

Students' Perceptions about their Self-Study Experience

Wannapa Jenwitthayayot

Saowaluck Tepsuriwong

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

Abstract

There are various ways to promote autonomous learning. Self-study can be a good means of improving students' sense of autonomy in English language learning. This study, therefore, was conducted in order to investigate students' perceptions towards their self-study experiences in a self-study module. The subjects were eight first-year undergraduate King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) students. The instrument used for data collection was the structured interview. The data obtained from the instrument were analyzed to find out the students' attitudes towards the self-study module, their self-efficacy on their learning, their opinions about the benefits of the self-study module, and their problems encountered while learning. The results revealed that most students were satisfied with their performances. It also seemed that students' attitudes, together with their self-efficacy and their opinions about benefits, influenced their self-study learning. Of concern should be problems experienced while learning.

Keywords: *self-study, students' perceptions, self-efficacy, learner autonomy, attitudes*

1. Introduction

Self-study is one of the essential ways for promoting students to become autonomous learners. To do so, there are various methods such as providing a Self-Access Learning Centre, integrating a self-study module into an English course, or giving scores to do a task. At King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), English language self-study is concretely designed and integrated into an English course. Students were provided with a self-study module, where a part of the class time was designated for self-study, and students could choose to study from computer-based or paper-based materials at the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) or the computer lab independently. Some researchers (Holec, 1981; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Vasuvat & Intrarat, 2010) suggest that self-study can help improve a student's planning skills, attitude, and sense of responsibility.



Although self-study is beneficial to foster autonomous learning, there are many challenges for teachers, especially foreign language teachers who are challenged to support students to become autonomous learners. Autonomous learners can be described as students who are active learners, consciously practising and perpetuating their learning to achieve learning goals with willingness and responsibility (Holec, 1981; Bruner, 1986; Little, 1996; Nunan, 1997, as cited in Sinclair, McGrath, & Lamb, 2000). As a result, students should be trained to become autonomous learners so that they may find further knowledge based on their needs from various tools and channels instead of waiting to be spoon fed by their teachers. Moreover, they can easily capitalize on learning opportunities available to them in this century of technology (Esch & John, 2003). Due to these reasons, learners can learn from anyone, anywhere ubiquitously. They can learn not only from teachers but also from materials or other learning resources which could play roles as teachers. However, to study by themselves is not an easy task, especially for first-year students, as they possess different English language abilities and often lack the necessary study skills.

At KMUTT, a self-study module was integrated into every fundamental English language course. Every student studied one hour in a computer lab every week. They were provided with both computer-based and paper-based materials in a computer lab and the SALC which was available for them both in their study times and outside class. In the self-study module, students had to select what they wanted to study by themselves from the provided programs in the computer lab. They could practise listening, reading, or grammar from those programs, as well as consult the books provided at the SALC and with a facilitator in the computer lab. After that, they had to write a reflection in an e-portfolio which focused on what they had learnt, difficult problems they had faced, their levels of learning satisfaction, and what they would have liked to tell their teachers.

Although various facilities as mentioned above are provided for students to use independently, students' perceptions towards self-study learning are unclear. Essentially their perceptions would be able to help teachers to support them to learn by themselves better or become autonomous learners.

The aforementioned reasons motivated the researchers to find out what students perceive towards their self-study and what students think about their abilities to self-study—whether or not they are confident to study on their own. Self-efficacy, or one's beliefs about their abilities and what they think about their learning, could influence their self-study. Beliefs play important roles for students to evaluate their own learning because they inevitably influence the performance whether it is effective or not. Also, the problems they encounter when studying by themselves are investigated in this present study.

2. Beliefs and their relationship to language learning and attitude change

Beliefs play a major role in directing or determining human behaviors towards the success or failure of living and learning (Cotterall, 1999). Humans construct beliefs which are a significant part of every step of human behavior or in the expression of actions (Sakui & Gaies, 1999). In other words, beliefs have much influence on human behavior (McDonough, 1995, as cited in Cotterall, 1999) because humans hold and apply their beliefs in their daily lives (Benson & Lor, 1999), and each person behaves differently. It has been mentioned that each person holds constructs differently depending on their interpretation of their own previous experiences (Kelly, 1963, as cited in Little, 1991). That is to say, ones' beliefs are formed by every circumstance they experience such as their families, the society in which they live, and also their education (Gardner & Miller, 1999). This means that when interpreting circumstances, their beliefs are shaped by how they interpret their circumstances. It can be said that beliefs can be changed depending on one's interpretations and experiences as it has been discussed that the nature of learners' beliefs is dynamic (Kern, 1995).

In early studies (Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1987; Schulz, 2001; Benson & Lor, 1999; Altan, 2006), many researchers attempted to uncover beliefs in language learning using different instruments such as BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) questionnaires, interviews, and surveys. The results indicated that learners had a similar set of beliefs about what was needed to learn English (such as grammar study), and they were also able to have a mixed set of beliefs (Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1987; Benson & Lor, 1999; Schulz, 2001). However, the findings of Altan (2006) indicated that each student held a range of beliefs. That is, each student believed in the ability of learning language differently. It was also shown that beliefs influence the ability to learn language and therefore the outcomes of language study. Moreover, students who held a similar set of beliefs might have behaved differently towards language learning; however, they could all succeed in language learning. For example, Gerardo and Pedro, the subjects of Altan's study, believed that creating situations for using English, practising, correcting errors, and participating in class actively were important; however, the former studied consciously towards language (e.g. grammar) and attempted to communicate or understand the conversation while the latter disagreed with the meta-language (Abraham & Vann, 1987).

One thing that should be of concern is the relationship between beliefs and attitudes. Beliefs in language learning influence attitudes and behaviors. It was found that beliefs which are shaped from each person's experiences influence attitudes in language learning, and attitudes are reflected in the form of behaviors and learning outcomes (Little, Singleton, & Silvius, 1984). Gardner and Miller (1999) state that beliefs, together



with goals, attitudes, and decisions, affect the ways learners choose to learn language. In accordance with the findings of Victori and Lockhart (1995), beliefs affect the learners' behaviors and attitudes in their language learning. That is, learners who held positive beliefs tended to have positive attitudes and to be autonomous learners compared to those who held negative beliefs, for whom it was hard to become autonomous learners. Chang and Shen (2010) investigated 250 Taiwanese remote junior high school EFL learners' beliefs and their learning strategies, and the relationship between learners' beliefs and their use of strategies through the use of BALLI questionnaire as an instrument. The results showed students' beliefs that everybody could learn a foreign language, yet they did not believe in their own abilities. As a result, they did not blame their effort on their failure but rather on their talent. They suggested that students' positive attitudes must be encouraged by a teacher. Therefore, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are interrelated in language learning, especially in autonomous learning, since learning plays the most important role in every stage of a self-study module.

As mentioned above, language learning outcomes and attitudes towards language learning are related to each other, especially in autonomous learning. It has been discussed that learner autonomy and attitudes are interrelated, and that attitudes, including beliefs, goals and decisions, in turn, affect language learning management (White, 1995; Gardner & Miller, 1999). It has also been found that learners have positive attitudes towards getting the benefits of self-access (Gardner & Miller, 1997, as cited in Gardner & Miller, 1999). It can thus be concluded that learners' attitudes are one of the main factors affecting learners' learning success.

Moreover, perceptions, which are defined as "the processes of determining the meaning of what are sensed" (Klazky, 1984, as cited in Kibirige et al., 2014) are a factor in self-study learning. Sanprasert (2010) found that learners' perceptions can change and that these changes affect learners' behaviors. After intervention in her study, students perceived that they were more aware of getting feedback from their teacher and more independent in learning, and their behaviors were consistent with their perceptions in which they felt more confident and independent. This confirms that students' learning behaviors can be affected by beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions.

It is concluded that beliefs which each person sets differently by themselves relying on their sense towards situations can affect their perceptions and attitudes in either a similar or different way. Their learning behaviors are determined according to their perceptions and attitudes.

3. Characteristics of autonomous learners

The terms used for learner autonomy have been under a lot of discussions and there are many terms used such as learner independence, self-directed learning, self-instruction,

self-access learning, and autonomous learning (Gardner & Miller, 1999; Darasawang, 2007), and all of those terms focus on a learner-centred approach (Moore, 1973; Holec, 1981; & Dickinson, 1987, as cited in Morrison, 2008), individualization, and growing recognition of the political nature of language learning (Benson & Voller, 2013, p. 6). Benson and Voller (1997, pp. 1-2) discussed that there were five different ways to define the word ‘autonomy’:

1. for *situations* in which learners study entirely on their own;
2. for a set of *skills* which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
3. for an inborn *capacity* which is suppressed by institutional education;
4. for the exercise of learners’ *responsibility* for their own learning;
5. for the *right* of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

From the various definitions mentioned above, it can be concluded that the concept of autonomy is that learners should be ready to take charge of their own learning (Dam, 1990, as cited in Gardner & Miller, 1999). In other words, learners have a chance to participate in and to be fully responsible for their own learning in a learning environment (Dam, 1995, as cited in Sinclair, McGrath, & Lamb, 2000). In the broad term, an autonomous learner contains characteristics as “one who has acquired the strategies and knowledge to take some (if not yet all) responsibility for her language learning and is willing and self-confident enough to do so” (Wenden, 1991, as cited in Figura & Jarvis, 2007, p. 450). Esch et al. (2003) propose that teachers cannot teach all of what students need, also cannot provide all input, materials, and opportunities for students and that ‘learning is a personal process’ (pp. 17-18); therefore, the characteristics of autonomous learners mentioned earlier are necessary for students to be able to develop their studying independently.

A study by Sim (2007) collected data from 84 ESL students who were studying English in Australia before progressing into the Australian higher education system. Its purpose was to examine the effects of integrating a structured and explicit focus on goal setting and active learning into an English language and study skills university preparation program. Students were divided into 2 groups: a control group and a treatment group. The results indicated that the treatment group of students provided more details and expressed a variety of strategies for preparing themselves to be experts in English which showed that their sense of autonomy had increased significantly. Students in the treatment group had a positive attitude towards the English language (e.g. being interested in English and always thinking positively). They were willing to study English with effort (e.g. studying hard and practising skills, trying not to use their mother tongue, trying hard both in and out of the class, and trying to speak only English). They tried to find opportunities to use English (such as speak as much as possible with all kinds of people), and they accepted mistakes in order to learn from them. Meanwhile



they tried to rely on themselves which shows increasing levels of autonomy. In terms of monitoring, they tried to review their progress as well. Consistent with the statement, an autonomous learner creates their situation for learning by themselves from the beginning to the end of the learning process (planning, pacing, monitoring, and evaluating) (Little, 1994; Chan, 2003, as cited in Balcikanli, 2010). It implies that there are various ways to be a successful learner depending on not only students' interests and aptitudes but also students' positive attitude towards language learning.

To sum up, students' perceptions towards their self-study and their beliefs towards their own abilities to study by themselves are the main focus of this study. This is together with their perceptions about the potential benefits of the self-study module and their problems while studying because all of these can affect their self-study performance.

4. Methodology

4.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study were eight first-year undergraduate students who were placed into an LNG 101 course (elementary to pre-intermediate level of English proficiency) by their O-net scores (Ordinary National Educational Test) which were not high. LNG 101: General English is a compulsory course which requires the students to do self-study in both a computer lab and a Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC). The subjects voluntarily participated in this study. They were from four faculties: Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology, and School of Information Technology, at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT).

4.2 The self-study module

In the self-study module of LNG 101, the subjects studied for one hour in a computer lab every week for 15 weeks. They used various Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs and online materials (such as English Discoveries and Quartet), to practise listening, reading, grammar, and pronunciation, as well as paper-based materials (e.g. graded readers and in-house materials) provided for students in the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC). Some subjects also did some self-study outside class. Each week, the subjects worked on their self-selected materials and wrote reflections in an e-portfolio (two reflections from the computer programs and one reflection from graded readers or short stories) which focused on what they had learnt, difficulties they had faced, their levels of learning satisfaction, and what they would have liked to have told the teacher.

4.3 Data collection

The data were collected from structured interviews which were used to elicit the subjects' perceptions towards their self-study experiences. Their perceptions consisted of their attitudes towards self-study, their self-efficacy or beliefs towards their own abilities, their opinions about the benefits of self-study, and the problems they might have encountered while self-studying.

Before collecting the data, each subject was asked whether he or she had any general background knowledge or experience of self-study before studying in the self-study module in LNG 101, such as an experience of doing a self-study in their secondary school. In the process of collecting data, in order to investigate their performances and perceptions, the subjects were asked what they had done in the self-study.

The subjects were interviewed in Thai at the end of the semester after they experienced their self-study learning in the self-study module. The researcher did not intervene in the subjects' learning processes, and there were no controls so that real performances and perceptions towards the self-study module could be obtained. The interviewer was allowed by the subjects to record and conduct research. The subjects agreed to be recorded during the research interviews.

4.4 Data analysis

The data from the interview were transcribed and analyzed by identifying salient themes and counting frequency. The data was analyzed to investigate four main results: the attitudes towards the self-study, their self-efficacy in the self-study, the opinions about the benefits of self-study, and the problems encountered.

1. For the attitudes towards the self-study, the data was analyzed to find out two main results—whether they had positive or negative attitudes and the reasons supporting the favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards the self-study.
2. Self-efficacy in the self-study was analyzed to find out whether the subjects contained high or low confidence to study by themselves in the self-study module.
3. For the opinions about benefits of self-study, the subjects' reports were categorized.
4. Lastly, problems encountered while learning in the self-study module were identified by analyzing the data obtained from the interviews.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Subjects' attitudes towards self-study

The results show that half of the subjects (4 out of 8) had positive attitudes while the rest had negative attitudes towards their own experiences in doing the self-study.

For subjects with positive attitudes, there seemed to be four main reasons supporting their favourable attitudes: love of English, importance of English, background knowledge of English, and learning styles.

Regarding their preferences towards the English language, four subjects said that they enjoyed studying English, explaining that English was fun and their feelings towards English were positive. These subjects also viewed English as important and thought of it as an important tool for studying. It was the means for searching for knowledge and that was why they wanted to be better at English.

“... Now I think English is important and I try to practise and feel good with it (English). Overall I think I like it.” (S2)

“I enjoyed studying English because this language can provide further information from around the world.” (S8)

“Studying English is fun. It is not serious and not too difficult.” (S5)

Three of these subjects further explained that they liked self-study because it suited their learning style well. They could be independent and could learn at their own pace and interest.

“I like this way of learning. I can study by myself and I can select what I want to practise such as reading skills, finding new words.” (S8)

“It is free for me to study. I can practise depending on my feeling.” (S3)

Additionally, the background knowledge of English is considered as an important reason that fosters students' positive attitudes towards self-study. One out of eight subjects viewed that only proficient students would enjoy studying in a self-study mode.

“If students have a good background of English language, it would be fun when practising. But if not, students would not practise much.” (S8)

On the other hand, four subjects explicitly showed negative attitudes towards the self-study. Noticeably, the factors affecting their attitudes were similar to those of the subjects with positive attitudes, but they were of opposite orientation. It was possible that beliefs and attitudes reinforced one another. They thought that English was too difficult for them to study by themselves together with their points of view towards their poor English background knowledge so they preferred a conventional classroom with assistance from teachers.

“I do not like studying English. Also I never want to study by myself. It seems like it is not interesting... It wastes time to prepare myself. I want to learn with teachers.” (S6)

“I do not like studying English. I never feel like it.” (S7)

“I do not like studying by myself because I cannot understand. It is complicated... I know I have to practise by myself, but I do not like studying by myself. It is complicated. I have to work hard. I think studying in the classroom is enough.” (S1)

“I do not like English because it is very difficult and I feel bored...I think I am not good at English although I tried (a few weeks). Then I stopped practising.” (S4)

From the results above, it can be seen that learning styles and English language background knowledge influence students' attitudes to learn.

Based on the result of learning styles, it can be said that learning styles influence subjects to study in the self-study module. The subjects, such as S8 and S3, who preferred studying by themselves, enjoyed studying in the self-study module; on the other hand, subjects such as S6 and S1, who disliked studying by themselves, had trouble with studying in the self-study module. Kinsella (1995, as cited in Wong & Nunan, 2011) defines the word 'style' as a general term, *“being an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills”*. In other words, learning styles identify the way subjects conduct their learning (Cohen, 2003; Oxford, 2003, as cited in Wong & Nunan, 2011). Oxford (1993, as cited in Wong & Nunan, 2011) also notes that learning styles affect how learners accommodate their learning strategies. If subjects are aware of their own learning styles, they can well apply or adjust strategies and techniques to suit them. This is why some subjects faced difficulties in the self-study module; they preferred the conventional classroom and passive learning to the autonomy required of them in the self-study module.

In addition, background knowledge of English is one of the factors affecting subjects' learning and attitudes. A subject reported that he enjoyed practicing English because of his good background of English while others felt bored because of their relatively lower ability in English. Prior knowledge is said to be important because it influences learners to perceive, organize, and connect new information (Svinicki, 1993-4). Willingham (2007) also explains that background knowledge can both help and hurt performance depending on whether or not it can be applied to the learning situation. It means that subjects who have good background knowledge of English can study new information better than those who have unsatisfying results in English; consequently, one of the subjects (S8) stated that background knowledge could make the study more enjoyable. This can suggest that students can develop positive attitudes towards studying if they can apply their existing knowledge to new situations.

It can be concluded that students whose awareness of their needs or goals of studying tally with a self-study module and have good English background knowledge can study by themselves with positive attitudes. Their performances can also be better than those who have negative attitudes and have poorer English background knowledge because they can apply their existing knowledge and the learning strategies which they have

practiced. To help students to study effectively, students should be trained in both cognitive and affective strategies so that they can perceive which strategies are suitable and can prepare themselves in terms of mindfulness for learning (Dickinson, 1992).

5.2 Subjects' confidence in conducting self-study

The results concerning subjects' confidence in doing self-study were in the same direction as the results about their attitudes. Subjects with favourable attitudes seemed to have high confidence while the ones with unfavourable attitudes appeared to have low confidence in doing self-study.

Half of the subjects had strong beliefs in their abilities to study by themselves and explicitly expressed their can-do attitudes relating to their readiness to take responsibility. These subjects found this learning experience useful and enjoyable and therefore were willing to devote time to study in order to reach their learning goals.

"I can do self-study depending on my feeling and my goals. If I think I want to do it, I practise immediately. Sometimes, I want to know these or those, so I will find by myself. I can speak English with foreign teachers without embarrassment...I think I have the ability to use English well, but I still want to develop myself." (S5)

"I can take my responsibility for myself. It is fun trying to practise such as finding meaning of new words by using a dictionary. I can select the materials which I am interested in." (S2)

"Now I know how to manage the time and prepare myself. So, I feel more comfortable to study by myself. I can stay practising it for hours." (S3)

Oppositely, the rest of the subjects (4 out of 8) were not confident in their ability to self-study. Some of them gave up studying by themselves. It seems that their beliefs towards their ability to study by themselves influenced their learning. One of them (S4) believed that she could not study by herself although her score was satisfactory.

"I cannot learn it although I want to improve myself. I think English is difficult and there are a lot of things to learn." (S7)

"I tried for a few weeks, and I could not improve myself. Then I stopped practising by myself. Actually I want to be good at it, but I think I cannot." (S4)

"I know it is good for me if I practise by myself, but I cannot control myself to stay with it. Also, I have to study many subjects. I have to study hard. Once I had a test and, I passed and got good scores. It is incredible." (S1)

According to all of these results, it can be seen that confidence or self-efficacy was consistent with attitudes. Students who had positive attitudes towards self-study had more confidence towards their learning abilities; they enjoyed studying by themselves and decided their own direction of their learning to take responsibility. For example, they attempted to study for hours and applied their skills and techniques they had practised and retained towards their self-study learning. They seemed likely to have higher effort and get better performance compared with the group with low self-efficacies and lower proficiencies. Bandura (1997, as cited in Zimmerman, 2000) claimed that self-efficacious students are able to study by themselves with readiness and persistence while still confronting problems. Moreover, students who have positive attitudes and high levels of self-efficacy see the values of self-study. They can push themselves to study for hours with tolerance. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) explained that learners' investment in the study or devotion of effort relies on their perception about their expectations for success and the values of tasks. Students who see the value of what they are doing will make great effort to do/practise with enjoyment and they will participate in what they do due to the benefits they will receive (Eccles et al., 1983, as cited in Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

It can be said that this group of subjects, who had positive attitudes and high levels of self-efficacy, could take responsibility to control their learning situation on their own pace with their abilities and skills. In other words, because they held the characteristics of autonomous learners as per the discussion of Benson and Voller (1997), they seemed to be able to be autonomous learners in the future. Inefficacious subjects seemed to report positive values of the tasks but they seemed to lack belief in themselves. Moreover, for this group, their perceptions of their own abilities to take control of the situation were quite negative. It was suggested that locus of control is also necessary for taking actions, e.g., building confidence and reaching goals, where one with high confidence believes that results come from behavior while one with low confidence believes that outcomes are beyond control (Ashby et al., 2002; Bernardi, 2001). All of these explained why S1 felt that it was incredible for her to get good scores. To her, good scores come by "luck" or uncontrollable factors, so it might not be likely to come back easily.

5.3 Opinions about benefits of self-study

The results show that the subjects were aware of the benefits they gained from the self-study module in two main areas: their English skills/knowledge and their learning skills.

Regarding gaining English skills/knowledge, seven subjects stated that they gained more knowledge (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, and culture/stories) and improved their English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) from the self-study module. Four subjects, moreover, explained that English is significant in terms of opportunities to get jobs in the ASEAN community. They saw that it was important to be able to communicate with foreigners in English.



“I try to read newspaper from both online and paper sometimes (Bangkok Post) recommended by my teacher. I can know more words by myself by using dictionary and I prefer online dictionary. Moreover, I play games for which I must know vocabulary; it can help me expand my vocabulary. My listening skills are better comparing with my previous level. I think like that because I can catch more words when listening in the self-study mode and I can sometimes practise my pronunciation and intonation through imitation. My writing skills and grammar knowledge are better because of writing tasks on E-port.” (S3)

“I know that self-study enables me to practise listening, reading, pronunciation and to know more words. I can practise guessing vocabulary in context when reading stories. I think English is important for my future. I think of job seeking in the future because the competition is stronger when having the ASEAN community.” (S4)

“English is very important because now and future I have to use English in the real world. I must use English to get a job and speak English with foreigners.” (S8)

Regarding the learning skills, five subjects perceived that their learning skills had improved. They explained that they could manage their own learning better, such as preparing for both the self-study module and the conventional class, managing time to practise each week, and solving problems while practising. They also thought that because this style of learning (self-study) supported independence and interest, their sense of responsibility had increased in turn.

“I learn how to prepare myself for my study. I came to know that having a plan can be done by myself such as which computer programs I will study today. I can also prepare myself for the conventional class such as looking up vocabulary of the lesson I will study that day. I also manage time for each practice by myself.”(S2)

“I think self-study is to learn by myself. No one controls me, so I can choose what I am interested in. I think because of this, I must manage my time and my study. I must devote more time to study. I spend my time practising English via computer programs outside the class/lab 2-3 times a week. It is similar to when working, no one controls because I am an adult.”(S3)

“I think it motivates me more than studying in the conventional classroom with only lecturers. I am able to practise what is interesting. Sometimes I have to solve problems by myself. At first, I could not set my time for it, but then I adjust my schedule and it is better. When rescheduling, I must plan for other subjects as well.”(S4)

From the statements above, it can be seen that the subjects could see that self-study was beneficial for both learning English and developing study skills in general. From

their point of view, they gained more knowledge (such as grammar and vocabulary) and skills of the English language (e.g. listening, reading, and writing skills). Moreover, self-study can improve their sense of responsibility not only applicable to their studies but also in their future working lives, especially in acquiring a job and communicating in the workplace. Students, who interact with materials, try to understand the materials, apply techniques to finish tasks and use cognitive strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Metacognitive strategies are one of the three basic types of metacognition, which is a device for encouraging students to engage in self-study (Shannon, 2008). Metacognitive strategies can be called 'self-management strategies' or 'skills of self-directed learning' (Wenden, 1991; Holec, 1981, as cited in Darasawang, 2007). For this group of subjects, it seemed that they gained benefits from their self-study both in terms of cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies. Their work involved practising and understanding the activities, trying to find ways to complete the activities and memorizing new words. That is to say, students who utilize cognitive strategies make their own decision to design their working of the given task (Darasawang, 2007). They could also manage themselves to learn in the self-study throughout the process of learning such as planning their learning, deciding to complete the task, monitoring their learning, and evaluating themselves. It shows that metacognitive strategies are important for autonomous learning, because students with metacognitive strategies have their goals and try to find the opportunities to complete tasks consciously (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; McDonough, 1999).

5.4 Problems about self-study

The results show that there were four main impediments to learning which occurred while the subjects were studying: technical problems, time constraints, score, and their interest.

Regarding the technical problems, there were two main problems mentioned which were the computer operating system and equipment. Seven out of eight subjects mentioned having problems with the log-in and log-out system. Each time subjects wanted to practise the provided programs or write a reflection, they had to sign in by using their username and password. Log-in availability could be frequently jammed when they wanted to practise in other places (e.g. at the library or at home). Also, while practising in a provided program or writing a reflection, the program would accidentally log out without saving the user's work; consequently, they could not complete their tasks and thus wasted their time. These problems affected their learning process and feelings towards their self-study.

"Sometimes I can't log in into the programs and it affects my feelings. When it happens, I don't want to practise. I change my mind to do other things instead." (S1)

"When writing a reflection in the E-port, the programs log out automatically very quickly, but I am working and my work hasn't finished." (S6)



There were six subjects who mentioned equipment. They requested new earphones which could help them hear more clearly while practising listening.

“I do not like earphones in the computer lab because they do not work properly and especially the quality of sound. It is not good enough and it influences me when listening.” (S2)

“One of the problems which wastes my time is earphones in the computer lab. I have to change my seat to find better ones.” (S7)

Regarding the time, which is one of the major problems, five subjects said that an hour for studying in the self-study module was not sufficient. They suggested that expanding time for studying in the lab would be a better way to solve this problem.

“I have to practise in the lab as quickly as possible because the time is out. I want at least 30 minutes more to finish all my jobs.” (S4)

“Time for practice in the self-study is too short. I want to have more time to practise. Sometimes I work, but I can’t finish my exercise and time is out.” (S7)

Additionally, the potential score did not motivate the subjects enough to learn. They said that value of scores were too low to stimulate them to practise in the self-study.

“If there are no scores, I will not do/practise it. Also, I will do assignments/works (the reflection) when it is the time to submit.” (S1)

Finally, interest was also revealed to influence self-studying. One subject revealed no interest toward his learning and self-study, which resulted in him abandoning the self-study tasks altogether.

“I am not interested in English at all. I think it is boring. I don’t understand and I don’t want to practise...I don’t understand how to learn by myself. I can’t practise reading alone. I don’t understand the stories. Also, I don’t understand what the teacher wants me to do.” (S6)

Based on the findings, problems during the self-study came from technical difficulties (such as the log-in/log-out system and equipment), the time available for practice in the self-study module, the percentage of total course score awarded for their work and their interests towards self-study learning.

In terms of technical difficulties, Clarke (2008) explained that when working with technology, students can easily be faced with technical problems either when working at home or at the university. This means that technical problems are commonly encountered, so problem solving skills are very important for self-study so that one may manage their learning more effectively. In this study, the subjects could not control the system (e.g. log-in and log-out availability) when practising outside the computer lab. In response

to this, they changed their plans in order to do other activities instead, or they could not complete the task in the time allotted; they had to save their work in advance, for example. Therefore, to facilitate students learning with technology, training in problem solving skills is essential for them. Also, the equipment was a problem for students because earphones are basic equipment for students to study in a computer lab; however, when students had faulty earphones they tried to find new ones, by changing their seats. In addition, to facilitate students' optimal learning, an institution should seek for someone to regularly examine and maintain all equipment in a laboratory. Everything should be well-equipped and ready to use as much as possible.

The problems mentioned above link directly with the next problem, which is the time the subjects had left for practice. To clarify, with problems with earphones, subjects had to change their seats, switch on the machine, and relog-in, etc. and, as a result, had little time left to do their self-access work. Moreover, more than half of the subjects reported that they needed more time to practise in the self-study module in the computer lab because they could not finish their work on time. This shows that, in learning through the self-study, each student is different in terms of their ability to manage their time and to complete a task or activity; consequently, each of them differently spends time practising and completing a task or activity. It has been suggested that learners should have enough time to digest their knowledge and thoughts (Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999). It can also be said that if students are guided in how to manage their time in and out of the computer lab, they may be able to maximize their benefits in the time allotted to them.

In terms of interests towards the self-study module, one of the subjects (S6) felt that studying by himself was difficult and that the language was incomprehensible. To him, the English language was difficult and especially so when studying by himself. It can be said that these difficulties link to learning styles which have been discussed earlier. Clarke (2008) also states that when students have to study in different and unfamiliar styles of learning, they may feel uncomfortable and struggle to study effectively. Furthermore, Mahmoudi and Noor (2012) found that using technology like computers influences students' attitudes in language learning. Studying English was easier and more enjoyable when using computers and they were stimulated to study more. In other words, technology is used as a tool to stimulate or attract students to learn more if students are accustomed to using technology such as a computer. On the other hand, if students feel uncomfortable with practising via a computer, they should be suggested to find other ways that suit them better, such as studying and discussing in a group with classmates, studying with friends, or spending time in an English club provided for them. This is supported by Dickinson's idea (1987) that self-study learning does not mean that he/she must study alone; rather, studying with peers or in groups can help maintain morale and motivation in learning.



Another noticeable result is the scores for assignments. From the results obtained, the scores received are not commensurate with the effort put into their self-study modules. It shows that students paid too much attention to the scores awarded for each assignment. This concern creates conflicts between the sense of autonomy and the motivation or inspiration of learning. Learning should come from students' interest; however, students' interest may be gradually changed from focusing on scores, at the first step, to developing their sense of learning orientation, at the last. In other words, at first, students may start to learn by themselves because they are interested in and motivated by scores, but after practising how to study by themselves, they may find and develop their own interests. From this point, it is suggested that students should know their role as a learner, that is, *'they know how to learn'* or students should be involved in every step of making decisions on their own learning (Holec, 1987). It can be suggested that learner training is essential for students, and particularly, they can see and understand the purpose of studying and how to learn in a self-study module; therefore, they can take and exercise their responsibility towards their own interests and learning.

From all the results and discussions above, it reflects that student's perceptions are related to attitudes, self-efficacy, and beliefs which have been discussed earlier. It can be seen that students who have positive perceptions seemed to hold stronger beliefs in themselves that they can conduct a self-study and have positive attitudes comparing with the other group of students. Together with the opinions which they expressed, they see the benefits of self-study learning for their future. In other words, it is harmonized with Wong and Nunan's results (2011) that English in effective learners' view is regarded as a tool for communicating rather than a subject they must study. With reference to the problems mentioned earlier, students who possess the characteristics of an autonomous learner would try to solve problems to finish a task or goal instead of stop practising. This confirms that students who have positive attitudes and confidence in themselves will hold can-do learning beliefs and it is obviously seen from their behaviors while studying, which is consistent with the study of Gao (2010) that a physical disabled student had strong belief in her learning ability and the result showed that belief was closely related to self-efficacy and behavior such as effort and perseverance.

6. Conclusion and implications

The present study explored how the students perceived the self-study module. The data collected after they finished practising in the self-study module and their problems occurring in the self-study module were also investigated. From the results, it was found that there were two groups of students who either liked or disliked the self-study learning. They show that attitudes, self-efficacy, and opinions about the benefits of self-study played major roles. A number of problems encountered while studying in the module were reported. Therefore, to help students study by themselves at the highest

potential in the module, those problems should be solved, especially in terms of score percentages. Although ideally autonomy is not concerned about scores, it is important that the module is designed to bridge overcome this hindrance. Significantly, to re-arrange the self-study module is useful for students; however, teachers should be aware of the differences and preferences of each student. Each student needs support and motivation differently, so they need different levels of preparation and scaffolding. It may be helpful for students to be trained and taught strategies related to self-study. Another way to scaffold students is through consultation. Students may get a chance to consult with teachers to improve their skills and to find out their strong and weak points. Importantly, students should be trained in problem solving skills because problems do typically occur, especially when learning with technology. Because of this, the system should be a primary concern and should thus be well-designed to integrate technology with self-study. Whether or not a self-study module is useful for students depends on methodological preparation. In addition to that, students' beliefs are important, thus psychological preparation should also be of concern.

7. Limitations of the study

In conducting this study, the main weakness is that the sample was small. Regarding the representatives of all faculties in the university, eight undergraduate students voluntarily took part in this research; thus the findings were mainly related to the self-studying which they experienced in the course LNG 101 at KMUTT. For future studies, the results which come from different contexts may reveal a wider view of student's perceptions and lead students to become autonomous learners in various ways.

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Authors

Wannapa Jenwitthayayot is a graduate student in Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching (ELT) at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Bangkok, Thailand. Her recent study is *Students' Perceptions about their Self-Study Experience*. Her research interest is in the field of English language teaching, especially independent learning.
wannahite@hotmail.com

Saowaluck Tepsuriwong is a member of the teaching staff at the Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. Her interests include language learning, strategies training and teaching pedagogy.
saowaluck.tep@kmutt.ac.th

