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บทคัดย่อ

งานศึกษานี้เป็นการศึกษาเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพ โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ (1) ศึกษาผลของการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษนอกชั้นเรียนต่อทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ (2) ศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษนอกชั้นเรียน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการศึกษาประกอบด้วย แบบสอบถาม แบบบันทึกการเรียนรู้ แบบทดสอบทักษะการสื่อสารก่อนและหลังการศึกษา การศึกษานี้จัดทำขึ้นในมหาวิทยาลัยแม่ฟ้าหลวง ซึ่งเป็นมหาวิทยาลัยในกำกับของรัฐที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสื่อกลางในการเรียนการสอน กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการศึกษาคั้งนี้เป็นนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 3-4 ที่สมัครใจเข้าร่วมโครงการศึกษานี้ และศึกษาอยู่ในหลากหลายสาขาวิชา ในปีการศึกษา 2560 หลังจากการเข้าร่วมการเรียนรู้นอกชั้นเรียนเป็นเวลา 10 สัปดาห์แล้ว ผลการศึกษาพบว่าผู้เรียนที่มีทักษะการเรียนรู้

ด้วยตนเอง มีคะแนนทดสอบหลังการเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมสูงกว่า
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.05 สำหรับปัจจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับทักษะการสื่อสารของผู้เรียน
ได้แก่ ความสามารถด้านคำศัพท์และไวยากรณ์ภาษาอังกฤษ
ส่วนปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษนอกชั้นเรียน
ได้แก่ แรงจูงใจในการเรียนและบริบทในการเรียนรู้ของผู้เรียน

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Out-of-class English Language Learning and the Communication Skills of University Students

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Abstract

This research is a quantitative and qualitative study. The research objectives were (1) to study the effects of out-of-class language learning on students' communication skill, and (2) to identify the factors related to out-of-class language learning. The research instruments included questionnaires, personal learning logs, and a communication skill pre-test and post-test. The study was carried out at Mae Fah Luang University, an autonomous university where English is used as a medium of instruction. The participants in the study were ten students who voluntarily participated in out-of-class oral communication development. They were third and

fourth-year non-English majors in the 2017 academic year. After 10 weeks of participation in the out-of-class language learning, based on the pre-test and post-test, it was found that students who were more autonomous than other students performed better in their post-test, and their post-test scores were statistically higher at a significance level of 0.05. The main factors affecting communication skill were vocabulary and grammar; and factors influencing out-of-class language learning included motivation and learning context.

Keywords: out-of-class English language learning; communication skills; autonomous learner; learning context

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1.Introduction

Nowadays, English has become a tool for communication all around the globe. In Southeast Asia, English is viewed as an official language by the ASEAN Community; not only as a language of communication, but also in diplomacy, technological innovation, education, research, and science (Phitsuwan, 2012). In strengthening and preparing Thai people for their lives and careers, the Thai Ministry of Education has emphasized the importance of English since 2015. As stated in the 1996 English Language curriculum policy reform, students should acquire fundamental language skills in English that will contribute to their authentic performance in using language for communication. Unfortunately, a report by Education First (2016) revealed that Thailand was ranked as the 5th lowest country in Asia for these skills.

For a long period, English language teaching in Thailand; at all levels, has been primarily influenced by the traditional approach, where grammar and syntax (sentence structure) have been primarily emphasized. Moreover, English language instruction in Thailand is viewed as transmissive and authoritarian in nature (Hayes, 2008) where teachers are expected to impart knowledge to their students, with most classes being teacher-fronted and controlled, so they are not actually exposed to the target language. As a consequence, English has not been successfully acquired by Thai students regardless of the number of years they spend studying in the classroom.

Learning context or setting is frequently considered as a key factor influencing other factors in language learning (Hurd, 2006). In Benson and Lor's (1999), and Sakui and Gaies's (1999), learning context influences beliefs and attitudes. Informal language learning

or out-of-class language learning plays an important role in developing English communication skills, especially for foreign language learners. Out-of-class learning includes activities for indirect exposure of English use, such as reading newspapers, and watching news on television (Wiriyaichitra et al, 2012). These activities tend to help develop the English language ability of learners. However, little is known about the effectiveness of out-of-class learning activities on communication skill of foreign language learners.

Another attribute that is required for undergraduate students is learner autonomy. According to Holec (1981 as cited in Thanasoulas, [2000]) learner autonomy refers to the ability of language learners to take control over their own learning. The characteristics of autonomous learners include having insights into their learning styles and strategies; taking an active approach to the learning task at hand; being willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs; being good guessers; attending to form as well as to content, that is, placing an importance on accuracy as well as appropriateness; developing the target language into a separate reference system and being willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and having a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language. If language learners develop their learner autonomy, they can be good language learners.

In the current study, the researcher was interested in a notion of “Personal Learning Environments” (PLE), which are deemed to encourage students’ autonomy, in order to monitor and manage their own language learning outside a classroom. In definition, Personal Learning Environments (PLE) means a learner-controlled environment for language learning. Specifically, it is a combination of

tools and resources chosen by the learner to support different aspects of the learning process, from goal setting to materials selection to assessment (Reinders, 2014). In this study, the students determined their own language learning environments to foster their autonomous learning.

Mae Fah Luang University is an autonomous university where English is used as a medium of instruction. Students need to be equipped with English language skills for their learning and future profession, particularly communication skills. As language learning is a lifelong process; non-native English learners should learn English non-formally. Consequently, they are motivated to learn from available resources and environments. When they are willing to learn language non-formally, they will be able to communicate by using that language more effectively.

2. Purposes of the study

- (1) To study the effects of out-of-class language learning on Mae Fah Luang University students' communication skills.
- (2) To study the factors related to the effectiveness of out-of-class learning of Mae Fah Luang University students.

3. Scope of the study

The study focused on the use of out-of-class learning activities by non-English major students at Mae Fah Luang University.

4. Limitations

Due to the small number of participants in the study, the outcome could not be generalized to other contexts.

5. Related literature

The general assumption of this study is that out-of-class learning contributes to the improvement of language learning by language learners, and it helps improve foreign language learners' communication skills. Related literature includes the following:

5.1 Learning condition

Learning condition or learning environment is an important factor for foreign language learners. Learners are generally allowed to practise their language use in the form of games, songs, etc.; however, this does not reflect real communication (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.32). Conversely, students receive limited exposure to the target language used for communication. It is clearly seen that learners not only spend less time in contact with the language in classrooms, but they are also likely to be exposed to a range of discourse types (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.32).

Ellis (1994) divided learning settings into natural and educational settings. The natural setting arises in the course of the learners' contact with other speakers of the second language (L2) in a variety of situations -in the workplace, at home, through the media, at international conferences, in business meetings, etc. There will be some learners who experience the L2 entirely in natural settings and others whose only contacts with it are in educational settings. But many of them are exposed to the L2 in both natural and educational settings. He made an assumption that learning that takes place in natural and educational settings is very different in nature. In natural settings, informal learning occurs. That is, learning is considered to result from direct participation and observation without any articulation of the

underlying principles or rules. Also, there is an emphasis on the social significance of what is being learnt rather than on the mastery of subject matter. While formal learning is held to take place through conscious attention to rules and principles and greater emphasis on mastery of subject matter which is treated as a decontextualized body of knowledge.

The principle of condition of learning as stated by Ellis (1994) is similar to the ideology of acquisition and learning by Krashen (1976). Krashen distinguishes two ways in which knowledge of a second language can be developed: acquisition takes place subconsciously as a result of understanding what has been said or written in communication and clearly corresponds to informal learning; or it involves conscious attention to linguistic forms.

As Lennon's (1989 cited in Ellis, [1994]) study of advanced German learners of English in Britain demonstrates, learners in natural settings often resort to conscious learning and may deliberately seek out opportunities to practice specific linguistic items they have studied. Conversely, learners in classrooms may not be required to treat the language as subject matter but instead may be given opportunities for acquisition. From d'Anglejan (1978 as cited in Ellis [1994]), it was found that a correlation between educational settings and formal language learning depends on the pedagogical approach. In the traditional approach, there may be few opportunities for informal learning. While in the case of innovative approaches, informal learning is not only possible but actively encouraged.

Ellis (1994) also made another assumption about L2 learning, namely that natural settings lead to higher levels of L2 proficiency than educational settings. Schinke-Llano (1990 as cited in Ellis [1994])

claims that second language acquisition results in native-like use of the target language, while foreign language acquisition does not. This is evident in the “year-abroad” built into university level foreign language education in many European countries, and the growing popularity of home-stay programmes among Japanese learners. The aim of these is to provide foreign language learners with opportunities for information learning, so that they can reach a higher level of oral proficiency.

5.2 Personal Learning Environments

As suggested by Reinders (2014), teachers should extend students’ learning beyond the classroom in order to encourage them to take control over their learning while still being able to monitor and support them. Personal Learning Environments (PLE) are effective ways to do so.

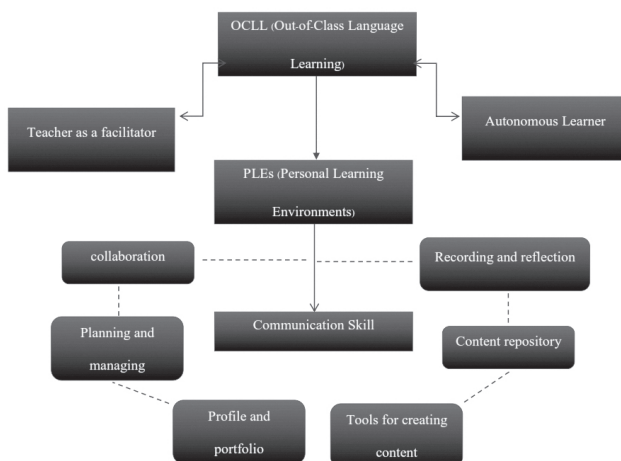
Figure 1. Common tools used to create PLE



As shown in figure 1, PLEs (Reinders, 2014) bring together tools and resources that help learners control their language-learning process. These tools and resources are usually selected and maintained by learners themselves and can be accessed from a computer or from a smartphone.

From figure 2 below, out-of-classroom language learning is a type of learning where students design their Personal Learning Environments to improve their communication skill. Evidently, the teacher's role is as a facilitator, who helps encourage and guide students to individualize their own learning. Most importantly, learners who demonstrate autonomy could possibly better develop their communication skill.

Figure 2 Concept of Out-of-class Language Learning



5.3 Out-of-Class Language Learning

Out-of-class language learning (OCLL) is divided into three categories (Benson, 2001 as cited in Cortina-Pérez and Solano-Tenorio [2013]) as follows:

- Self-instruction, where learners deliberately plan to improve the target language and search out resources to help them do this such as by reading self-study grammar books to improve their grammar;
- Naturalistic language learning, where students learn mainly unintentionally through communication and interaction with the target language group, for instance, when students get engaged in discussions with English speaking classmates or colleagues; and
- Self-directed naturalistic language learning, where learners create or seek out opportunities for learning a language, but may not focus directly on specific aspect (e.g., grammar) while they are engaging in the activities.

In addition, in terms of its modalities, OCLL is divided into two main modalities (Cortina-Pérez and Solano-Tenorio, 2013) as follows:

- Orientated OCLL, where the teacher provides the learners with opportunities to improve their communication skills out of the classroom.
- Autonomous OCLL, where the learner him/herself decides those activities in which to be involved in order to improve his/her communicative skills in the target language.

Recognizing the limitations of in-class language learning and practices, the orientated OCLL was employed in this study to provide activities for the students to improve their communication skill.

5.4 Learner autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy is discussed in this study since being an autonomous learner is one of the effective language learner strategies. Hedge (2008) classifies two main types of learner strategy which are a) strategies that deal with the second language or cognitive strategies, and b) strategies that manage learning or metacognitive strategies.

Cognitive strategies are thought processes used directly in learning enabling learners to deal with the information presented in tasks and materials by working on it in different ways, e.g. when learners look for rules in the second language on the basis of existing knowledge about language (Rubin, 1987, as cited in Hedge, [2008], p.78). Memorization is also included in cognitive strategy. Other examples of cognitive strategies are repetition such as imitating a model, writing things down, and inferencing.

However, in Palfreyman (2005), autonomy is different from independence. An autonomous learner monitors his learning, identifies problems, goes to get help and so on. An independent learner can fill in the timetable himself, choose elective courses, decide when to take an exam and manage his time on a daily or weekly basis.

In this study, autonomous learners are those who plan for their out-of-class learning, monitor their progress, and take responsibility for their learning in order to reach their learning goals.

5.5 Related studies

The study by Oxford (1999) on relationships between second language learning strategies and language proficiency in the context of learner autonomy and self-regulation revealed that language

learning strategies make a significant difference in language proficiency. The multiple regression results indicate that (a) language proficiency can be predicted in both foreign language and second language environments and (b) the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) appears to be quite a useful predictor of language proficiency.

Ching-yi, Shu-Chen, and Yi-Nian (2007) studied language learning strategies used by college EFL learners in Taiwan. The students in a classroom setting or a formal language-learning environment were investigated and the influence of gender and major on college EFL learning strategies was identified. 1,758 participants who were Taiwanese college EFL students took part in the study. The findings showed that there was not a great difference among the frequency of each strategy, all in medium-use level. There were statistically significant use of cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies and overall strategies with regard to gender. There were also statistical differences found in the use of six subcategories of language learning strategies with regard to major.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Participants

10 students who voluntarily participated in out-of-class language learning activities were included in the study. They comprised third-year and fourth-year students in the 2017 academic year.

6.2 Research Instruments

Research instruments for collecting data were as follows:

1. The students' Personal Learning logs were used to monitor

the students' autonomy.

2. A pre-test and a post-test of communication skills were used to determine student communication skills.

6.3 Data collection procedure

1. The researcher included 10 students who voluntarily participated in an out-of-class language learning in the study. They all signed consent forms.

2. Prior to the inclusion of the study, the participants' communication skills were measured by a pre-test.

3. During the study, the participants planned their out-of-class learning on a weekly basis and had a conference with their teacher every week for 10 weeks.

4. Students recorded their weekly activities in their learning logs.

5. At the end of the study, students' communication skills were measured by a post-test.

6.4 Data analysis

The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to identify the effects of out-of-class language learning on the students' communication skills and factors related to out-of-class language learning.

7. Results

7.1 The effects of out-of-class learning on the communication skills of Mae Fah Luang University students

Ten students who volunteered to participate in out-of-class language learning activities were included in the study. From Table 1, five of the participants were from the School of Sinology, four were from the School of Management, and one was from the School of Health Science.

Table 1 Number of the participants

School	Number	Percentage
Management	4	40
Sinology	5	50
Health science	1	10
Total	10	100

Table 2 Student self-rating in each skill

Skill/Self-rating scale	Very good	Good	Fair	Low
Listening skill		4 (40%)	6 (60%)	
Speaking skill		4 (40%)	4 (40%)	2 (20%)
Reading skill		6 (60%)	4 (40%)	
Writing skill		1 (10%)	8 (80%)	1 (10%)

According to table 2, a 60% of the students rated their listening and speaking (oral communication) skills as low or fair.

Table 3 Frequency Distribution of Out-of-Class Language Learning Activities Carried Out by Students

Types of activities	Frequencies	Percentage
<i>Using productive skill</i>		
Speaking English with friends	16	24.61
Speaking English with teacher	17	26.15

Types of activities	Frequencies	Percentage
<i>Using receptive skill</i>		
Watching video clips	7	10.76
Watching online movie	10	15.38
Listening to music	13	20.00
<i>Other</i>		
Engaging in activities at the Self-Access		
Language Learning Centre	2	3.07
Total	65	100

From table 3, the three most preferred activities were speaking English with teachers, speaking English with friends, and listening to music.

Table 4 Comparison between pre-test (B) and post-test (A) scores on five communication skills and the aggregate

Student # / Criterion	Gram- matical accuracy		Fluency		Interac- tion		Vocabu- laries/ expres- sions		Cohe- rence		Total	
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
Max	8	8	12	12	8	8	4	4	4	4	36	36
#1	5	6	7	8	6	6	3	4	4	4	25	28
#2	4	4	6	7	4	5	3	3	2	2	19	21
#3	5	6	7	9	5	6	3	3	2	3	22	27
#4	4	4	6	7	4	4	2	3	2	2	18	20
#5	4	4	5	7	4	4	2	3	2	3	17	21
#6	4	6	9	9	5	6	2	3	3	3	23	27
#7	4	5	6	7	5	5	3	3	3	3	21	23
#8	3	4	7	7	6	6	3	3	2	2	21	22
#9	4	4	6	6	4	4	2	2	2	2	18	18
#10	4	4	6	6	5	5	2	2	2	2	19	19

Table 4 indicates that 80% of the students gained higher post-test scores than pre-test after engaging in out-of-class language learning activities that they managed and planned in the personal learning logs.

Table 5 Paired Samples t-test

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
pretest-posttest	-2.30000	1.7029	.53852	-4.27	9	.002

Table 5 shows that students gained a higher score in the post-test at the 0.05 level of significance.

7.2 Factors related to out-of-class learning of students.

The data obtained from learners' logs indicated that factors influencing students' communication skills include vocabulary skill, grammatical knowledge, and confidence in communication. Moreover, it was found that the main factors related to out-of-class learning include learner autonomy, motivation, and their opportunities to communicate.

8. Discussion

8.1 Out-of-class language learning activities of Mae Fah Luang university students

The main need for improved English skill for Mae Fah Luang university students was to improve their speaking skill. Students viewed their speaking skill as relatively low when compared to other

skills. It had been confirmed by many studies that speaking ability was found problematic by students at the tertiary level (Rotjanapong, 2002 as cited in Champakaew [2013]). Therefore, it is quite significant for them to develop their communication skill and for their future careers, as communication is considered one of the 21st century skills for learners (Kampa and Vilina, 2017).

The findings from Personal Learning log on language learning activities showed that students favored talking to teacher, talking to friends, watching online movies and listening to music. This suggested that students preferred both productive and receptive activities. Most students used social strategy in language learning when they interacted with other speakers; they asked others to slow down their speech, and they practised English with others. As suggested by Oxford (2003, p.86), learning where it involves dynamic interaction between the learners and more capable speakers, such as teachers, promotes language development of the learners (Maros and Mat Saad, 2016). These results were also consistent with the findings from Pearson (2004), Hyland (2004) and Maros and Mat Saad (2016), namely that the participants in their studies preferred receptive activities in their out-of-class language learning.

8.2 Effects of out-of-class language learning on communication skill

With respect to research question 1, it has been shown that out-of-class language learning enhances students' communication skills. Social strategy was adopted in out-of-class language learning. In the study, students who volunteered to develop their communication skills planned their weekly out-of-class learning, and they met the

instructor every week for 10 weeks.

Through social strategy, students sought for support from the teacher during their out-of-class learning. They felt more confident about their communication skills. Social strategy is also another key factor for their communication skill improvement. According to Mitchell and Myles (2014 cited in Maros and Mat Saad [2016]), “learning is also seen as socially mediated, that is to say, it is dependent on face-to-face interaction and shared processes, such as joint problem solving and discussion.” Mediation involves dynamic interaction between the learners and a more capable other (Oxford, 2003, p.86). Through an interaction between the learner and the teachers, peers and members of the society this notion of socially mediated learning promotes language development of the learners (Maros and Mat Saad, 2016). In a friendly and relaxed learning environment, students were highly motivated to learn. Reinders (2014) asserted that without proper guidance and ongoing support, many do not have the skills and experience to be successful in learning independently. To foster learner autonomy, students need support from the ones who are capable, that is the teacher in this study. The instructor during the conference time after the students planned their weekly task, they met the instructor to seek for an opportunity to engage in a conversation naturally and give feedback on their learning. One student in the study said that ‘I think my English skill is better because of having a personal learning environment such as learning with a teacher, a friend, or other people who talk to me.’ The teacher’s role as a facilitator is to monitor students’ journal and give feedback on language learning outside of class.

Providing out-of-class language learning is a means to develop

students' language competence as well as their autonomy. This is particularly true when an instructor is a mediator who helps support and scaffold their learning. The teacher's role is not only in the classroom but teachers play a very important role outside the class. In this natural and informal learning condition, learners feel motivated, relaxed and more confident in speaking or communicating. Moreover, this out-of-class learning also fosters learner autonomy. Students who are responsible for their out-of-class learning seemed to be more effective learners. More importantly, learner autonomy is a crucial element of the 21st century skills students should master.

The results from the pre-test and the post-test showed that after engaging in out-of-class language learning activities through social strategy, students had better communication skills. This study aligned with the results from Hughes, Krug, and Vye (2011) proving that the number of times students who attended out-of-class language learning increased their proficiency score. Students who were more autonomous by being responsible for their out-of-class learning and tended to gain higher communication skills, as an autonomous learner monitors his learning, identifies problems, goes to get help and so on (Palfreyman, 2003, p.191). Students realize that their problems concerning communication skills are important as they perceive English communication skills to be significant for their future careers. Additionally, through social strategy, they sought support from the teacher during their out-of-class language learning.

8.3 Factors influencing out-of-class language learning

Vocabulary skill, grammatical knowledge and confidence were found to be the main factors influencing out-of-class language learning as indicated by students in their Personal Learning log. Vocabulary

and grammatical knowledge are related to their communication skill. If they have a high language proficiency, they will be able to communicate well. While grammar also influences their oral communication, students often feel that they cannot use correct grammar while communicating with others. As Cohen and Macaro (2007) pointed out, any type of L2 oral communication involves at the very least a combined emphasis on vocabulary, pronunciation, pragmatics, and grammar (p.119). With low vocabulary skills and grammatical knowledge, language learners do not feel confident to interact with others. Therefore, vocabulary is clearly important for language learners. They can communicate by using words that are not placed in the proper order, pronounced perfectly, or marked with the proper grammatical morphemes, but communication breakdown can occur if words are not used properly (Cohen and Macaro, 2007, p.96). Therefore, by encouraging students to learn more vocabulary from a variety of sources, their language learning and language use should benefit.

In addition, motivation and opportunities for communication are found crucial for out-of-class language learning. It is quite evident that students who improved their communication skill in this out-of-class language learning are those who had a high level of motivation to practise their oral communication skills. As shown in table 4, students 1, 2 and 6, who engaged in out-of-class language learning activities more frequently, performed better in their communication skill. As they see the importance of their development in language learning. Gardner (1972, cited in Lightbown and Spada [2006]) used the terms instrumental motivation (language learning for more immediate or practical goals) and integrative motivation (language learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment). Motivation involves

four aspects, a goal, effortful behavior, a desire to attain the goal and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question (Gardner, 1986 cited in Gass and Selinker [2008]). Research has also shown that these types of motivation are related to success in second language learning (Lightbown and Spada, 2006).

9. Conclusion

This study has attempted to point out that out-of-class language learning should be fostered. The more students engaged in out-of-class activities, the better the improvement of their communication skill. Particularly, students who displayed autonomy; planning their language learning, seeking opportunities to practise language, and taking control of their learning could improve their language learning progressively. Moreover, teachers should take a role as a facilitator in giving feedback or encouragement and guiding students to individualize their own learning.

10. Recommendations

10.1 Implementation of the study

From the study, strategy training is very useful for students to enhance their language learning. It is recommended that other language learning strategies should be fostered. Using social strategy in out-of-class language learning helps learners to be more active and confident in their communication. Teachers can play many roles such as being a facilitator, being a participant, and a tutor all at the same time. Other language learning strategies that should be enhanced are grammar learning strategies.

10.2 Recommendations for further research

1. There should be an investigation on out-of-class learning context in developing other skills, such as reading, writing, listening, or grammar.
2. There should be a study on bringing out-of-class language learning activities into classroom language learning.

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