty staff adjusted the format to be a kind of "hybrid." Not only the teachers, but students also needed to adjust themselves to the new instructional environment.

Students Satisfaction with Online, F2F, and Hybrid Instruction

To fully understand hybrid learning, many researchers also look at students' attitudes toward the three modalities: online, F2F, and hybrid. When compared online with F2F instruction, it was found that students enrolled in the online course were significantly

less satisfied with the course than the traditional classroom students on several dimensions (Summers, Waigandt, & Whittaker, 2005). Peterson and Bond (2004) also found that students perceived that they learned more through FTF, even though their course performance was no different than the online students.

Many studies have found students in hybrid classes to be more satisfied with their course experiences as compared to their traditional, face-to-face classes. Lim and Morris (2009) have reported that student satisfaction increases when blended learning is adopted. Similarly, Vernadakis, Giannousi, Antoniou, & Kioumourtzoglou (2012) evaluated students' satisfaction with blended learning course delivery compared to a traditional face-to-face class format in a general multimedia course in physical education. Results indicated that a blended course delivery is preferred over the traditional lecture format. These finding suggest that students' satisfaction could increase when the teacher provides learning environments not only in a traditional classroom, but in an asynchronous online system as well. Moreover, student satisfaction and success rates in blended courses slightly superior to traditional courses (Melton, Graf, & Chopak-Foss, 2009; So, 2009; Schober, Wagner, Reimann, Atria, & Spiel, 2006; Taradi, Taradi, Radic, & Pokrajac, 2005).

For hybrid learning environments, it is particularly important to obtain feedback from students, which may throw light on the appropriate proportion of online and face-to-face components we should include in the delivery of the program. The degree of student satisfaction plays an important role in evaluating the effectiveness of the designed course. The results will provide management insight into developing effective strategies that will allow educational institution administrators and teachers to create new educational benefits and value for their students (Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2010).

Purposes of the Study

Much of the research literature has focused on comparing student satisfaction in hybrid and face-to-face environments in the field of technology, but few studies have investigated differences in satisfaction in the field of language learning. It is necessary to understand how students view hybrid learning. Thus, this study sought to further understand students' satisfaction on implementing a hybrid instructional approach (online delivery + face-to-face (F2F)) in an English course. The following question will guide this study: "What are the perceptions of students exposed to a hybrid instructional delivery on its impact on their learning such as learning attitudes, communication, learning styles, and technical understanding?" For the purpose of this study, a hybrid course is defined as an English course in which approximately 50% of classroom meetings are replaced by online learning activities.

Methodology

Respondents

Three hundred students from eight sections enrolled in a fundamental English entitled EN112 were selected to respond to the questionnaire since they had an experience of conventional 100% face-to-face format. The respondents in this study were male and female students (53% and 47% respectively), aged between 18 and 21. They were

from nine faculties (Communication Art, Fine and Applied Arts, Law, Engineering, Humanities, Science and Technology, Accounting, Business Administration, and Economics). They were enrolled in the second semester of academic year 2011. In this semester, they were required to take this English course with a new teaching format called "hybrid." With regard to ethical approval, all the respondents in this study were voluntary and anonymous. They had been informed that they could withdraw from the reply whenever they felt uncomfortable. Allowing the author to use their responses for publications, the respondents also signed a consent form that briefly described the study before completing the questionnaire.

Research Instruments

The instruments used to collect the data were two sets of questionnaires adapted from Park (2011) and an interview. There were two sets of surveys to assess students' perception on the hybrid approach. The first set of survey questions comprised two parts, mainly gathering students responses on satisfaction related to the hybrid delivery approach and hybrid components designed for this course. Each part in the first set contained eight questions in a form of five-point Likert rating scale. The second set of questions asked students to compare the hybrid delivery with traditional F2F delivery. On ten items, students were required to choose which approach they believed was better. The draft was reviewed by three colleagues and pilot-tested with a small sample of students. The reliability coefficients of Cronbach's alpha for the first set were .82 and .87 respectively. Another instrument, a semi-structured interview, was conducted with fifteen students to elicit more details to support the findings gained from the quantitative method.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, means and standard deviations were used to analyze students' satisfaction with the hybrid delivery approach and its components. A descriptive analysis was conducted to report the mean scores and standard deviations in tables based on the following ranges: 1.00-1.50 = very low, 1.51-2.50 = low, 2.51-3.50 = moderate, 3.51-4.50 = high, 4.51-5.00 = very high. Percentages were used to investigate students' perceptions on the hybrid delivery approach when compared with the conventional FTF delivery approach. Data got from the interview were categorized and presented.

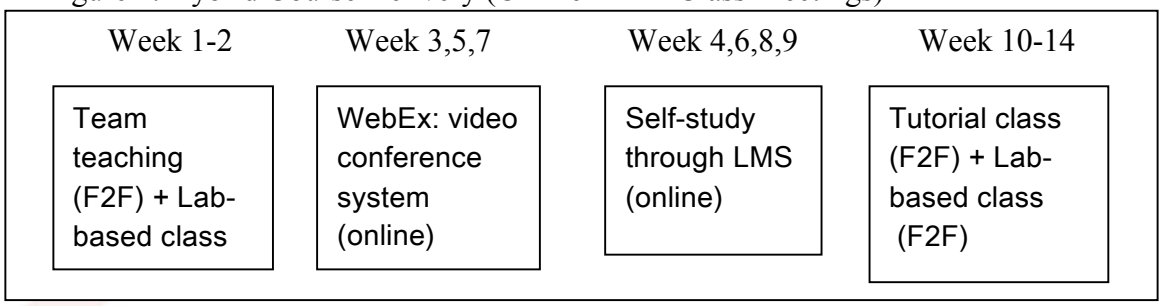
Course Format

The typical course format of the previous offerings is presented in Figure 1. Students and the teacher met in a classroom twice a week and each 2-hour F2F class meeting was prepared for reading, writing, and speaking activities. An hour usually was assigned for a study in a language laboratory. Therefore, every class was designed in a F2F format. This repeated every week throughout the semester.

Figure 1. Typical F2F Course Delivery Format before Converted to Hybrid Format

Week 1- 14		
Class Meeting (F2F)	+	Lab-based class (F2F)

Figure 2. Hybrid Course Delivery (Online + F2F Class Meetings)



In this study, the traditional format was converted to a hybrid format. Instead of combining F2F class meetings and lab-based classes together in each week, in this new format, the teacher delivered the subject matter in both online and F2F format. For the new design, instructional process begins with team teaching as we see a lot of benefits of this approach. First of all, team-teachers share responsibilities and thus lighten each other's workloads, especially in the large-size classes. Second, team-teachers can improve the overall quality of the language lesson as the teaching job is assigned to each teacher based on their strong points. As such, team teaching can provide opportunities to make the best use of each teacher's ideas and experiences. Lastly, team-teachers can show students how teachers cooperate with each other. For a fundamental English course, team-teaching in a large class was very useful when there were not enough classrooms. About 200 students were gathered in a big room and taught by team-teachers for the first two weeks.

The second component which is new for all teachers is WebEx: video conference system. WebEx is designed to be a virtual classroom where the teacher and students can meet and talk. With a camera and microphone, an interaction between both sides can occur based on a pre-set schedule. Video conference system helps students save time traveling to campus. It also solves the problem of limited classrooms. Students are required to participate in on-line classes for three times as scheduled.

The next component in this hybrid teaching course includes Learning Management System (LMS). It refers to server-based software that controls access and delivery of online learning resources through a standard web browser. Students are required to study online materials as well as do quizzes, assignments, and tasks. LMS can show scoring and tracking of students' progress. Two means of communication available for teachers and learners include the announcement and discussion boards. Announcement is used to give all students any new information about the course, including the latest news and upcoming events while the discussion board is a forum of communication where both teachers and learners can post their messages and read the comments from others.

Instruction in tutorial classes is arranged in a small group format, providing an opportunity for students to brainstorm ideas and receive feedback on written drafts. This makes the actual writing process less burdensome. Teachers can identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual students, help them develop understanding and improve their attitudes of learning English. Tutorial classes are scheduled in the last step of hybrid format with a hope that classroom repair will be done during that time.

Results

Table 1 showed that the mean scores of satisfaction with hybrid delivery approach were at a high level in six items. There were two items which students rated at very high and moderate levels. That is, students had a very high level of satisfaction with taking responsibility in learning while they have a moderate level of satisfaction with efficient communication or interaction. The three highest mean scores fell on item no. 1 (encouraging students to have more responsibility in learning), followed by item no. 8 (feeling comfortable), and item no. 2 (promoting active learning).

Table 1 Students' satisfaction with Hybrid Delivery Approach

Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level	Rank
1. The hybrid delivery encouraged students to have more responsibility in their learning.	4.89	.31	very high	1
2. The hybrid delivery promoted active learning/ participation.	4.47	1.15	high	3
3. The hybrid delivery made the class interesting.	4.41	.49	high	4
4. The hybrid delivery allowed efficient communication or interaction with the teacher.	3.34	1.11	moderate	8
5. The hybrid delivery improved language skills.	4.32	.47	high	5
6. The hybrid delivery made the class engaging.	3.95	.96	high	7
7. The hybrid delivery provided a good learning experience.	4.01	.78	high	6
8. The hybrid delivery made students feel comfortable.	4.49	.50	high	2

Table 2 showed that the mean scores of satisfaction with the hybrid course components were at a high level in seven items. The first highest mean score fell on item no. 3 (team teaching), followed by item no. 6 (learning management system) and item no. 4 (tutorial classes). The only one item which was rated at a moderate level was WebEx video conference.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Satisfaction with the Hybrid Course
Components

Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level	Rank
1. Satisfaction with the course contents	4.13	.73	high	5
2. Satisfaction with the design of hybrid course	4.18	.60	high	4
3. Satisfaction with team-teaching	4.49	.50	high	1
4. Satisfaction with tutorial classes	4.32	.49	high	3
5. Satisfaction with WebEx video conference	3.30	1.08	moderate	8
6. Satisfaction with learning management system	4.41	.47	high	2
7. Satisfaction with means of communication such as Facebook, e-mail, and forum	4.01	.78	high	6
8. Satisfaction with online course materials	3.66	.95	high	7

Table 3 showed that students agreed that the hybrid approach was better than the 100% FTF delivery approach in nine items. They acknowledged "more responsibility", "more active learning", "more interesting", "more language skill improvement", "more engaging", "a better learning experience", "more understanding of content", and "more comfortable" as reasons. Moreover, 77 % stated that they

would like to study in a hybrid approach if they could make their own choice. However, 52.3% still believed that FTF allowed more efficient communication with the teacher while almost half the students (47.7%) expressed the opposite opinion.

Table 3 A Comparison of Students' Perception on FTF and Hybrid

Statement	Hybrid	Face-to-face
1. Which course delivery approach encourages you to take more responsibility in your learning?	81.7 %	18.3%
2. Which course delivery approach promotes more active learning/ participation?	70.7%	29.3%
3. Which course delivery approach made the class more interesting?	77.7%	22.3%
4. Which course delivery approach allows more efficient communication or interaction with the teacher?	47.7%	52.3%
5. Which course delivery approach improves more language skills?	77.7%	22.3%
6. Which course delivery approach makes the class more engaging?	68.7%	31.3%
7. Which course delivery approach helps you understand the topics /contents more easily?	76.0%	24.0%
8. Which course delivery approach provides a better learning experience?	68.3%	31.7%
9. If you have to take an English course again, which course delivery approach will you choose?	77.7%	22.3%
10. Which course delivery approach makes you feel more comfortable?	71.3%	28.7%

Interview Results

The interview results brought about two interesting issues concerning the drawbacks of studying with a hybrid delivery approach. The first one was about obstacles to communicating through WebEx video conference. Seven students stated that video conference should not have been included in this course since the equipment was not available in good conditon. They specified technical problems occurring when they were studying through WebEx. For instance, students who did not have their own computer could not totally depend on the lab. The main problem came from the equipment in the language lab on campus which was rather old and out of order such as microphones, speakers, and cameras. As a result, they could not communicate well with their teacher. Four students agreed that studying online through video conference was useful and acceptable, but the problem was about unfamiliarity with video conference operation, so it was rather difficult for them to communicate online with the teacher smoothly. If the university provided more time for training, it would be more efficient. However, three students did not perceive video conference as a problem; they really love it and found it a new learning experience. The second critical issue was about communication with the teacher. Ten out of fifteen respondents identified some difficulties of interaction with the teacher during on-line learning. The discussion board was not convenient in case they required a lot of explanation. Contacting by e-mail was not fast since the teacher did not reply the message immediately. However, five respondents did not see it as a big problem; they thought the situation turned better when tutorial classes started.

Discussion

The results of the analyses have important implications for learning and teaching as they suggest that to optimize the success of a hybrid learning approach to language learning, there is a need to cater for students' satisfaction and to maintain a desirable balance between the FTF and online modes of delivery.

The first discussion was about student satisfaction with hybrid delivery approach which was at a high level in nearly all items. This might be because this approach is a combination of FTF and online classes which provide more flexibility. Since learning English with hybrid format was rather new for many students, they seemed to be excited in it. Also, they paid much attention and put more effort to their study in order to earn good scores. Interestingly, the mean scores of satisfaction with the hybrid course components were at a high level in seven out of eight items. The results indicate that the components designed for this English course were rather beneficial and satisfying. The reason supporting these results might be because there was a variety in the hybrid course delivery. It can be assumed that blended learning fit in the context. Team teaching and tutorial methods in face-to-face environment could support their learning while the use of technology concerning video conference, and Learning Management System was a new learning experience for them, motivating them to be more responsible. Students also benefited from receiving fast feedback on-line. As we know that this was the first time students experienced hybrid, proportion of components was limited with only 33 % of online classes in order that more time were spent in FTF classes. By so doing, students could adjust themselves easily to the new learning environment.

The second issue for discussion was about students' higher perception on hybrid than traditional approach. Although this is the first time for them to experience hybrid instruction, they can adapt themselves easily and seem to be happy with it. This is due to the fact that hybrid instruction blends the use of technology-based asynchronous teaching methods and traditional teaching methods to give students more control of their own learning and promote greater interaction and cognitive engagement (Allen & Seaman, 2006). This finding was consistent with other studies in the literature review which seem to indicate that student satisfaction and success rates in hybrid courses was slightly superior to traditional courses (Melton, Graf, & Chopak-Foss, 2009; So, 2009; Schober, Wagner, Reimann, Atria, & Spiel, 2006; Taradi, Taradi, Radic, & Pokrajac, 2005). To conclude, a hybrid course can be a new choice for language teachers who would like to make more use of technology in their courses.

Conclusion

The findings in this study suggest that hybrid instruction which blends the use of technology and traditional methods can be an alternative for English courses since it is a kind of worthwhile learning experience for students. The positive feedback from students implies that they open up their mind to accept new things. Such learning lets them have more control on their learning. In order to make hybrid instruction more beneficial and meaningful, teachers might need to choose the hybrid format which suits contents and objectives of the course. Apart from that, the problem of the equipment or learning tools should be resolved; everything should be ready before the

course starts. This will help to promote and support interaction between students and teachers.

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