

Thai Students' Perceptions towards Self-Study and the Use of a Self-Access Language Learning Center

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate Mae Fah Luang University (MFU) students' perceptions towards self-study and the use of the Self-Access Language Learning Center (SALLC). The main research questions include: 1) what are students' attitudes towards the use of SALLC at MFU, and 2) what are the factors that promote students' use of the SALLC? This study adopted a mixed-method approach which employed two research instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Using convenience sampling, the questionnaire respondents consisted of 215 students who used the services at SALLC. Purposive sampling was employed to select eight respondents to participate in the group interviews.

The key findings of this study can be summarized into two main aspects related to the primary research questions. Firstly, using the SALLC services led to participants' positive attitudes towards English learning in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Most students had positive attitudes towards the services offered at the SALLC, which included facilities, consultation, coaching, foreign language activities, and self-study materials.

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Secondly, factors indicated as those that attracted students to use the center were the positive environment and pleasant surroundings.

Keywords: Self-Access Language Learning Center (SALLC) / Perception / Self-Study

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งสำรวจความคิดเห็นและทัศนคติของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยแม่ฟ้าหลวงต่อการเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเองและประสบการณ์การใช้ศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเอง โดยมีคำถามงานวิจัย ดังนี้ (1) นักศึกษามีทัศนคติอย่างไรต่อการใช้ศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเองของมหาวิทยาลัยแม่ฟ้าหลวง (2) มีปัจจัยอะไรบ้างที่ส่งเสริมให้นักศึกษาไปใช้ศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเอง งานวิจัยนี้เก็บข้อมูลทั้งในเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพ จากการคัดเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบตามความสะดวกและแบบเจาะจงตามลำดับ ได้ผู้เข้าร่วมงานวิจัยแบ่งเป็นนักศึกษาผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามจำนวน 215 คน และนักศึกษาร่วมการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มจำนวน 8 คน ผลการศึกษาที่พบสำคัญ 2 ประการคือ การใช้บริการของศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเองนำไปสู่ทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ และนักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่มีทัศนคติที่เป็นบวกต่อการใช้บริการต่างๆ ของศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเอง ประการที่สอง นอกจากการให้บริการของศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเองที่เป็นปัจจัยในการส่งเสริมให้นักศึกษาเข้าใช้ แล้วยังพบว่ายังมีปัจจัยอื่น เช่น สิ่งแวดล้อมและสภาพแวดล้อมที่ส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้ของศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเอง

คำสำคัญ: ศูนย์การเรียนรู้ภาษาด้วยตนเอง / ความคิดเห็น / การเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเอง

Introduction

The Self-Access Language Learning Center (SALLC) at Mae Fah Luang University (MFU) was established in 2008, and it aims at enabling learning to take place independently of teaching and learning in required preparatory-level English language courses. Because English is the medium of instruction at MFU, most students likely need a great deal of extra practice outside of class. The SALLC provides materials, facilities, teaching assistant, consultation, coaching, and activities for students to practice on their own.

Currently at MFU, students who have used the SALLC can be categorized into three types according to the reason for their visit: (1) a course requirement (score given for students' attendance), (2) a teacher's suggestion as English course support (no score given for students' attendance), and (3) a voluntary visit due to personal interest.

From the researcher's observations, it was found that the majority of students who have used SALLC spent only enough time there to finish their tasks rather than exploring the center further. Relating to this point, students might not realize other benefits they could gain from joining or using other services provided at the SALLC. At present, the SALLC provides materials, facilities, consultation, coaching, and activities focusing on foreign languages. However, the questioned remained as to whether the SALLC can support students' learning as it is primarily aimed.

Accordingly, this study set out to explore students' perceptions towards self-study and the use of MFU's SALLC. It aims to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are students' perceptions towards self-study and the use of the SALLC at MFU?

2. What are the factors that promote MFU students' use of the SALLC?

Literature Review

1. Self-Access Centers (SACs)

A Self-Access Center (SAC) is a place which provides self-study materials and facilities to support learners to learn on their own. Self-Access Centers (SACs) are defined in relation to other terms such as self-access, self-access learning and self-access language learning.

Sturtridge (1992) defined SAC as “any system which makes materials available to language learners so that they can choose to work as they wish, usually without a teacher or with very limited teacher support” (p.4). Similarly, Sheerin (1991), who focused on materials, defined self-access as the materials designed and organized for students, so that they can select and work on tasks on their own.

SACs and the Self-Access Language Learning Center (SALLC) are connected to self-access language learning or SALL by making contributions to support the students in terms of language learning. SALLC is sometimes named differently as Self-Access Centre (SAC), Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC), and Independent Learning Centre (ILC), all of which have the same key purpose. In the present study, the research site uses the term “Self-Access Language Learning Center” or SALLC. Hence, SALLC in this study is defined as a place which provides language learning facilities including multi-media

tools, activities, and materials that focus on self-study. In the center, students are given the opportunity to practice language skills and organize their own study.

2. Learner Factors

The success of language learning can be influenced by various factors. The factors are divided into two categories, internal and external. Firstly, internal factors are defined as individual or inside factors of the learners that affect learning. Johnson (2006) indicated that internal factors include motivation, attitude, personal practice, and study habits relating to the capability of learners to learn a foreign language. In the present study internal factors involve the learners' characteristics such as motivation, perception, beliefs, and attitude

Secondly, external factors are defined as factors outside of learners that affect them in language learning. External factors include curricula, learning environment, and time (Johnson, 2006). The current study's external factors involve SALLC services; materials, facilities, consultation, coaching, activities, the environment and the surroundings, and the opportunity to utilize these resources.

The internal and external factors affect students' characteristics and achievement in language learning. Knowing more about this interplay could be valuable information for the teacher in preparing the instruction to encourage learners to achieve in language learning (Sudsard, 2013).

3. Self-Study and Similar Concepts

Self-study is an important learning approach which allows learners to set up their own learning process (Tang & Yang, 2000). It involves studying

outside the classroom without guidance and direction from teachers. The students can choose learning materials and methods on their own. Other terms, which also use the similar concept as that of 'self-study', include "autonomous learning", "independent learning", and "self-directed learning. Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), while Little (1991, p. 4) explained autonomy as a "capacity of detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action". Independent learning is when an individual student is capable of thinking, creating, acting, and learning by themselves without the support from the lecturer at the university. In other words, students are expected to do their own study or search for a lesson they are interested in by their own. Self-directed learning (SDL) is defined as a process which learners learn on their own initiative, interests, needs, and abilities. Learners set their own goals by pursuing their learning resources and strategies, including assessing progress of their own learning. They might conduct SDL individually or with the assistance of others.

To conclude, self-study and other terms share similar concepts that learners manage their own learning, and they can take control of the instructional process. In addition, they are likely to become independent or autonomous learners.

4. Perception

Perception is one of the most important factors in learning a language (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013). Pickens (2005) defined perception as a process of awareness and acceptance of something through the mind or the senses and it is closely related to attitude. Attitude is a positive or negative representation of something within one's mind, which is formed through the

person's experience, and this representation influences one's behavior (Allport, 1935). Wenden (1991) and other researchers have divided the term "attitude" into three components which are cognitive, affective and behavioral. Accordingly, the first aspect of attitude, "cognitive" involves with learners' beliefs or perceptions, ideas or opinions towards the knowledge they receive. Secondly, the second aspect of attitude, "affective" involves learners' feelings and emotions towards knowledge or service they receive. Finally, the last aspect of attitude, "behavioral," involves one's action, reaction or behavioral intentions relevant to certain situations (Rahimi & Hassani, 2012; Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, & Alzwari, 2012).

Research has shown that attitude plays an important role in English language learning; students with positive attitudes will achieve more in learning than students with negative attitudes (Malcolm, 2011). Farani and Fatemi (2014) concluded that teachers have a strong influence on students' attitude towards language learning; hence, the role of teachers is very important in changing students' attitudes.

To sum up, a positive attitude towards English language learning and the support from teachers would increase students' motivation, encourage high achievement, and enhance success in self-access language learning.

5. Relevant Research Studies

Many previous research studies have explored students' attitudes, perceptions, and motivations towards self-access language learning, self-access language learning centers, and English language learning. For example, Abidin, Mohammadi, Wongchana, and Yee (2012) studied Thai students' motivation level and attitudes towards the use of materials and

facilities of an SALLC. It revealed that the SALLC could improve students' attitudes and stimulate their motivation to go to the center. Materials and facilities were factors that helped to promote the SALLC. Furthermore, the SALLC could encourage the students to develop themselves for lifelong learning in the future.

Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012) explored the attitudes of the students towards learning English on three different aspects, which are cognitive, affective and behavioral in a secondary school. The results showed that most of the students did not have positive attitudes towards learning English, but rather negative attitudes which resulted from students unaware of the benefits of English language. Also, English curriculum and classroom activities which related to the students' needs and their individual differences were not sufficient to develop positive attitude.

A study by Javdani et al. (2011) examined the attitude of Iranian English for Specific Purposes students towards the role of self-access language learning center in improving their reading comprehension. It revealed that students had a highly positive attitude about the resources, and students' satisfaction depended on the degree of difficulty they had in finding the right materials. Self-access centers help students by providing useful resources for English learning

Cheng and Lin (2010) led an investigation on students' perceptions of doing outside reading and self-access counseling in a Taiwanese university. It was suggested that the teacher should explain the content and highlight the key words or structures in class in order to assist students' self-access learning. Cheng and Lin also mentioned that the teachers should provide reasons to

learn English; reasons that are related to their personal needs and goals; they should help the students to develop skills and strategies in order to become self-directed learners. The major implication of this study is that teachers should encourage their students' awareness and give them instructions to build up their own learning autonomy which can be promoted at the SALLC through self-study materials.

Salvia (2000) studied a model for the integration of a self-access system in a language learning institution. The aim was to promote autonomous learning through the use of self-access facilities. Salvia indicated that a self-access center should provide various kinds of learning materials, the necessary equipment, and the staff to ensure the smooth working of the self-access center.

Klassen, Detaranami, Lui, Patri, and Wu (1998) investigated the effectiveness of the three-stage structures; directed, semi-directed, and self-directed of the remedial English Foundation Program in the self-access mode. They found that major factors influencing students' positive attitudes towards the self-access learning included improvements in English proficiency skills, confidence, advantages of materials, and organization of the course.

In summary, the results of these relevant research studies showed various benefits from using the SALLC. The SALLC enhanced the students' English skills and increased their confidence in learning English. Factors that helped to promote the SALLC were including, materials and facilities. Moreover, the role of the teacher is significant to link between the classroom and the self-access center. However, very little is known whether these factors play any roles at the SALLC of MFU. Hence, this study aimed to investigate to what

extent it enhances English skills of the students and encourages them to develop self-study learning habits.

Research Methodology

1. Participants

There were two groups of research participants: questionnaire respondents and interviewees in semi-structured interviews.

There were two stages for collecting the data from the questionnaires: First, purposive sampling was intended to collect data only from the students who went and used the services at the SALLC; therefore, the questionnaires were distributed in the SALLC. Then, a convenience sampling technique was used to select participants for the questionnaire. The participants were MFU students who randomly went to use the services at the SALLC. They consisted of 215 students who were from 11 schools, namely: School of Management, Liberal Arts, Sinology, Laws, Social Innovation, Science, Cosmetic Science, Health Science, Nursing, Agro-Industry, and Information Technology (as shown in Figure 1). They were 65 males and 150 females. All of the students were Thai whose years of study ranged from the first to the fifth.

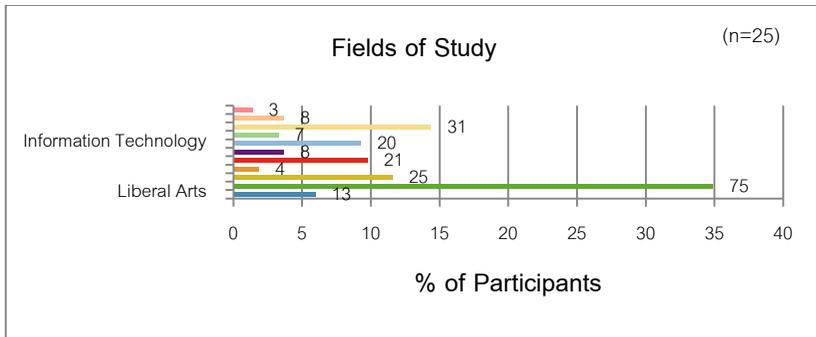


Figure 1 Fields of Study of Participants

Using purposive sampling, the semi-structured interview participants for the focus group were selected from those who responded to the questionnaire. Two focus groups were conducted with four students in each group. The four criteria used to select the interviewees were: field of study, years of study, gender and reasons to go to the SALLC to ensure the representativeness of the research participants. The interviewees included four males and four females who represented seven major fields of study. There were two students in the first year, two students in the second year, two students in the third year, one student in the fourth year, and one fifth year student. Moreover, the interviewees were chosen from the reasons why they went to the SALLC: three students were chosen because they were required to attend by the course (score given for attending), two students required by the teacher (no score given for attending), two students voluntarily attended, and one student went to the SALLC for another reason, to improve English skills.

2. Research Instruments

This study used two research tools, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The use of these tools enables the researcher to validate the study results and get more reliable findings.

The questionnaire was obtained using an adapted version of that developed by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzware (2012). The questionnaire concerned students' attitudes in terms of: cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of attitude. The items employed a four-point rating scale: 4= Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree and N/A = No Comment or No Experience.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Thai language because it is the mother tongue of the interviewees; therefore, they could give answers clearly and accurately with their first language. The focus group question guide was divided into two parts and each part aimed to obtain the following information: Part 1) to investigate the perceptions of the students who use the SALLC; Part 2) to identify the factors that will promote the use of the SALLC.

3. Validity and Reliability

1) Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

In this study, validity was enhanced by a review of the questionnaire from three experts of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, among whom was the chair of the SALLC committee at MFU and two experienced academic lecturers of MFU. The questionnaire was reviewed four times. A pilot test was done for the questionnaire to obtain feedback on the questionnaire in general, for example, the easiness of understanding the

statements, including wordings. Then, after revision, it was tested with 39 randomly selected people to verify Cronbach's Alpha reliability.

The questionnaire items were also assessed by the same group of experts as mentioned above. The index of item-objective congruence (IOC) was used to ensure the congruence between the question items and the specified objectives.

2) Validity and Reliability of the Focus Group Interview Questions

The questions related to the focus group were reviewed by three experts in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. The focus group interview questions were also assessed by the same group of the experts as mentioned in section of Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire (see number 3.3.1). The index of item-objective congruence (IOC) was used to analyze the congruence between the question items and the specified objectives.

4. Data Analysis

Data gathered from the questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the program 'Statistical Package for the Social Science' for Windows version 20 (SPSS 20). Data collected from focus group interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method.

Research Results and Discussion

1. The participants' perceptions towards self-study and the use of the SALLC

The study results indicated that participants had positive attitudes in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects towards the use of the

SALLC including: the materials, the facilities, the consultations, the coaching sessions, the activities, and the self-study materials. In contrast, the participants had negative cognitive and behavioral attitudes towards the teaching assistants. The findings of the questionnaire will be discussed on four significant points, which are the materials, the teaching assistants, the consultations, and the self-study materials.

1) The materials

The findings showed that the participants' overall attitudes towards materials were at highly satisfied level; however, in terms of the cognitive aspect, some participants thought that the materials did not support their English classes. This portrays a negative experience as a result of the participants' interaction with the SALLC materials which did not meet every student's needs. Moreover, this negative experience may contribute to the participants' negative attitudes and their unwillingness to learn as proposed by Mina (2013). Additionally, Javdani et al. (2011) proposed that the difficulty of finding the right materials was a factor in influencing attitudes of the usefulness of an SAC for learning to learn. These problems echo the findings of Klassen et al. (1998) which suggested that the variety and quantity of the materials provided in the self-access center were the factors that contribute to the students' positive attitudes towards the self-access learning.

2) Teaching assistants

The participants showed a low satisfactory level with the teaching assistants; they had negative attitudes in terms of cognitive and behavioral aspects towards the teaching assistants of the SALLC. In terms of cognitive aspect, the participants did not think that the teaching assistant could help

them improve their English skills, and they did not believe that they gained more knowledge and understanding from the teaching assistants.

Actually, the SALLC provided four teaching assistants to serve all MFU students with general information about the SALLC and help with the center's general errands. From the results it seems that the number of teaching assistants, or some aspect of their job specification was insufficient to support the SALLC's and students' needs.

3) Consultations

Most participants showed that they were highly satisfied with the consultation services in the SALLC. With regard to the three aspects of attitudes, they indicated positive cognitive, affective and behavioral attitude towards the consultations. They agreed that the counselor gave them advice that they needed and they looked forward to attending the consultation at the SALLC. Regarding the use of counselors within the SALLC, this study provides support for Salvia's view (2000) that a self-access center should provide the counsellors to ensure the smooth working of the self-access center. Counsellors clarify how to use the self-access materials; therefore, their job implies counseling the learners on materials which are appropriate to the learners' needs.

4) Self-Study Materials

Regarding the self-study materials, most of the participants showed positive attitudes towards self-study materials. They agreed that they used the SALLC test materials to evaluate their English skills, learned to use new learning strategies, and chose materials or facilities that would accommodate their learning. They also developed new learning strategies. This

result is in line with Little's study (1989) which indicated that self-access centers provide the students opportunities to learn by themselves, and make their own decisions about their learning. In the center, the students can select and work on tasks on their own, do activities to encourage self-directed learning, and develop autonomous learning habits (Sheerin, 1991).

In summary, the overall research results indicate that the participants had positive attitudes towards the use of the SALLC. The appropriate materials stimulate and encourage the learners' willingness to learn. All the SALLC services: the materials, the facilities, the teaching assistants, the consultations, the coaching sessions, the activities, and the self-study materials are considered as factors that promote and improve students' English language learning and help them to become self-directed learners. However, there is still room for improvement for the materials at the SALLC because some students found them unsupportive to their English classes.

The findings of the focus group interview will be discussed as follows: the students' performance improvement, the additional opportunities to practice English after class, and the purpose of the SALLC users.

1) Students' performance improvement

The results showed that using the SALLC services led participants to have positive attitudes towards English learning with relation to behavioral aspect. The students' performance had improved; so they felt more confident to communicate with their foreign classmates and could express their opinion in class. In other words, their speaking and listening skills had improved after practicing with foreign teachers in the SALLC. The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings in Klassen et al. (1998) which stated that

students found self-access learning useful and they were motivated to increase their confidence in learning English. The major factors influencing students' positive attitudes towards the self-access learning included improvements in English proficiency skills, an increase in confidence, the usefulness of materials, and an enhanced ability to understand content from their English courses.

2) Additional opportunities to practice English outside class

The participants strongly agreed that they had more opportunities to practice English after class because of the SALLC. In terms of cognitive attitude aspect, the participants thought their English skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing had improved after using the SALLC. Moreover, the SALLC enhanced and benefited their English skills in terms of English studies and daily life. Similar to the findings of Javdani et al. (2011), participants indicated that the SALLC is beneficial for learning specialized English and the SALLC is a useful place for learning to learn. The participants made use of the resources, even if only for practical reasons. Moreover, the SALLC is beneficial because learners must be able to control their own way of learning, which may help them not only be successful in class, but also be able to learn in an independent way outside of the class.

3) The purpose of the SALLC users

The interview results showed that using the SALLC led to positive attitudes towards English language learning regarding affective and behavioral aspects. Participants usually had specific purposes for visiting the SALLC. They planned and prepared themselves before going to the SALLC which related to behavioral aspect. Regarding the affective aspect, most of them went to see a

writing coach and enjoyed practicing writing with a writing coach at the SALLC. This is similar to the research done by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, Wongchana, et al. (2012) which found that when the students went to the center, their main goal was to improve language communication.

In contrast, in the current study, two participants had non-specific purpose before going to use the SALLC services. They did not set any plan before going to the SALLC, but sought to use the center only in a general way, hoping for some kind of improvement. In other words, by simply walking in to the center hoping for improvement, they might have neither adequately understood the process of self-directed learning, nor actively attempted join the self-directed learning process. This disconnect highlights that, in promoting self-directed learning, the role of the teachers is very important; they are able to encourage and guide the students in terms of learning process to become self-directed learners. According to Littlewood (1996), teachers should train their students on learning strategies, motivate them, and support their learning to build up their autonomy.

Moreover, teachers should help students by giving them motivation to study. These reasons should be aligned with the needs and goals of the students (Cheng & Lin, 2010). Javdani et al. (2011) indicated that the students did not find the self-access center useful in terms of helping them to become more independent learners, but in fact, they felt that acquiring skills and strategies to be self-directed learners must be done through the help of a teacher. Therefore, teachers should explicitly teach learning strategies so that students can learn independently. In doing so, the students will have new perceptions of competency, worth and control.

In conclusion, the SALLC facilitated the improvement of students' skills and capabilities of autonomy, independence, and self-directed learning. It provides the students opportunities to practice language skills on their own and organize their study. The resulting positive attitude enhances the success in English language learning and encourages motivation and high levels of achievement among the learners.

2. The factors that promote MFU students' use of the SALLC

Factors that promoted the participants towards the use of the SALLC can be categorized into two factors: internal and external factors.

Regarding internal factors, participants' perceptions towards the SALLC services, opportunities to practice with teachers, and participants' goals and achievement were indicated as the factors that promote the use of the SALLC. The research participants found that their English language skills had improved after using the SALLC. In other words, when participants had positive attitudes and perceptions towards the SALLC services and they made use of the SALLC to develop their English skills, these could lead them to continue using the SALLC. This is consistent with Hosseini and Pourmandnia's study (2013) which revealed that the student's attitude and perception were significant factors in language learning that influenced the student to learn effectively. In addition, the results illustrate that participants gained more speaking and listening techniques when practicing with foreign teachers individually in the SALLC. The participants could not practice with teachers individually in class because the time in class was insufficient, and they felt - more relaxed when they saw teachers at the SALLC than seeing them in the office. The last internal factor is students' goals and achievement. The

participants found that the SALLC services fit their needs and interests. Their goals were achieved after using the SALLC. Most participants went to the SALLC to improve their English skills on their own after classes, with some form of encouragement from a teacher.

In terms of external factors, it was indicated that the environment and the surroundings, materials, facilities, and consultations and the coaching sessions in the SALLC were the key factors in promoting the use of SALLC.

1) The environment and the surrounding

The findings showed that the environment and the surroundings in the SALLC were sufficiently quiet and uncrowded which positively attracted participants to go to the SALLC. When the participants felt comfortable and well-focused, this contributed to a self-directed learning atmosphere. Javdani et al. (2011) and Malcolm (2011) emphasized similarly that at the SALLC the students had a chance to work in a quiet and comfortable atmosphere with a large number of resources, opportunities that they did not have at home; therefore, the students feel like working, and creating their own ideas during their learning process.

2) Materials in the SALLC

It was indicated that materials in the SALLC facilitated the interviewees' learning. They acquired new vocabulary, especially from reading books, novels, and the self-study materials. Their English skills improved after using the materials in the SALLC. However, the participants suggested that the SALLC should update the materials such as novels and books. This is consistent with the study by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, Wongchana, et al.

(2012), the materials were indicated as a factor motivating the students to go to the SALLC to study and improve their language skills.

3) Facilities in the SALLC

The interview results revealed that the computer and internet access, karaoke rooms, and mini theatres in the SALLC facilitated the participants' learning. They enjoyed themselves and felt relaxed whenever they used karaoke rooms. Besides, they acquired new vocabulary at the same time from singing. Their listening and pronunciation improved after watching movies. This study provides support for Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, Wongchana, et al.'s study (2012) of Thai students' motivation level and attitudes towards the use of the materials and the facilities of the SALLC. They gained more vocabulary and entertainment from using the materials and the facilities at the SALLC. Furthermore, students suggested that the SALLC should update facilities such as movie DVDs, and new songs for singing karaoke. The SALLC should add more karaoke rooms and mini theatres; which may increase the currently low use of the karaoke rooms and of the mini theatre. Finally, participants suggested that the SALLC should select headphones that are easy to use because the headphones available were not compatible with the computers in the SALLC.

4) Consultation and coaching in the SALLC

The consultations and the coaching sessions were the main factors that encouraged the participants to go to the SALLC. They agreed that the consultations and the coaching sessions enhanced and supported their English skills. This is similar to the research done by Klassen et al. (1998) who mentioned that counselors could offer individual help for

specific language problems, especially in discussing students' essays. In the current study, the consultations were found to give the students opportunities to confirm their impressions regarding students' strengths and weaknesses in English; however, it was suggested that the SALLC should provide coaches in other languages, such as Japanese and Chinese.

To sum up, both internal and external factors influenced the success of English learning at the SALLC. These provided factors could be promoted to attract students: improved language learning, the comfortable and composed environment, and the surroundings which contribute to a self-access learning atmosphere.

Conclusion

The key findings of this study can be summarized into two main results related to the two main research questions. Firstly, using the SALLC services led to participants' positive attitude towards materials, which in turn enhanced and supported their English skills. The SALLC facilities enabled their learning regarding the acquisition of new vocabulary and the improvement of their listening and pronunciation skills. Consultations and coaching sessions were seen as relevant and supportive of their English classes. Extra activities at the SALLC encouraged foreign language learning. Finally, the self-study materials provided opportunities to learn on their own. In contrast, participants showed negative attitudes towards the teaching assistants. They did not think the teaching assistants could help them improve their English skills, and they did not think that they gained more knowledge and/or understanding from the teaching assistants.

Secondly, four factors that promoted the use of the SALLC were: the environment and the surroundings, the materials, the facilities, and the consultations and coaching sessions in the SALLC.

Based on both the questionnaire and interview results, it was suggested that to encourage the students' use of the SALLC, the SALLC should provide updated materials and facilities which are aligned with the learners' needs. The center should increase the total number of coaches and teaching assistants, provide more training for teaching assistants, and also provide coaches of other foreign languages. Finally, the SALLC should publicize its services extensively and offer students an introduction to or orientation on how to most effectively make use of the center.

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