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### **A Blended Learning Case Study: The Application of Station Rotation Model in ELT Listening and Speaking Class at Phayao Pittayakhom School**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to investigate a blended learning approach that could be applicable for English Language Teaching (ELT) in listening and speaking within Thai provincial school educational contexts. This qualitative case study purposively selected Station Rotation Model (SRM) to be studied in ELT listening and speaking class at a Thai provincial school. This research paper aims at finding the barriers and benefits, as well as the challenges of SRM application in a Thai provincial school. The study is conducted at Phayao Pittayakhom School, a provincial public high school in Phayao, a northern province in Thailand. There were total sample of 45 participants from Matthayom 4 class: 20 female and 25 male students, aged between 15 to 16 years old. Research data and findings were collected from classroom observation, observational report, quizzes, and focus group interviews. The research have obtained substantial key findings on students' positive learning responses and attitudes towards SRM, potential barriers and benefits of SRM implementation in ELT listening and speaking class, as well as the challenges found in Thai provincial school settings. This research is determined to encourage further research on other blended learning approaches that could be useful and effective for Thai public provincial schools and other educational settings or levels.

*Keywords:* Blended Learning, Station Rotation Model (SRM), English Language Teaching (ELT)

#### **Introduction**

In 1999 (B.E.2542), the National Education Act (NEA) of Thailand enacted a “learner-centered approach” to develop the quality of the educational systems and promote student-centered learning classroom (Ministry of Education, 2008). Following the reform, the Thai education systems have since attempt to plan and encourage a call for innovative learner-centered teaching practices in all subjects. There are various well documented literatures of such approach being applied into English Language Teaching (ELT). Although with the promulgation of the learner-centered reform, Thailand, however, still need more rooms for progression and improvement. Educational administrations are still learning how to apply new understanding of the contribution of Information Communication Technology (ICT) learning, and infusing ICT infrastructure and resources into schools and educational policy planning (SEAMEO, 2010). Some developed schools are shifting from traditional pedagogical approaches toward personalized learning, and using their competent resources and technological readiness to promote innovative teaching and learning. On the contrary, traditional pedagogical approaches are still taking place in majority of developing brick-and-mortar schools, especially in smaller provinces and rural areas due to limited resources and Internet accessibilities. It is therefore indisputable that majority of Thailand's public schools,

especially in provincial areas are still widely practicing a traditional pedagogical approach which is a one-size-fits-all curriculum. Most traditional curriculums expected all students to progress at the same time with the same curriculums, and much of the approach is incorporated into every subject including language teaching.

Blended learning is a learner-centered approach that is claimed to be one of the effective pedagogical approaches in the recent years of western educational development. There were many successful and effective claims of blended learning approach case studies in the western educations as such from KIPP Empower Academy, Alliance for College-Read Public Schools, FirstLine Schools, Rocketship Education and Summit Public Schools (Aspire Public Schools *Blended Learning 101 Handbook*, 2013). Idaho Digital Learning Academy (2013) also asserted that this emergent instructional approach was proven to be beneficial with successful case studies that are highly effective in helping their districts schools to meet the challenges of student performance and achievement, also helping schools with limited resources and answering the objectives of 21st century learners.

According to Horn and Staker (2011), blended learning is defined as and when a student is at least participated in a supervised brick-and-mortar location or place that is away from home, and at least with involvement through online delivery with the element that the student could control over time, place, path and/or pace. Blended learning has always been on the assumption that it is a teaching practice that combines the traditional face-to-face instructions between teachers and students, with the involvement of using online elements. However, blended learning is not just merely an integration of online materials or technology. There are many different set of models of implementation along with the complexity of its learning continuum. The station rotation model (SRM) is one of its pedagogical models and is probably one of the most common blended learning model that schools finds it practically less complex to be implemented and adapted. According to Horn and Staker (2012), SRM is defined as an implementation within a given course or subject on which the students would rotate on a fixed schedule or when the teacher assigns the students, which involves at least online learning. To simplify, it is the rotating of assignments or tasks given to the students inside a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom, but which also involves elements of online learning materials and technology used.

### Literature Review

#### ELT Methodology in Thai Context (Listening and Speaking)

The Thai government has launched series of education reforms since 1999. One of the focused aims is using the “learner-centered approach”. Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf and Moni (2006) mentioned that the purpose of this approach is to shift from traditional teacher-centered to learner-centered approach in order to promote self-learning. The approach was long introduced in western education and the impact of learner-centered began to evidently spread in language teaching, and thereafter developed communicative approaches that shifted the teaching-learning processes. Despite decades long of practicing pedagogical theories on learner centered approach, Thailand is still not achieving much effective and successful result even when implementing the contemporary trend of English language teaching pedagogical. Foley (2005) critiqued that the limited success of ELT in Thailand is due to absence of proper syllabus, dry teaching techniques, which often focused on grammatical structures, limited learning media, inappropriate texts, assessment and evaluation.

A critiqued research about ELT in Thailand by Chamcharatsri and Methitham (2006) reflected back to its historical background that linked to the political, economical and cultural roles. The authors posited that Thai teachers of English experienced the dominance of teaching methods, classroom materials and testing techniques which were developed by the western world. They also cited from Kumaravadivelu (2003) that the effect of this

phenomenon compels teachers' expectation to follow to a particular set of the theoretical principles and classroom methods which are conceptualized only by the Western theorists, but not by the local teachers, and were considered to be appropriate. This ideology caused local teachers to devalue their own teaching experience and disempowered their instructional judgments.

Initially, Thai EFL teachers used Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual teaching methodologies in English classroom. However, the two approaches were changed to correspond with the learner-centered reform (Khamkhen, 2010). After decades of experiment with various ELT methodologies such as task-based and content-based approach, a more preferred method was introduced: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This methodology was accredited by many notable scholars and was promoted through ELT conferences and teaching materials (Leung, 2005). However, Bhatt (2002) refuted this concept and method with Noam Chomsky's notion of "an ideal native speaker", in which a native speaker becomes an idea informant of a language, conferring it as a biased methodology. CLT is widely criticized for its biased methodology that is evaluated through the success or failure against the standard of the native speaker. CLT thus received much serious critique as it is seen to be heavily biased towards Western communicative styles and culture (Holliday, 2005; Leung, 2005). Howatt and Widdowson (2004) also critiqued that students struggle to reach unrealistic and unnecessary goals that teachers imply on them, therefore, prevent them from appropriating the language. Consequently in such classrooms, teachers' and students' cultural backgrounds and local knowledge are disregarded in the learning process. To evidently add up the refutation of CLT, the approach fails to support real interactions in the classroom as Saengboon (2004) explained that *Thai teachers are not familiar with the aural-oral method of CLT*, and therefore shift to focus on grammar and rote learning of isolated sentences or vocabulary, and create erroneous language forms and limit speaking activities in the classroom. Classroom interactions are often teacher-dominated and students are set to memorize responses which are not accurate to use in real circumstances. The reasons are because teachers did not understand how to design speaking activities, have difficulties in choosing materials and activities that would be appropriate for learners' speaking abilities (Bilasha and Kwangsawa, 2004; Kanoksilapatham, 2007; as cited in Khamkhen, 2010). There are still controversies around with CLT, especially in Asian context (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Burnaby and Sun, 1989; Canh, 1999; Howard, 1996; Jung and Norton, 2002 as cited in Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf and Moni, 2006). The latter authors also suggested that in rural provincial schools, where trainings and resources are comparatively lower, teachers must be given the chance to reflect on the system on how they think it should be implemented under their context, and not just merely implementing the approach without the potential to do so. Most educators and researchers similarly justified that, it is understandably difficult for Thai EFL teachers to deal with many challenges when they are required to implement a learner-centered policy because the traditional Thai education system is based on teacher dominated talk or rote learning, and hence teachers who are still under the influence of traditional reform may find it difficult to adapt new approaches and reverse their roles. Furthermore, they also make reference to Maskhao's (2002) postulation that majority of Thai EFL teachers are still using materials in which they are familiar with such as a textbook based, grammar focus structures, vocabulary and reading to prepare students for university entrance examinations. These happenings are accurately evident and are still in practice until this present day especially in provincial schools.

### **Station Rotation Model (SRM)**

Station rotation model is defined by Horn and Staker (2012), as an implementation within a given course or subject on which the students would rotate on a fixed schedule or

when the teacher assigns the students, and which involves at least online learning. Other teaching modalities in this approach might include small group or full class instruction, group projects, individual tutoring or written assignments. It is a method in which the students can work at their own level and pace with rotating assignments in groups or individual.

It is a common model used to implement blended learning in primary and high school settings. Sometimes it is also referred to as classroom rotation or in-class rotation. As the name implies, students are assigned to rotate across different learning stations in classroom-based learning either with entire class or into small group alternation. SRM is characterized with teacher-led instruction that involves independent and collaborative practice inside the classroom, and engages in personalized learning with online instructions (Aspire Public Schools, 2013). It is also claimed that SRM corresponds to the topic of English language learning. Rios (2014) recommended using rotational model at the start as it is a more teacher-led instruction that would work with English Language Learners (ELLs) when using blended learning for the first time. According to Troute (2009), who published a constructive overview report on the implementation of "*The Balanced Rotational Instructional Model*", affirmed that the model supports ELLs in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The latter claimed that it provide an appropriate approach to language acquisition and competency which also addresses important elements such as phonetics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension that is required by International institutions and organizations such as Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) International Association. Khan Academy, a recognized non-profit educational organization has also proposed that SRM is a good model approach to get started for classrooms which have limited IT accessibility.

### **Implication of Station Rotation Model for PPK School**

Blended learning is more than the combination of face-to-face with online learning and technology use or just merely integrating online materials and technology into lesson plans. Every blended learning model differs and even with rotational model, each model differs and is personalized differently according to the school contexts. Each case study reviewed has different implications of their own SRM. Whether a blended learning model is applicable or not applicable depends on the context of the countries, regions, schools, teaching professionals, technology competency, Internet accessibility and subject taught. This study, therefore, has design an implication of a 50-minute lesson using SRM application for ELT listening and speaking class, which was reviewed as appropriate for PPK School context.

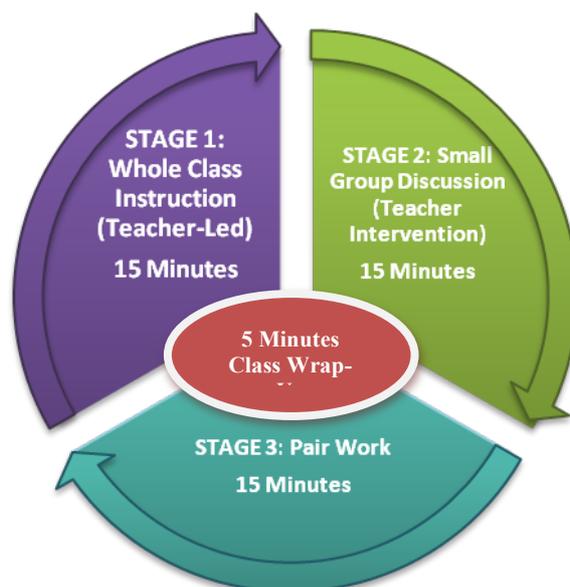


Diagram 1. A 50-Minute Station Rotation Model Implication for Listening and Speaking in PPK School

The above illustration is a designed implication of SRM instructional model that is used in this case study research. SRM claimed to be very flexible to the teacher's subject and objective needs. For example, instructors can implement other types of assignment or task to fit their subjects or objectives in the stages of rotation. To elaborate for instance, KIPP Empower uses small group rotation in its model because they have small numbers of students and their classroom are well equipped with individual computers that can also accommodate self-directed learning. On the contrary, PPK School does not have accommodating classroom settings that could provide large numbers of students with individual and personalized computers. In addition, the characteristics of Thai students are very different from the Westerners, as discussed earlier. Therefore, instead of choosing to apply an exact same SRM as previous case studies, this research have designed an SRM that would fit into Thai provincial school classroom settings, as well as the ELT lesson objectives. Instead of choosing to rotate assignments within small group, this model prefers entire classroom rotation to be in the first stage because Thai students often need to be led by teacher first. This SRM hence starts with the whole class instruction, followed by a small group discussion, in which students could interact with one another and also the teacher, lastly with a pair work instead of individual work and ending the class with class wrap-up. In ELT listening and speaking, more communication is preferred because language learning can only be effective when there is exposure to interaction. Hence, an individual assignment for listening and speaking in a classroom would prove no interactions. However, individual assignment would be deemed suitable for reading and writing, which is practiced in KIPP Empower Academy's SRM model.

### Research Methodology

Phayao Pittayakhom School (PPK School) is selected as the case study setting for SRM blended learning application. PPK is a district public school in Phayao province, northern of Thailand. It is one of the largest public high school in Phayao city district that consists of lower and upper secondary students; Matthayom one (Grade 7) to Matthayom six (Grade 12), with a total population of approximately between 3500 to 4000 students and approximately 200 teachers. The school is considered to be better-equipped with teaching

materials and facilitation compared with other smaller public schools and municipality schools. However, there are some limitations in its own context in terms of classroom facilitation and Internet accessibility.

This research is a qualitative study that used a case study methodology to describe and investigate a blended learning model particularly applying SRM into ELT listening and speaking class. To restate once again, this case study gathered data information from classroom observation, conducting quizzes for listening and speaking assessment and focus-group interviews. This study will not be using comparative methodology. As Grgurovic (2010) mentioned, there are many studies that investigated blended learning by comparing the performance of blended learning with traditional classroom method. The author scrutinized that comparative research methodology did not allow sufficient description of the experience in a blended learning environment and its context. In addition, Bliuc, Goodyear and Ellis (2007), authors of blended learning in higher studies have also cautioned against comparative studies, which tend to indicate separate components in blended learning and not its integration. As blended learning studies in Thailand is relatively few in English academic literatures, this paper have chosen to conduct a case study to investigate the results. Given that Grgurovic (2010) also concluded from many research authors that case study research is widely used in applied linguistics to study language issues. It can be found in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as cited from Lam (2000) investigation about text chatting, e-mail writing, and web page creation influenced on US living Chinese, English as a Second Language (ESL) learner's writing skills and how Murray (1999) examined 23 second languages used in a computer program for independent language learning by French learners. The former also cited from Merriam (2002) that case study determines to understand the uniqueness of the situation and provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon using multiple sources of information. This dissertation have selected to therefore use a case study methodology that follows four stages of Yin (1994) recommendations: 1) Design the case study 2) Conduct the case study, 3) Analyze the case study evidence, and 4) Develop conclusions, recommendations and implications.

### **Research Participants**

The research participants of this study are students in Matthayom 4 (Grade 10), upper secondary class section 4/9 at PPK School. There are total of 45 students in this mixed-gender classroom, with 20 females and 25 males, aged between 15 to 16 years old. Public provincial school is chosen to be the study setting because of its many challenges and prolonging English competency issues. It is therefore the aim of this study to find out if SRM is applicable.

According to the students' profile background from classroom observations and class introductory reviews, all students are local residents of Phayao province, who have been studying in local provincial primary and secondary schools throughout their educational years. Majority of the students have low competency in English, particularly in speaking. When speaking, their speeches were apprehensive and sentences were arranged in incorrect structures and forms with redundant answers. When answering questions, many answers were arranged like memorized scripts rather than a natural impromptu conversation (see appendix for questions asked during first class introduction warm up). Their listening skill is also comparatively low, and they were not able to catch or understand long sentences and phrases. Students were able to understand only limited words or vocabularies. When asked about English media exposure, majority of the students have not been expose to English media at all as they prefer listening and watching Thai and Korean media and news, following the popularity emergence of K-pop media. In addition, there is no English speaking environment outside their classroom or at home.

## Findings

### Highlighted Findings

One of the major findings in the initial stage of the study predicated about the students' poor English proficiency background, especially in listening and speaking. This dilemma concurred with the other existing research findings and is very evident in provincial schools. Due to students being educated in different rural primary schools prior to attending their secondary school years at PPK School, participants in this study comprised of different levels of English proficiency. The participants' understanding affected each stage of the rotation tasks with their inconsistency. There was a slight scoring difference between the less able and able participated students, but they showed the similar feedbacks and more positive learning outcomes. The findings although has led to positive learning outlook, but it also left contradictory results to previously reviewed case studies in the Western educations. There were some limitations and barriers found concerning Thai students and Thai provincial school context settings. Unlike students in Western culture, Thai students are still very much depended on their teachers and the interference of L1 is very domineering. Although SRM stages were designed to boost independent learning, however, most students are still dependent on my instructions and guidance. Nonetheless, the key findings also revealed substantial beneficial learning outcomes and outlook on SRM from the students.

The beneficial learning attitudes from SRM are summarized in each stage of the rotation tasks such as the following findings:

**Table 5**

*Summary of Beneficial Learning Attitudes from SRM*

<b>Whole class instruction lead by teacher</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students were attentive to listen and anticipated to instructions.</li> <li>• Students showed enthusiasm in listening and ownership of their own assignment.</li> <li>• Students felt challenged and motivated to move on to the next rotation task</li> </ul>
<b>Small group discussion with teacher-led</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students who appeared to be reserved participated more actively in speaking than when they are during pre-test observation. Lower proficiency and disinterested students were more alert than in traditional class.</li> <li>• It enhanced personalized interactions between teacher and students in a large class size.</li> <li>• Students learned new words and vocabulary/speech/ pronunciation through their own personalized learning tools; tablets and smart phones (sharing with their peers).</li> </ul>
<b>Pair work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It encouraged reserved and lower proficiency students to speak with their close peers.</li> <li>• It motivated students to think independently and apply to real life context.</li> </ul>

There are certainly positive learning attitudes that were produced from SRM. Students felt the sense of achievement after completing all three rotation tasks. It also allows the teacher to monitor all the students in the classroom, personalizing interactions with the

students, and not making them feel that they were left out, especially students who were sitting at the back of the classroom. During the observational study, the teacher was also able to listen to the language the students produced in terms of speech structure, pronunciation, intonation, word stress etc. It certainly personalized teaching and learning in a new level.

The most beneficial stage of SRM application in this study that answers the objective of listening and speaking is the group discussion and pair work. It allows students to have the opportunity to speak English in the classroom. Students were able to express themselves during group discussion and use more language functions. Krall (1993) also mentioned that group work provides learners the exposure to a range of language items and functions. Students were able to use and experiment with their own learning tools that they already know in order to develop their fluency. As a result, after few lessons, they became more confident and were motivated to achieve on their own task with lesser supervision. According to Norman (1986), foreign language learning is achieved better when learning with others, than on their own.

The following table summarized how SRM affects the students' learning attitudes and outcomes during its application in listening and speaking accordingly to the key highlights that were found in Chapter 4.

**Table 6**

*Summary of Key Highlights of SRM Learning Attitudes and Outcomes in Listening and Speaking*

<b>Listening Key Highlights</b>	<b>During SRM Application</b>
<b>Understand and interpret meaning/purpose</b>	Student independently transcribed down immediately what they heard. Meaning is interpreted later but with much better accuracy.
<b>Identify details of the spoken texts</b>	Students still misspelled vocabulary but they seek to find correct spellings from their peers in later stage of the group discussion.
<b>Understand speakers accents/pronunciation/ intonation/word stress</b>	Students still cannot catch some of narrator's pronunciation/intonation and word stress. Students share mobile dictionary application as a learning tool to find out the correct soundings and words.
<b>Level of understanding range of language features (sentence structure, noun group/phrase, vocabulary, punctuation, figurative language)</b>	Students' level is still pre-intermediate. However, students showed signs of improved learning attitudes.
<b>Speaking Key Highlights</b>	<b>During SRM Application</b>
<b>Express information: with imaginative ideas and personal opinions</b>	Students were more participative although they still replied short conversation.
<b>Convey meaning: using appropriate vocabulary and grammar</b>	Students still cannot really convey meaning on their own but in group discussion, they were able to help each other translate L1 to English correctly

<b>Clear speech presentation: pronunciation, intonation, volume word stress</b>	Speech was still not clear but both able and less able students enjoyed mimicking the audio dictionary sound in their mobile application during the process of discussion
<b>Coherence and relevant sentence structure: clearly present and developed</b>	Better relevancy although with grammatical and spelling error

Another factor to note while planning the lesson is to understand the students' proficiency levels. Some students could take their time in completing the stations because of their proficiency. Students who were not able to complete all the rotation tasks may not help each other because the pair has very low proficiency. This could be one of the main issues in this model implication for PPK School or any other public provincial schools with similar situations. However, this problem could be easily solved with easier lesson topic, but it must not be too easy for able students. Therefore, teachers must always prepare flexible lesson plans.

### Conclusion

The most important key element in implementing SRM is the role of teacher. Without the teacher, it cannot be called blended learning. Public Impact (2013) quoted that no technology can replace the role of the teacher even as technology will become prominent. Teacher guide students in making smart choices in the learning content and pace and they also facilitate relationship between students and their learning. Teachers also motivate students to engage in appropriate ways and overcome learning barriers. Therefore, in order to apply SRM blended learning, the teacher needs necessary skills sets to be able to know how to plan the task in each station rotation; the right small group, peers-to-peers, individual etc. Especially in ELT classes, teachers need to be flexible with the task because students' proficiency levels vary. Therefore, if the rotation task does not fit with the students' capabilities, the teacher must be able to shift these students to other alternative plan or tasks spontaneously without affecting the students. Teacher must therefore be familiar with online materials and be required to have appropriate computer skills in order to prepare the lesson plans and able to guide students in their tasks. Many teachers themselves are still adapting to the use of the new millennium technology. In order to take blended learning into serious consideration, schools need to conduct teacher training program in order to equip their teaching professionals with appropriate computer skills, language and online knowledge application. A survey conducted in the case studies schools in the US, such as the Rocketship schools, reported that they believed it is important for teachers to receive training on how to access and interpret student progress report provided by online instruction programs and how to use data to inform their instructions. It might take some progressive time for Thai provincial schools to program to such advance training because blended learning is rarely a topic discussed in the educational context. However, if blended learning were to be implemented into the school system, there should definitely be a compulsory training program for all foreign and Thai teachers.

### Recommendation

When adopting or implementing SRM blended learning into a Thai provincial school context setting, it is very important to study the students' background such as students'

proficiency level, miscellaneous limitations as well as the classroom settings. Not every stages of rotation are appropriate for all levels of students and all Thai schools settings. With the assumption that if the provincial school is located at a very rural area, and has only a small number of students, the teacher might want to consider implementing only small group rotations such as the KIPP Empower adaption. However, if the school does not have competent technology and facility to provide self-directed learning for individual students, alternative offline learning tools could be used to substitute online learning such as downloaded pictures, movies or audio files. There should be no hard and fast rules when designing the rotations to fit with the appropriateness of the learning context. Hence, teachers must be spontaneously active in thinking of creative tasks to implement in each rotation stage. Teachers must equip themselves with knowledge of both academically online and offline materials, as well as adapting to the fast changing technological trend and put themselves in the students' perspectives. The most important question that all teachers must ask themselves before applying a blended learning approach is how do we blend?

This study would like to provide some recommendations for practical and useful insights for SRM implementations such as the following:

- Plan the lesson carefully and consider the learning outcomes that the lesson wants to achieve. Teacher must look into the readiness of the technology available and the classroom constraints and limitation. It is good to have a pre-observational record of the classroom settings before developing or creating the stages of rotation.
- Always be flexible and spontaneous to adapt to the students' needs. Be ready to make adjustment when needed. If the school has large classroom size such as in PKK School, the teacher should consider studying the general background of the students first before applying the approach by conducting a pre-test quiz to determine the general level of the class's proficiency so that the teacher could have other alternative tasks planned out.
- During the first few lessons of the course, it is always good to build a consistent rapport with students and introduce students to the available technology and learning approach so that they can have an idea of what will be expected of the class.
- Teacher must have clear lesson objective. Such as in this case, it is ELT listening and speaking, therefore the rotation task must allow students to get involve and engage in communication as much as possible.
- During the first few implementations of the model, teacher should not expect immediate outcomes, and must be patient to monitor all groups, encourage students to ask questions and share opinions with teacher and peers. Especially in speaking and listening, the assessment scorings should be based on their participations rather than the completion of their tasks or the correct answers.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Predominantly, findings in this study will greatly impact on the researcher's own teaching strategy. It would become a further intention to have the SRM research used in this study to be enhanced and remodeled to achieve more evident effectiveness in speaking and listening. The evidence of the limitations, barriers and challenges could be further studied in order to overcome them. This study also trust that it will encourage Thai provincial public schools, particularly in basic educations, to support using blended learning that will promote cost effective approach, reduce their unnecessary teaching materials cost, and the schools help plan for commendable academic funds and effective resources for both teachers and students. This study is determined to pave way for further investigation of better enhanced SRM or other blended learning approach that would encourage students to have zealous

interest and motivation in learning English language. With the growing importance of English use in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), it is time to promote English into the students' daily lives rather than just treating it as a prerequisite subject.

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