

An implementation of a collaborative Internet -based project learning for Thai EFL students

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Abstract

The aim of study was to investigate the effectiveness of using a collaborative Internet-based project (I-B Project) in English language learning. Two kinds of language experience were examined, i.e., speaking and writing. It also examines the teacher's role in supporting students' collaborative learning as well as students' perceptions about using the Internet to look for the value of the websites on the Internet as a source of authentic texts for communicative EFL learning. Findings on speaking show that students' speaking ability can be easily enhanced by using Power Point presentation. The results on using a PPT presentation reveals that PPT was very motivating to encourage students speak in front of the class. The other result relating language experience shows that students' writing strategies were mostly plagiarism. This led to critical concerns in classroom Internet applications, particularly for teachers who favour using the Internet as teaching/learning tools. The investigation shows that changes for the better happened in this Project which was unconventional for Thai classroom practice, and students are very positive and attracted to the use of the Internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study originated from an attempt to examine the advantages and problems of an Internet-based Project (I-B Project) in providing students with language experience in a context of collaborative group learning. This study is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it looked for the approach that could motivate students to be active and self-directed learners in their English learning. Secondly, they study employed group work learning as a tool for students' inquiry in attaining their Project goal. And thirdly, the study focuses on using authentic texts from websites on the Internet as teaching and learning materials. As thus, the study was one which examined both the implementation of new teaching and learning strategies and the use the Internet as a

teaching tool. One could think of this as an intervention that had two innovative aspects. The use of the Internet in classrooms is relatively new world-wide and is certainly so in the Thai education system (Intajuck, 2006). The use of collaborative learning is also relatively new to Thai classrooms, which have usually employed more didactic teacher-centred methods (Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Tudor, 1996). This research combines the three aspects of the teaching and learning by Project Work, Collaborative Learning, and the Use of the Internet in a university setting in Thailand.

The literature review provides four major frameworks of the study. They are Project Work, collaborative learning, the Internet, and Internet-based projects. Project Work is characterised by self-directed learning and its impact is found to be fruitful in inspiring learners' 'passion' (Newell, 2003, p.87) for learning, encouraging responsibility (Hedge, 2000, p.364), and developing 'higher cognitive skills' (Henry, 1994, p. 49). As a consequence, Project Work creates motivation, and provides students opportunities to discover their own strengths, interest and talents (Hutchinson, 1996; Legutke & Thomas, 1991). Moreover, Project Work is said to promote learner autonomy and self-directed learning (Cotteral, 2000; Fang & Warschauer, 2004).

Although Project Work offers a lot of advantages in teaching students through real world tasks, and putting them in group learning situations, there are certain concerns in undertaking Project Work in traditional language classrooms. Firstly, what authentic materials should be selected in order to empower students in EFL context? Secondly, in terms of student-centred learning, how much support should teachers give in students' learning? The teachers still have a critical role in structuring and steering learning activities and outcomes.

Also, there are certain liabilities in employing student-centred projects in a traditional classroom. These are to do with students' responsibilities for carrying out project-tasks and teachers' involvement in providing students with assistance on language demands (Stoller, 1997). Thus, it is necessary to be aware of how much students should be authorised the power of learning and what and when language content should be taught. Even though student-centred method is stated in the National Education Plan in organizing classroom teaching and learning (ONEC, 2004), it is

also important to bear in mind issues of fairness when a project takes more time to complete than 'normal' methods of instruction; or when the results of a project carried out as a group may impact on the students' academic results. These factors may cause undue stress to students.

The second important feature of the I-B Project is an implementation of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning (CL) is an approach that can develop student learning and promote academic achievement, especially at university and college levels. Educators and teachers sometimes use the terms collaborative learning and cooperative learning interchangeably. This is because both pedagogies employ group work as an instructional tool (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Barkley and colleagues (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005, p. 4) define CL as students working in pairs or small groups to accomplish shared learning goals. This is because it has characteristics which actively engage students in learning more than the traditional classroom conducted by a lecturing teacher. CL makes learning interactive and dynamic, by involving learners working together in groups. This constitutes students constructing knowledge with peers; in fact, individual students are believed to have more insight into concepts when accomplishing tasks assigned in the company with their friends (Bruffee, 1993; Lotan & Whitcomb, 1998). For example Lotan and Whitcomb (1998) claim that 'Groupwork is a well-documented and highly recommended strategy for enhancing academic, cognitive, social, and attitudinal outcomes for students (p. 105).' CL can be a tool in searching for new knowledge and experience by increasing students' responsibility and reducing teacher's controlling. Six major features of CL are 1) learning in small groups; 2) co-working; 3) group interactions; 4) individual responsibility and accountability; 5) time concerns; and 6) an effect of changing or increasing students' learning experience.

Thirdly, the Internet was discussed in three areas. These are 1) the Internet as a teaching tool, 2) the Internet and communicative teaching, 3) advantages and benefits of using the Internet in the EFL classroom. . The characteristics of the Internet were that it was an effective teaching tool, including its being a vast and up-to-date source, providing students freedom and opportunities for self-directed learning. Its features helped contribute to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in that it has interactive features and being authentic materials. The advantages and disadvantages of the Internet for educational purposes are that, in spite of being authentic, user-

friendly, and promoting independent and individualized learning, there were some limitations of using the Internet materials such as its unreliability, being time-consuming, and some inappropriateness for students. Moreover, there were concerns of plagiarism in Internet-based learning. In spite of numerous advantages of the Internet, the ideas about the problems of Internet plagiarism were useful, particularly when I found that students in the study had not only used the Internet as a resource but in some cases had copied from it. This links to one of the research questions in looking for students' perceptions about using the Internet.

Finally, I examined the Internet-based projects, including their features. Research studies show that Internet-based projects share three similar kinds of aspects; that are using Internet applications, engaging students in collaborative learning, and students' creating webpage or website and publishing them on the Internet. However, there is a distinct feature of teachers' employing collaborative learning. This is collaboration within the classroom and between classrooms. Whatever collaboration is, results of research studies reveal that Internet-based projects promote learner autonomy, increase authentic interaction and learning motivation.

Although collaborative Internet projects prove to be a motivating pedagogical approach and valuable to the EFL classroom, only some teachers who are interested in enhancing technological instruction make use of them. The reason is that project-based instruction needs more time and effort compared to the traditional lecture classroom (Fang & Warschauer, 2004). Considering other positive effects that Internet-based projects can contribute to student educational development, such as learner autonomy, interdependence, and interpersonal skills, it is a worthwhile challenge to implement this collaborative Internet project in spite of technological problems.

For this study, the Internet-based project shared two features similar to the above studies in that the students used Internet information from websites to create their own project which they chose the topic of their interest, and they worked collaboratively in groups to produce the learning product, i.e., a report. However, there were two differences from the above studies. First, the collaboration was among students in the same classroom not from different classes or universities. The other distinct characteristic was that the students in this study produced a written report and made

an oral presentation, not producing a website project and publishing it on the Internet. Since the study was based on students 'using information from websites to create a project by writing a report, I considered chances that students might commit plagiarism either innocently or purposefully. Besides, the aim of this study was trying a new idea of teaching EFL in technology setting; it was just an experiment of the teacher/researcher who wanted to find a new innovation for professional development.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of study was to investigate the effectiveness of using a collaborative Internet-based project in English language learning. Students at this particular university had low motivation in English learning in the classroom. Moreover, their communicative skills in writing and speaking were not satisfactory, in spite of their having completed quite a lot of English courses. However, the advantage of the site was that it provided facilities for IT-enhanced instruction.

This study looked for an approach to motivate students to become active learners. Thus, project work, which was considered as a learner-centred approach, was employed in combination with collaborative learning. Using collaborative learning would allow students to work together in small groups in order to accomplish the goal of their project. This would provide the teacher chances to examine features of collaborative learning that would affect successful and unsuccessful learning in internet-based projects. Also, it was planned to investigate the roles of the teacher, because the teacher's instruction would be minimised whereas the autonomy of the students would be increased in undertaking their project. The investigation also examined students' perceptions about using the Internet to look for the value of the websites on the Internet as a source of authentic texts for communicative EFL learning. It was expected that with the integration of project work, collaborative learning, and the Internet, students might be encouraged to have high motivation and develop positive attitudes towards learning English.

3. METHOD OF THE STUDY

This study applied case study design (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 2003) and action research approach (Burns, 1999; Corey, 1949; Hitchcock

& Hughes, 1995; Hopkins, 2002; Kember, 2000; Kemmis, 1999) as tools for research method. The following research questions were used as the guidelines for the study:

- 1) What is the teacher's role in supporting students' collaborative learning?
- 2) What kind of language experience do students gain through undertaking the Internet-based Project?
- 3) What are the features of students' collaborative learning in the Internet-based Project?
- 4) What are students' perceptions about using the Internet in the Internet-based Project?

Case study design and action research fit together well in this study for three major aspects. Firstly, the purpose of both research designs help teachers to become teacher-researchers who understand best about their classroom problems and solutions. Whereas the purpose of case study inquiry is to gain a full/in-depth understanding of a particular and single instance of a real life situation, the purpose of action research is to look for "changes" and to solve specific issues. In this study I was teacher-researcher who wanted to seek understanding for solutions in a particular classroom situation where IT instruction was enhanced. This could lead to my professional development.

Secondly, the innovative program of the I-B Project was employed as a tool for changing EFL learning and teaching in the IT context. The program that I carried out as a teacher-researcher was in some ways action research. According to Hitchcock and Hughes, the four stages of action research are identification of a problem, collecting information, analysing, planning action/intervention and implementing and monitoring the outcomes (1995, p. 28). Thus, this study used an integrated method of both case study and action research on what was a classroom-based program, to give me insights and to serve as an initiation of change in Thai EFL classroom instruction by investigating a collaborative Internet project as an innovative teaching tool.

And finally, both action research and case study are compatible because both can use qualitative methods to collect data such as observation, questionnaire, videotape recording, diary, interview (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Hopkins, 2002; McNiff,

1993). For this study, data were collected from teacher’s journal, students’ reports, videotape recordings, interviews and e-mail reports.

For this study, trustworthiness was used to ensure the quality of data collection and analysis. ‘Trustworthiness’ is a concept used to ensure that the qualities of findings for qualitative studies are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.290 cited in Fenton, B and Mazulewicz, J, 2008).

Findings were derived from five sources of data. Teacher’s journal reflected what the teacher did (roles) in the I-B Project. The interviews investigated students’ perceptions about the advantages and problems of a particular teaching strategy. Students’ reports, videotape recordings, and e-mail reports were also collected. This helped to strengthen trustworthiness of the findings of the study. Besides, the main purpose of the study was not to measure students’ level of learning but to examine their perception of the advantages and disadvantages of collaborative group work and Internet-based learning. As Burns points out, the multiple sources of data collection could provide “multiple perspectives” (1999, p. 163) on the study. She also argues that “if different methods of investigation produce the same result then the data are likely to be valid” (Burns, 1999, p. 163).

To clarify the meaning of trustworthiness in qualitative studies, Table 3.1 provides a clear conceptualisation. Lincoln and Guba (1982, p.3) have compared the criteria for judging the quality of quantitative and qualitative research.

Table 3.1: Comparison of criteria for judging the quality of quantitative (conventional) versus qualitative (naturalistic) research

Conventional terms	Naturalistic terms
internal validity	Creditability
external validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

Nevertheless, with all the advantages that case study and action research methods provided for the study, there were some limitations in the research design. The study

was very small-scale, and all the participants were volunteers. As Hamel et al. (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993, p. 23) point out, case study method lacks “representativeness”. Moreover, the way evidence was collected, constructed, and analysed might be biased and subjective, which could affect the validity of the results. Since my role in this study as teacher and assessor might affect what the students said in the interviews, and their statements evaluating the work in class were thus not likely to be completely reliable, so the main interest would be in their perceptions of the problems and advantages. However, in spite of the potential threat of lacking objectivity in qualitative data for the study the aim of the study was to make an “analytic” rather than “statistical” generalization (Yin, 1984, p. 39).

3.1 THE PARTICIPANTS

Three groups of students participated in the study, (three to four students for each group), and were selected from student volunteers. They were third year undergraduate students majoring in Business English in a Rajabhat University in Bangkok. The students were 18-20 years old. They had studied English in primary and secondary school for eight years before enrolling in the Business English Program. They all had enrolled in basic and intermediate grammar, reading, and writing and speaking courses during their first and second year. According to the course description they were assumed to have the skills of paragraph writing. In addition to this, they all enrolled in “Public Speaking” course during this study (see in Appendix 8).

The students chose their own group members and the topic of interest for their project. The first group chose to do the project titled “Travel in Bangkok.” The second group was “Milk Dairy Farm Business” group. And the last group was the Internet Services Provider (ISP) group. There were four students in this group.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study was undertaken to explore and provide an example of a particular teaching strategy (the I-B Project); it was important to collect various data sources to answer the research questions. For this study, the data sources were collected for different

purposes to address the research questions. These were teacher's journal, student written reports, videotape recordings, interviews, and e-mail reports.

The study employed Strauss and Corbin's coding procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) for data analysis. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61; 1998, p. 101) helped me in breaking down the data and categorising them. In addition to this, axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96; 1998, p. 123) was employed in order to link the concepts of subcategories found in the analysis and analyse their meanings (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 299). After reviewing literature on strategies of qualitative data analysis, I found that Strass and Corbin's coding procedure suited my research study. It could help me explain and clarify what had happened in both teacher's behaviour and students' performances in the study.

In order to interpret the events occurring during the study, I used the techniques of code notes, colour coding with the highlighter on the computer screen to categorise the data. Then I employed the use of questioning such as "What did teacher/students do? Why did they do that? What does that mean?" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 77) to analyse the data and group the ideas emerged. In later stages of data analysis the process was similar but the concepts were grouped differently since each method of data collection had particular purposes related to research questions, as described below.

4.1 TEACHER'S JOURNAL

The teacher's journal was recorded to examine the role of the teacher in the innovative program. The purpose of teacher's journal was to examine what role and responsibility the teacher took and how they were carried out from the beginning to the end of the project. This would give a reflection of how the teacher supported students' learning both in gaining language experience and collaborative learning. The journal was analysed by using coloured coding to label the actions the teacher took during implementing this innovative program.

4.2 STUDENTS' REPORTS

The students' reports were analysed to investigate the writing strategies they employed in writing the reports. The reports were analysed by comparing between the original text taken from the Internet web sites and the students' text. I employed both coloured coding to categorise the method of students' writing. Then I used the technique of questioning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to analyse the writing strategies that the students adopted in writing the report. This aims to examine how the students, as EFL learners, developed their language learning by using the Internet web sites as the resources to create their reports. In other words, what writing strategies characterised their language learning? The writing strategies were categorised from basic writing to critical writing.

4.3 VIDEOTAPE RECORDING

Students' making oral presentations were videotape recorded and transcribed. There were three of them. The transcripts were analysed by comparing the oral reports and the written reports of the students. The purpose was to draw out the oral presentation strategies that the students used to achieve their presentation, to answer the research question of how this project developed students' language learning in terms of speaking skills. Data were categorized according to speaking strategies the students used in making oral presentations.

4.4 INTERVIEWS

The two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in order to investigate the students' perception of problems and benefits of collaborative group learning and using the Internet. The first and second interviews were transcribed. Analysis of the interview employed colour-coding techniques to identify students' perception. The perceptions from the first interview and second interview were compared to see if the students' views changed in relation to collaborative learning and using the Internet source.

4.5 E-MAIL REPORTS

The purpose of the e-mail reports was to provide clues about distribution of tasks in the groups, which could reveal aspects of their collaborative learning. The e-mail reports were printed out and words, phrases, or sentences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 81) that indicated their working were highlighted.

5. FINDINGS

The aims of this research were to investigate four arenas. These were the teacher's role in the I-B Project, the language experiences students gained by participating in the I-B Project, characteristics of students' collaborative learning, and students' perceptions about using the internet. Findings are as follows:

5.1 TEACHER'S ROLE IN THE I-B PROJECT

In supporting student collaborative learning, three major aspects regarding the teacher's role were found in the collaborative Internet-based project: managing, monitoring, and supporting. And they clearly were complementary and occurred from the beginning through to the end of the program, i.e., during both the part of Teaching Stage, and the part of Project Stage. While in the first part the teacher role focused on the learning **Products** of the Project (knowledge and skills), in the second part it concerned about the **Process** in undertaking the Project.

Managing in the introductory sessions can be regarded as the decisions made in regard to planning of teaching and learning strategies in the classroom and elsewhere. On the contrary, the decisions in the Project implementation part can be regarded as the decisions made in regard to assigning the Project and adjusting the program mostly outside the classroom.

Monitoring in the former section can be regarded as the decisions made in regard to the delivery of teaching and learning strategies in the classroom and elsewhere. In contrast, in the later section the teacher decisions were made in regard to checking student progress in undertaking the project mostly outside the classroom.

Lastly, **Supporting**, in the teaching of the initial sessions, can be regarded in terms of providing relevant knowledge and skills, including encouragement, within teaching and learning strategies in the classroom and elsewhere. In the Project part, supporting

was mainly providing encouragement, advice and help for carrying out the project outside the classroom.

Thus, while managing and monitoring in the first section relate more to teaching, supporting relates more to the interaction between teacher and learner **in the classroom**. On the other hand, managing and monitoring in the Project section relate more to controlling the program, while supporting relates more to the interaction between teacher and learner **outside the classroom**.

The findings also showed that this collaborative Internet-based project could incorporate student collaborative learning, but could also disadvantage some aspects. The advantages were that the teacher reduced control over student learning and handed over to students the authority to acquire knowledge on their own. This gave students freedom in learning choices, managing their own learning and solving their problems among peers. Thus, the teacher became less centred in the role of knowledge imparter, which was part of the purpose of employing collaborative learning in the I-B Project. Moreover, the interview showed that students enjoyed their freedom in pursuing their learning. These findings supported the role of teacher in conducting collaborative e-learning claimed by Barkley (2005) and Johnson and Johnson (1994).

5.2 STUDENT LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES DUE TO THE I-B PROJECT

The I-B Project uncovered two kinds of student language learning experience that were writing and oral experiences. This emerged in a form of writing strategies they used in writing the report, e-mails, and speaking strategies they employed in the oral presentation. It was found that student writing experience mostly depended on cut and paste and similar strategies such as substituting and replacing, merging and expanding. However, some students developed their own writing by rephrasing and summarising, including translating and composing. Moreover, students' reporting by email in English advantaged them in using English for an authentic communication. The oral experience students gained from making a PPT presentation was that they employed a wide range of speaking strategies in making their oral presentation. In addition, the interview data show that the students who prepared and rehearsed their oral presentation made an effective delivery and smooth presentation. These findings to this second research question are presented in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

Table 5.1: Writing strategies students employed in the I-B Project

WRITING STRATEGIES	NO. OF CASES
Cut & Paste	All
Substitute & Replace	All
Merge & Expand	1
Rephrase & Summarise	2
Translate & Compose	2

As shown in the Table 5.1, there are five writing strategies students gained from writing experience. However, only the first and the second strategies were employed by all cases. These are ‘cut and paste’ and ‘substitute and replace.’ Only one case employed ‘merge and expand’, while two cases preferred to use ‘rephrasing and summarising’ and ‘translation and composing.’

Table 5.2 demonstrates nine speaking strategies students gained in oral experience. Obviously, only two strategies, i.e., reading from script/notes and using presentation/speech conventions, are employed by all cases. Two cases were happier to employ the third, the fourth, and the ninth strategies. And some students preferred four different strategies. These are reading from PPT slides, summarising, paraphrasing from notes, and using word substitution and deletion.

Table 5.2: Speaking strategies students employed in the I-B Project

SPEAKING STRATEGIES	NO. OF CASES
Reading from script/notes	All
Reading from PPT slides	1
Speaking from memory	2
Speaking from understanding using cues from PPT slides/notes	2
Summarising	1
Paraphrasing from notes	1
Using word substitution and deletion	1
Using presentation/ speech conventions	All
Using daily life conversational language	2

The following sections will discuss three main issues that emerged from the findings which are 1) plagiarism in writing, 2) using PPT for the oral presentation, and 3) assessment.

5.2.1 Plagiarism in writing

Students' writing in the report was mostly cut and paste. Data analysis showed that though students were aware of duplicating the original language from the Internet, they did not think it was a serious issue. Research related to Internet-based learning reveals that plagiarism on the Internet is commonly found among EFL students and could be expected from Internet-based learning. In terms of language learning, students hardly showed what they learned from writing the report. Their reason for copying the electronic source from the Internet confirmed the study on certain reasons for student plagiarising by Gajadhar (1998) that students committed plagiarism because they were not aware of serious issues and copying mechanism. In terms of teaching application, it is important to note that we should be concerned more about how learners could benefit from duplicating (in order to develop their writing) than why they commit plagiarism. As shown in Table 5.1 above, students engaged in various strategies of writing in producing their report. Some strategies (translation and composing) demonstrated their efforts to use their own words.

Relating to the teacher's role, the copying strategies could have been limited if language assistance had been provided or if formative assessments had been done to correct student writing before they submitted their report. Students' writing strategies can be illustrated in Figure 5.1 below:

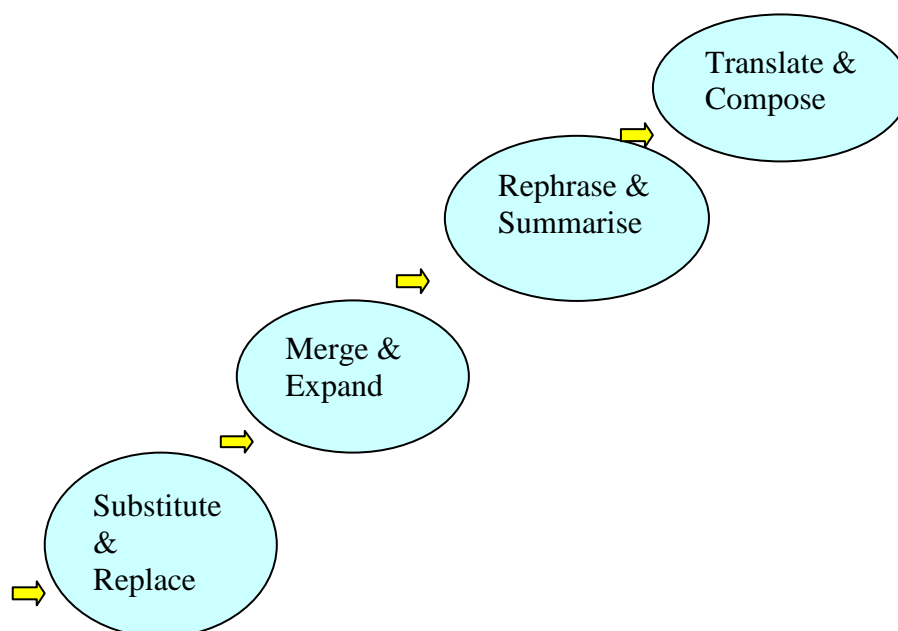




Figure 5.1: Stepping Stones for Writers in the Electronic Era

5.2.2 Using Power Point for the oral presentation

Secondly, Power Point (PPT) for presentation resulted in high student engagement. The PPT presentation was an effective tool in supporting and motivating students by engaging them in serious practice for the quality of presentation. Students put a lot of effort to condensing (summarising skill) the content of the presentation within ten minutes (structuring the presentation). In addition, they spent time together in rehearsals (collaborative learning), including integrating demonstration and quiz (creative thinking) to make their oral presentation attractive and deliver it effectively. PPT played a key role for students' speaking fluently. Data analysis in all three groups showed that students who used cues from PPT slides demonstrated fluent speaking in their presentation. It seems that PPT hit on the right spot in motivating and facilitating them to speak fluently. And thus, it may be that Power Point contributed to their fluency. This finding has important implications for pedagogy because there is ample anecdotal evidence that Thai students are shy and rarely want to speak because of being afraid of making grammatical errors and mispronunciations when using English (Klanrit, 2005).

Concerning student language learning, students used scripts derived from the written report. This did not prove to be real communicative speaking for the communicative purpose in CLT (Burns, 1990; Hedge, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ur, 1996). Moreover, some students showed that they did not understand what they spoke, e.g., Wadee and Paul in the ISP group. However, some students employed speaking strategies that involved their ability to converse using daily life language (as shown in Table 5.2) in their oral presentations. This helped them to be confident in speaking English without interruption from teacher's correcting. And Thai students really need confidence in speaking fluency. It is concluded that employing a PPT presentation for enhancement of speaking abilities can motivate and encourage learners of a foreign language in the Thai context.

5.2.3 Assessment

Finally, concerning assessments for student language learning, the written report was not evaluated for the quality of writing. It came as the end-product of learning for the project. This provided both advantages and disadvantages for student language learning and motivation in English learning. The advantages related to learning motivation. These are that 1) students were able to pursue their I-B Project work without its continuity being interrupted, and 2) they were not discouraged by having a corrected and re-corrected written report, which might have distracted and demotivated them from keeping on task to finish. On the other hand, a disadvantage was that students' project outcomes did not demonstrate significant language learning in writing. However, the findings shed light on the process of learning with the electronic source. To clarify, it shows how students dealt with the Internet language by employing the five writing strategies displayed in Table 5.1. This could lead to developing teaching strategies and creating learning materials which take advantage of Internet source.

5.3 USING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND THE INTERNET IN THE PROJECT

Findings about students' collaborative learning (CL) in the I-B project and the features of students learning groups reveal that there were three aspects regarding CL. These were 1) roles, 2) motivation, and 3) group climate.

Students in successful groups engaged in roles that had clear-cut task allocation, group commitment, and cooperativeness. In addition, their motivation was high due to significant factors such as grades, project requirement, enjoyment in learning, positive attitudes to group working, and group achievement. As a consequence, the group climate was cooperative and pleasant to work in. On the other hand, the less successful groups did not succeed in engaging in roles due to relying on peers and the leaders being autocratic. Moreover, the group members did not share mutual interest and learning goals. This led to an uncooperative climate in group work which resulted from lack of group engagement and leaders lacking group responsibility. However, students in the unsuccessful groups, e.g., Paul in the ISP group, were not discouraged or threatened by CL. They showed intention to work in groups again and learned that they needed to have high participation in making decisions to choose the topic of the

project as well as not relying on peers. Thus even the less successful participants gained something positive from the experience.

The purpose of the third research question was to examine the features of collaborative learning in the I-B Project. The findings provide conclusions in two main features of collaborative learning, which are self-directed learning and group work learning. An impact of the two factors resulted in students feeling both successful and unsuccessful in undertaking the I-B Project as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Features of collaborative learning

GROUP ACHIEVEMENT	FEATURES OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING		
	Roles	Motivation	Group Climate
Successful group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear-cut task allocation - Group commitment - Cooperating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grades - Project requirements - Enjoyment in learning - Positive attitude towards group working - Group achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helpful - Supportive - Compromising - A feeling of belongingness - Peer respect
Unsuccessful group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relying on peers - Being autocratic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of mutual interest - Lack of goal sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of group engagement -Leader abrogating group responsibility

In relation to self-directed learning, the interview showed that all students like the I-B Project because it gave them a chance to be self-directed learners. This involved choosing a topic of interest, planning, managing, and making decisions on creating the product of learning. For this study, the results were found to be both problematic and advantageous for students' language learning experience. The problem relates to common characteristics of Thai students, i.e., that they are passive and dependent learners (Muangkaew, 2006); thus students were not familiar with having authority to manage their own learning as in undertaking the I-B Project. This disadvantaged them in gaining skills in managing learning and acquiring knowledge by themselves. The interviews showed that the degree of responsibility and accountability the students felt determined the extent to which they were passive or active. Overall, students, whether strong or weak in English learning, who did not like studying in a traditional didactic method, preferred being self-directed in pursuing their learning goal.

It can therefore be concluded that the effectiveness of CL significantly relies on student responsibility and accountability, and that mixed abilities students preferred being self-directed to being teacher-directed.

The other feature of collaborative learning was the usefulness of group work for the students. The findings reveal that CL provided more positive than negative effects on student learning. In terms of positive effects, group work supports the discussion about their benefits in Section 2.4.4. The advantages deal with enhancing self-directed and independent learning, adjusting social and interpersonal skills to cooperate with peers in group working. In addition, problem-solving and critical skills were developed due to group conflicts and project requirements, i.e., producing the written report and making the oral presentation. Moreover, a group size of three with mixed-ability students provided the optimum advantage for collaborative learning.

On the basis of the above, it can be stated that CL could create group conflicts but students learned to adjust themselves and compromise with group members due to peer help and support. It is concluded that the greatest usefulness of CL was that it enhanced self-directed learning through group process in engagement of students in group commitment and contributions.

5.4 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROJECT

This section presents findings about student perceptions about using the Internet. These are categorised in three groups: 1) language use of the report, 2) language use of the oral presentation, and 3) usefulness of the Internet.

On the use of the Internet language for the report, the findings show that students perceived the language of Internet in two different extreme viewpoints. Data analysis shows that students copied because the language from the Internet source was **difficult** and they were not aware of plagiarism. However, some students copied though the language was **simple**. This opposite view gives an unexpected finding in plagiarism since duplicating would be expected to occur when students found the Internet source difficult. However, Sally (leader of the Travel in Bangkok Group) perceived it differently. She said the language from the web was easy to understand; therefore there was no need to paraphrase. This obviously confirmed student unawareness of plagiarism. Another example was Sam in the ISP group. Sam viewed commercial copyright as the issue, rather than plagiarism of ideas. This is due to their

generation identifying it as a source of commercial entertainment (games, music, videos, etc.). This could be said as a generation-gap perception.

On the use of Internet language for the oral presentation, students perceived a PPT presentation as either a **duplicating**, or a **summarising** version of the written report. Also they perceived that the good and effective presentation contributed to the key success of the I-B Project.

In terms of usefulness, students perceived that the Internet was beneficial to them in provision of large accessible resources, new knowledge, including a good place for relaxation and entertainment. Although they were aware of the disadvantages of time-consumption and having too much information on the Internet, this did not discourage them from using the Internet.

These findings to the fourth research question are shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Student perceptions about using the Internet

Student Perceptions			
Language Use of the Written Report	Language Use of the Oral Presentation	Usefulness	
		Advantages	Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simple vocabulary - Difficult language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Duplicating - Summarising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing easy access to information - Providing a great source of data - Uncovering the new knowledge - Being a cheap place for entertaining and relaxation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time consuming - Overwhelming information

The findings reveal that the Internet provides very motivating learning material but causes some problems for students. There are three additional conclusions arising from these findings.

Firstly, in spite of time consumed surfing the Net, the interviews showed that students like the Internet. It is true that searching the Internet takes time; however, this was a part of individualised learning. Moreover, learning at one's own pace also takes time. Students accepted that they learned how to extract information from the Internet by using skimming and scanning. Besides, they learned to type key words in order to get the target information from search engines. In terms of communicative language learning, it can be concluded from this study that the Internet's features of being authentic and a source of up-to-date language make it meaningful and interesting to students.

A second conclusion is that an Internet-based project can be problematic because it disadvantages students who do not like using technology, e.g., Paul in the ISP group. This confirms the findings of Kluge (1997). As a consequence, some students were not motivated by Internet-based learning, which could result in ineffective and unsuccessful learning if this mode of teaching and learning were too much. This could be true of any information source: there will be some people who don't like working with it. In teaching it is always wise to avoid too much reliance on any particular learning style or mode.

A third conclusion, based on evidence from the interviews, is that the large amount of information on the Internet can be distracting and makes students get carried away and not stay on task. This can make students become slow in learning pace instead of the other way round. On the other hand, if they are reading in English on these distracting sites, there could be some incidental language learning.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

There were some limitations in the design of this study. One limitation was the absence of baseline data to establish student language levels before undertaking the I-B Project. Thus there was no objective assessment of their improvement in writing or oral skills from their experiences within the Project. Another limitation dealt with time consumption because students carried out most of their work outside the classroom, which was difficult for the teacher to monitor. However, the researcher was able to explore in detail certain aspects of the implementation of the Project using

intensive observation and interview methods. These provided detailed understanding of the benefits the Project had for students, some of which related more to processes rather than outcomes. Given that this I-B Project was innovative, the use of exploratory techniques can be justified in this case. Hopefully the findings from the investigation, however tentative, can provide a basis for more evaluative work on interventions such as the one described in this study. Four areas for this further research are

6.1 AN APPLICATION OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB TO DEVELOP WRITING SKILL

As shown in Figure 5.1, students applied various writing strategies to produce the written report. This seems to be the hierarchy in their writing by using the WWW. It would be worth trying to investigate how students learn to develop writing skill from the cut and paste stage to the autonomous stage, i.e., using their own critical thinking in writing. Since students are attracted to the Internet, they can be motivated to develop writing skill with the application of the WWW (Beazley & Horsley, 1996; Fox, 1998; Warschauer, 1997).

6.2 IMPROVING READING FROM THE WORLD WIDE WEB

This study did not explore student proficiency in reading skill. However, the interview reveals that students employed fast reading skills (skimming and scanning) to retrieve information on the Internet. Since students read a lot on the Web in order to select information related to their project, it would be worth trying to examine to what extent the Web can develop reading efficacy.

Regarding reading and listening experience, though some students mentioned in their interviews that they learned to read quickly when surfing the Internet by using 'skimming and scanning' technique, there is insufficient evidence to support a claim that students gained language experience in reading and listening. Nevertheless, it would be worth investigating whether the Internet could be utilised to improve Thai EFL learning reading skills.

6.3 USE OF INTERNET-BASED PROJECTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVELS

Since English is compulsory in secondary education and the Ministry of Education has provided a lot of computers and encourages teachers and students to use technology, project-based learning is recommended in the secondary school curriculum in terms of integrated learning of subject matter (e.g., in science, maths, computer science). Moreover, utilising Power Point presentation might be challenging for students in other subjects. This can also improve speaking and enhance IT skills in Thai as well as English. Thus, it might be worth examining the use of an Internet-based project by teachers and students in Thai secondary schools. By integrating English Internet-based projects with other subject matter, the impact of project-based learning and the Internet on teachers and students alike could be investigated.

7. CONCLUSIONS

I would like to conclude that I have experienced and learned that changes for the better happened in this Project which was unconventional for Thai classroom practice. The investigation reveals that students are very positive and attracted to the use of the Internet. It was also discovered that Thai students can be encouraged to develop self-directed learning skill through a collaborative learning strategy.

The findings of the study did not satisfy my quest for an alternative approach to motivate students **and** develop their English language learning. However, this study shed light on what and how I need to look into if I am to design and carry out similar kinds of Internet-based projects in the future. These are handling Internet-based learning (i.e., electronic plagiarism), scaffolding plans for language assistance and learning assessments, and dealing with time management in monitoring. And student-centred learning is time-consuming. This study should inform other teachers who are interested in using the I-B Project in three areas which are employing Internet-based learning (i.e., teaching of writing), using project-based learning, and dealing with collaborative learning. Finally, other areas of further research are suggested, including recommendations for classroom practice and policy makers. Now, I have come to the final part of my exploration. I have now learned that the Internet can be powerful and influential to students both in daily life and their education. But it can be harmful to

creative thinking and damaging critical thinking in students' language learning, i.e., committing plagiarism. However, with the advanced technology, we teachers cannot step back and refuse to deal with its drawbacks. But let's look at it closely and professionally to make the best out of technology advancement.

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