

Enhancing Thai EFL Students' English Reading Comprehension Through Self-Directed Learning

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the enhancement of Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension through self-directed learning, and to examine their opinions regarding this approach. The participants were 22 first-year undergraduate students majoring in Accounting. The research instruments included lesson plans, English reading passages, a reading comprehension test, students' journals, and questionnaires. Quantitative data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests of English reading comprehension, as well as questionnaires. These data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, percentage, and t-test. Qualitative data were collected from students' journals and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results indicated that the mean score of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test, suggesting that the students' English reading comprehension was significantly improved. The questionnaires revealed that most students held positive opinions regarding the enhancement of their English reading comprehension through self-directed learning. The journals also showed that most students believed in the effectiveness of this learning approach. Therefore, the findings suggest that Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension can be effectively enhanced through self-directed learning.

Keywords: Thai EFL students, English reading comprehension, self-directed learning

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, English is considered a global language widely used for communication among people from different nations (Rao, 2019). In Thailand, Thai people have their own language, so English is used as a foreign language (EFL) for communication with foreigners for specific purposes such as education, business, and travel. As part of education, English has been a compulsory subject in Thai educational institutes since 1921. Thai students must learn it from primary school to higher education. However, their English proficiency is still unsatisfactory (Prasongporn, 2016). According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it has been used as the benchmark to evaluate learners' language proficiency (Office of the Education Council, 2017). The standard is divided into six levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2, in which A1 is the lowest level and C2 is the highest level (North & Piccardo, 2018). The average of Thai students' English proficiency is at A1–A2 only (Waluyo, 2019). This finding reflects the magnitude of the problem and highlights the necessity of solving it.

English reading skills can be considered one of the main problems for Thai students at all levels, including at the university level (Rungwaraphong, 2020). This problem leads to their limited learning ability in an academic context. The reason for this is that most worldwide knowledge has been written in English. As a result, English reading ability has played an important role in obtaining knowledge from various learning channels, not only those in Thailand (Widowati & Kurniasih, 2018). Reading comprehension is very significant when acquiring knowledge this way. This is because the procedure involves the extraction and construction of meaning through interaction with written texts. A reader needs to be able to decode the meanings of words and retrieve their meanings using syntactic knowledge for combining them into larger units such as phrases, clauses, and sentences. Furthermore, linguistic rules and background knowledge with regard to information need to be integrated to understand what is read (Snow, 2002). The English reading comprehension level of Thai university students seems to be at an unsatisfactory level. Many of them cannot decode the meanings of words, and cannot comprehend sentence structures (Sattanakho & Dechsubha, 2018). These Thai students still encounter difficulties in understanding the written content (Rawengwan & Yawiloeng, 2020). The findings suggest that this group of students struggles with English reading skills, which can lead to the problem of comprehension.

For the problem of English reading comprehension, a teacher-centered approach can be considered the cause of the problem. In Thailand, this teaching approach seems to be widely used. Teachers control learning management without giving students adequate learning independence or motivating them to learn and practice by themselves (Sinturat et al., 2021). This teaching approach may cause students to learn passively and decrease their motivation. Moreover, this seems to be a teaching approach that limits students to learning in classrooms only (Ertmer et al., 2012). Therefore, these students need to be prompted to learn and practice by themselves for more opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills.

In order to encourage students to learn and practice by themselves, self-directed learning can be used to assist them in improving their English learning (Taladngoen et al., 2020). Furthermore, technology has increasingly been developed to support self-directed learning and enhance English skills. Numerous studies have specified that self-directed learning enables learners to improve their knowledge or skills through flexible methods or the use of various tools. Students can apply these to broaden their English learning and practice in the classroom (Each & Suppasetseree, 2021). For this learning approach, it is required that learners take greater responsibility for their own learning. This learning approach also prompts them to learn from their teachers as well as from knowledgeable people and each type of learning resource (Karatas & Arpacı, 2021).

Based on the benefits of self-directed learning, all English skills can, therefore, be developed through the application of this learning approach, including English reading. In order to develop English reading comprehension, self-directed learning can be applied as an effective learning approach. In terms of this learning approach, the student-centered approach is normally emphasized. Thus, students are encouraged to learn more actively since they have to take action for their learning and practice rather than through a traditional learning approach. For enhancing English reading comprehension, self-directed learning encourages students to identify the specific problems they face in English reading comprehension, create learning plans to address those problems, and consider suitable learning resources as tools for supporting English reading enhancement (Zhu et al., 2022).

As a manifestation of self-directed learning, it tends to help learners improve their English reading comprehension. Learners have more flexible choices to learn and practice this skill, such as the selection of learning content, selection of learning methods, and management of learning procedures. However, previous studies have not focused on the

performance of Thai students in this type of learning approach for enhancing English reading comprehension. Thus, this research aims to investigate the enhancement of Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension through self-directed learning at a Thai university in the second semester of the 2024 academic year, and to examine their opinions on the learning approach. In addition, the results can be used as a guide to improve English reading comprehension in related contexts.

Purposes of the Research

1. To investigate the enhancement of Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension through self-directed learning.
2. To examine the opinions of Thai EFL students on the enhancement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning.

Research Questions

1. Can Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension be enhanced through self-directed learning?
2. What are the opinions of Thai EFL students on the enhancement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning?

Hypothesis

Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension scores from the post-test will significantly increase from the pre-test.

Scope of the Research

This study involves two variables, which are explained as follows:

1. Independent Variable

The independent variable of this research is self-directed learning.

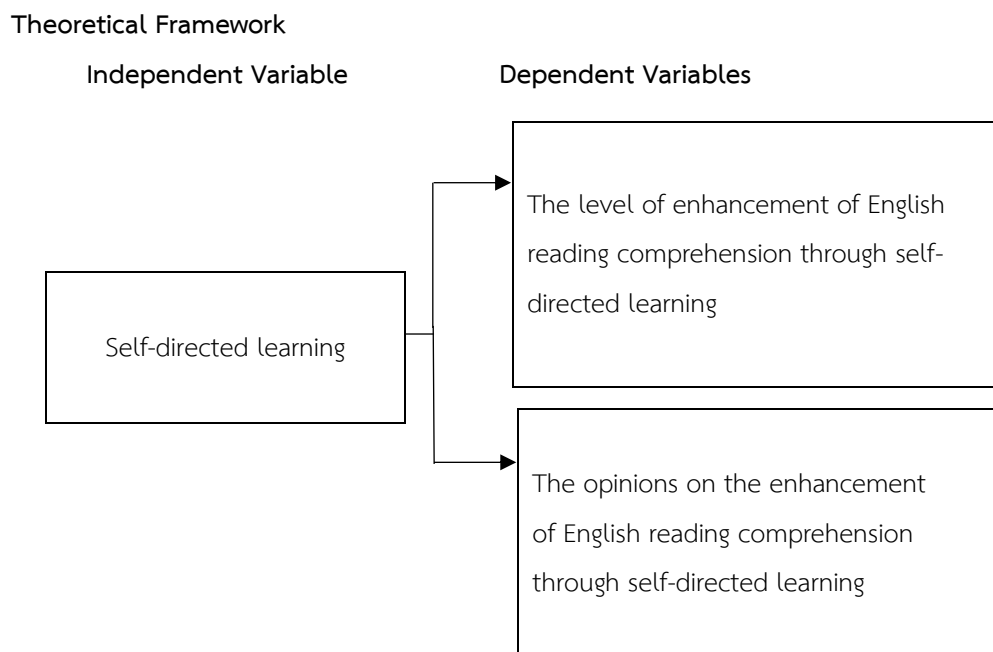
2. Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of this research includes the enhancement level of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning and the opinions on this learning approach.

The research's variables can be summarized as follows:

Figure 1

Independent and Dependent Variables



Literature Review

This section of the research reviews theories regarding English reading comprehension, self-directed learning, and the enhancement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning respectively for further study. These relevant theories are described as follows.

1. English Reading Comprehension

In academic areas, reading is very important for learners because they need to use reading skills to obtain knowledge. For this reason, it is important for learners to understand and practice strategies or techniques to strengthen reading skills, so as to perform successfully (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1989). In order to obtain the most benefits from reading, it is essential for learners to use intensive reading and extensive reading. Intensive reading focuses on the linguistic or semantic details of the content. This is dealing with unknown words and sentence structures (Khazaal, 2019). In the case of extensive reading, it is quite different. Extensive reading is a kind of rapid reading which emphasizes general comprehension, not focusing on every detail of content. Learners use this type of reading when they deal with long content

and read widely (Pongsatornpiat, 2021). From the above information, we can see that reading is an important way to receive content where comprehension is the most significant thing. Normally, this is called “Reading Comprehension”.

According to this aspect of reading comprehension, it has been defined as the procedure whereby readers simultaneously extract and construct meanings from small linguistic units by integrating them into larger textual units through interaction with a written text (Snow, 2002). Reading comprehension can mainly be divided into three levels: the literal level, the inferential level, and the critical level. The literal level involves comprehending information explicitly stated in a text. For the inferential level, this is different from the literal level since it involves comprehending information indirectly stated in a text by drawing a conclusion. As the critical level, it involves comprehending a text through understanding at both the literal and inferential levels, allowing ideas from the text to be developed and concluded. Therefore, readers have to decode and interpret the meanings of words, sentences, and all information by integrating linguistic rules and background knowledge to fully comprehend the text (Akopyan & Saks, 2022).

For English reading, this plays an essential role in obtaining information and knowledge. It seems to be the key to accessing the world of learning. The reason for this is that many information resources and learning channels have been published in English around the world (Widowati & Kurniasih, 2018). Normally, this is similar to reading in other languages, and comprehension seems to be the most important thing for English reading skills because the main goal of reading is to comprehend what is read. Readers need to be able to use English skills to decode the meaning of words, sentences, and all of the content written in English to understand them clearly (Rawengwan & Yawiloeng, 2020). Therefore, both reading comprehension and English proficiency are very significant parts. It is necessary to apply these parts together for effective English reading comprehension.

2. Self-Directed Learning

The concept of self-directed learning has been addressed by numerous scholars, but it can initially be defined as a procedure in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the assistance of others, to assess learning needs, develop learning purposes, identify learning resources, apply learning approaches, and evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). According to this issue, learners are promoted and motivated to learn and practice by

self-study under the teacher's suggestion. From this learning approach, learners have a tendency to move towards achievement or potential fulfillment (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2018).

Self-directed learning can be applied as an approach to provide students with more autonomous learning. It encourages students to construct learning from their own desires without limitations (Karatas & Arpaci, 2021). Moreover, they can learn more independently and flexibly, and accountability is very important for learning through this learning approach (Platt et al., 2014). Simultaneously, learning stress can be reduced since peer competition is not strongly emphasized (Zhu, 2021). Additionally, educational technology has increasingly been developed, including internet networks, which can be applied to support self-directed learning. Learners can search for information and interact with knowledgeable people from around the world via online environments to access information and construct knowledge (Sappapan, 2022). It can be mentioned that self-directed learning is an approach that promotes lifelong learning skills, which are very significant for each learner.

3. The Enhancement of English Reading Comprehension through Self-Directed Learning

According to the mentioned information regarding self-directed learning, it can be considered an effective learning approach. It encourages learners to identify problems, develop learning plans, and find out about appropriate learning resources (Phungsuk et al., 2017). Learners normally acquire and retain knowledge and are more likely to find information beyond what is provided in their normal learning settings (Mariano & Batchelor, 2018).

For improving English reading comprehension, self-directed learning provides an effective and flexible learning approach for developing this skill. According to the procedures of self-directed learning, this learning approach can encourage learners to identify problems in English reading comprehension. Learners need to know what should be improved and how to act on it. This benefit is consistent with the findings of Phungsuk et al. (2017). Self-directed learning motivated learners to identify their learning problems before specifying ways to solve them. After learners identify a problem, they need to create learning plans. These are used as guidelines to enhance English reading skills. This information is congruent with the study of Zhao and Lertlit (2023), indicating that self-directed learning encouraged learners to plan and specify the means to solve their learning problems. Moreover, learners need to consider appropriate learning materials and how to apply them. These learning resources can be utilized to learn, practice, and enhance English reading skills for more

comprehension. This aspect is associated with the findings of Zhu et al. (2022), specifying that this approach prompted learners to think about suitable learning resources and utilize them to enhance their learning and skills.

For this research, the principles of self-directed learning were adapted to design lesson plans that improved students' English reading comprehension. They were mainly used to set English reading goals, develop plans to achieve those goals, select appropriate learning strategies and resources, manage time, monitor and evaluate tasks, and improve learning outcomes. Moreover, drawing from the concepts of this learning approach; flexible study, learning interactions, and practices were emphasized in the lesson plans.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study was designed as a mixed-methods study with a variant of the embedded experimental model (Creswell, 2007). The priority of conducting the research was determined by the quantitative method, and qualitative data were given a supplementary role for supporting the quantitative method in gathering more detailed and in-depth data. The primary purpose of this research was to investigate the enhancement of Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension through self-directed learning using a pre-test and a post-test. The second purpose was to examine Thai EFL students' opinions on this learning approach; this was conducted by adopting a questionnaire, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were combined.

2. Participants

The participants of this research were 22 first-year undergraduate students majoring in accounting. They enrolled in a compulsory English course during the second semester of the 2024 academic year at That Phanom College, Nakhon Phanom University. All of them were Thai students: 2 were male, and 20 were female, with ages ranging from 20 to 22, and all used English as a foreign language (EFL). These participants were selected using purposive sampling.

The participants were selected for two main reasons: 1) they studied in an English course in the second semester of the 2024 academic year, and 2) they had different English

skills: low, moderate, and high levels. Therefore, they were suitable to be the participants for this research.

3. Instruments

There were five instruments employed to collect data: five lesson plans, English reading passages, an English reading test, a questionnaire, and students' journals. The details of these instruments are explained as follows:

3.1 Lesson Plans

The five lesson plans for the English for communication course were developed by adopting learning activities that promote self-directed learning. These lesson plans were implemented as guidelines for managing learning and teaching: content, time periods, learning purposes, teaching approaches, teaching procedures, learning activities, learning materials, and learning evaluation. These lesson plans were created based on the principles of self-directed learning. Learning activities of the lesson plans were used to stimulate and motivate the students to set learning goals, specify the means to achieve those goals, and monitor and evaluate the results during and after implementing tasks.

Each lesson plan was reviewed by three experts, who were teaching the English language at a higher education level, to confirm its suitability. This evaluation was based on a 1-5 scoring scale. The suitability mean score was 4.69, and the standard deviation was 0.54, indicating that this instrument was suitable. Moreover, suggestions from the experts were considered to revise the lesson plans for more effectiveness.

3.2 English Reading Passages

For intervening self-directed learning, this instrument was adopted for the participants to read by themselves outside the classroom. It consisted of 8 passages from the reading comprehension section of the *Interchange* Textbook published by Cambridge University Press. These participants were required to read two passages weekly and complete the comprehension exercises to train them to better understand what they were reading. Each passage consisted of five multiple-choice questions. Its validity was examined in a pilot study by 12 first-year undergraduate students who studied at That Phanom College, Nakhon Phanom

University, but they were not the participants of this study. The result was 0.89, indicating that these passages were valid.

3.3 Test of English Reading Comprehension

A test of English reading comprehension was used as both a pre-test and a post-test to examine the participants' English reading comprehension before and after learning through self-directed learning. The purpose of this test was to evaluate the ability of students to understand what was read. It consisted of four passages and 20 multiple-choice questions, with each question worth 1 point, totaling 20 points. According to the levels of reading comprehension, the test can be categorized into three levels: literal level (8 items), inferential level (7 items), and critical level (5 items). The test materials were identical to the English reading passages, which were used for practice during the investigation, but they contained different content. Therefore, they were also valid.

3.4 Students' Journals

The participants used this instrument to record their experiences regarding the enhancement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning. This instrument was used to enable the researcher to better understand the results after the participants had learned and practiced through self-directed learning. In the fourteenth week, they were required to write in Thai the problems and benefits that they had identified from their English reading experiences through self-directed learning.

3.5 Questionnaire

This instrument was created by the researcher and adapted from the questionnaires of Swatevacharkul (2017) and Zhao and Lertlit (2023). It was used to collect participants' opinions about self-directed learning after the treatment. The questionnaire contained two sections with 15 questions. The first section was a demographic question, and the second section was a five-point Likert scale with 15 closed-ended questions used to gather participants' opinions on the enhancement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning. The questionnaire was translated into Thai to prevent misunderstanding when reading and answering the questions. On a five-point scale (1–5): 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

In order to confirm the validity of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by the same experts who evaluated the suitability of the lesson plans. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate each item on the scale of -1, 0, and +1. The overall IOC was 0.85. Moreover, reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha. Its value was 0.88. These results indicate that this questionnaire is valid and reliable.

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee of Nakhon Phanom University. The reference number is HE2768.

4. Data Collection Procedure

Week 10: In this week, the researcher explained the research procedure to the participants, including the purpose of the study, the concepts of self-directed learning, the steps for conducting the research, the relevant learning resources, and the ethical clearance. The participants then took a 50-minute pre-test. Afterward, they were required to join a Line group to ask questions or provide suggestions regarding their learning during the experiment.

Weeks 11–14: The researcher sent two English reading passages weekly via the Line group. During this period, the researcher suggested reading strategies to motivate participants to read the passages and complete the exercises outside the classroom. Participants were required to complete and submit the exercises weekly. In the 14th week, they were also required to write journals based on their reading.

Week 15: Participants took a 50-minute post-test. After completing the post-test, they responded to a questionnaire about their experiences in enhancing English reading comprehension through self-directed learning during the experiment.

5. Data Analysis

The data of this research were analyzed into two parts: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. These parts are explained as follows:

5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Firstly, the scores of the pre-test and post-test were calculated using the mean and standard deviation, and compared with a t-test. Next, the questionnaire items were analyzed using percentage, mean, standard deviation, and t-test. All quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software.

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

A thematic content analysis was used to examine the students' journals. Initially, the original content was read to gain understanding. Then, statements with similar meanings were summarized and categorized. Finally, the meanings within each category were extracted.

Results

According to the first research question, a dependent-sample t-test was calculated to test the hypothesis of this research. The results are presented in tables 1–4.

Table 1

Mean Scores of English Reading Comprehension Tests Before and After Learning Through Self-Directed Learning (Overall Findings)

Test (20 points)	n	M	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Pre-test	22	7.32	2.12	21	7.18	.00
Post-test	22	12.36	2.52			
P < .05						

Regarding Table 1, the results show that the hypothesis was accepted. The pre-test mean score ($M = 7.32$, $SD = 2.12$) and the post-test mean score ($M = 12.36$, $SD = 2.52$) of the students' English reading comprehension were significantly different ($t = 7.18$, $p < .05$). The post-test mean score was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score. This suggests that, on average, the students' reading comprehension increased after learning through self-directed learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students' reading comprehension improved after learning through this approach.

Besides, reading comprehension can be categorized into three levels: literal, inferential, and critical. These levels were analyzed to present the results at each level. The findings are shown as follows:

Table 2

Mean Scores of English Reading Comprehension Tests Before and After Learning Through Self-Directed Learning (Literal Level)

Literal level (8 points)	M	SD	t-value	p-value
Pre-test	3.45	0.86	8.67	.00
Post-test	5.96	1.05		
P < .05				

According to Table 2, the results reveal that the pre-test mean score ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.86$) and the post-test mean score ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.05$) for students' English reading comprehension at the literal level were significantly different ($t = 8.67$, $p < .05$). The post-test mean score was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score. This suggests that, on average, their reading comprehension at the literal level increased after learning through self-directed learning. Hence, it can be concluded that students' reading comprehension at the literal level improved after learning through this approach.

Table 3

Mean Scores of English Reading Comprehension Tests Before and After Learning Through Self-Directed Learning (Inferential Level)

Inferential level (7 points)	M	SD	t-value	p-value
Pre-test	2.51	1.01	5.44	.00
Post-test	4.67	1.30		
P < .05				

Based on Table 3, the results show that the pre-test mean score ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.01$) and the post-test mean score ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.30$) for students' English reading comprehension at the inferential level were significantly different ($t = 5.44$, $p < .05$). The post-test mean score was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score. This suggests that, on average, their reading comprehension at the inferential level increased after learning through self-directed learning. Thus, it can be concluded that the students' reading comprehension at the inferential level improved after using this learning approach.

Table 4

Mean Scores of English Reading Comprehension Tests Before and After Learning Through Self-Directed Learning (Critical Level)

Critical level (5 points)	M	SD	t-value	p-value
Pre-test	1.36	0.79	2.11	.18
Post-test	1.73	0.98		
P > .05				

Regarding Table 4, the results reveal that the pre-test mean score ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.79$) and the post-test mean score ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 0.98$) for students' English reading comprehension at the critical level were not significantly different ($t = 2.11$, $p > .05$). Although the post-test mean score was higher than the pre-test mean score, the difference was small and not statistically significant. This suggests that, on average, their reading comprehension at the critical level did not increase substantially after learning through self-directed learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' reading comprehension at the critical level showed only slight improvement after using this learning approach.

For the second research question, the questionnaire and the students' journals were analyzed to examine their related points of view. The findings are presented in Tables 5-7.

Table 5

Participants' Gender Ratio

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	2	9%
Female	20	91%
Total	22	100%

According to Table 5, a total of 22 participants in the experiment responded to the questionnaire. Of these, 2 were male (9%) and 20 were female (91%).

Table 6

Participants' Opinions on the Enhancement of English Reading Comprehension Through Self-Directed Learning from the Questionnaire

No.	Contents (n = 22)	M	Standard deviation	Level of agreement
1	Self-directed learning is a useful learning approach for learning English.	3.95	0.486	High
2	Self-directed learning is helpful for improving English reading comprehension.	4.09	0.610	High
3	Self-directed learning enables me to enhance English reading comprehension.	4.05	0.486	High
4	Self-directed learning enables me to learn more things that are difficult to obtain from formal classes.	4	0.690	High
5	Self-directed learning is a highly flexible learning approach that can be adapted to enhance my learning.	4.36	0.581	Very High
6	Self-directed learning can be adapted for learning and practice in other subjects.	3.95	0.575	High
7	Self-directed learning is one of the most important learning approaches for students in higher education.	4.5	0.598	Very High
8	I have found that self-directed learning promotes learning both inside and outside the classroom.	4.55	0.510	Very High
9	I have found that self-directed learning enables me to learn anywhere and anytime.	4.36	0.492	Very High
10	I have found that I could learn more independently through self-directed learning.	4.45	0.671	Very High
11	Self-directed learning enables me to have greater accountability for learning.	4.18	0.665	High
12	I have found that self-directed learning promotes me to learn and practice more actively.	4.14	0.560	High

Table 6

Participants' Opinions on the Enhancement of English Reading Comprehension Through Self-Directed Learning from the Questionnaire (continued)

No.	Contents (n = 22)	M	Standard deviation	Level of agreement
13	Self-directed learning supports me to think reasonably and solve any problem systematically.	3.86	0.560	High
14	I have found that self-directed learning promotes me to plan for learning and practice.	4.09	0.684	High
15	Self-directed learning should be more promoted and applied for learning and practice.	4.23	0.429	Very High
Overall total		4.18	0.573	High

Based on Table 6, the participants' overall opinions on the improvement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning were positive, showing a high level of agreement ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.573$). When each item was analyzed, it revealed that six items showed very high average agreement (Items 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 15). For the rest of the items, the average agreement level was high. Therefore, the results indicate that participants generally believed in the usefulness of self-directed learning for enhancing English reading comprehension. In addition, some competencies such as accountability, planning, and problem-solving were also improved. Further insights into participants' opinions were collected from students' journals, as presented below.

Table 7

Participants' Opinions on the Enhancement of English Reading Comprehension Through Self-Directed Learning from Students' Journals

Themes	Sample responses
Positive opinions	
Independent learning	This learning approach prompts me to learn both inside and outside the classroom, which makes it suitable for learning in the current era. It is flexible, allowing me to manage my learning schedule and location. (S12)
	In my opinion, self-directed learning allows me to learn anything related to the scope of the content. The learning content is not too limited. (S18)
	Self-directed learning supports me in learning independently through various learning channels, which are very convenient. I use the internet to search for information on any topic and as a channel to communicate with others for asking and giving suggestions. (S05)
	From learning through this way, I can select each learning channel by myself, which makes it easier for me. This allows me to understand the content better. (S06)
	Self-directed learning is more flexible than traditional learning approaches, which emphasize learning in the classroom. Learning both inside and outside the classroom should be encouraged, as it appears to be more effective than learning in the classroom only. (S19)
Learning responsibility	It supports me in developing self-discipline for learning. Each assignment needs to be finished on time. Thus, this encourages me to take greater responsibility. (S22)
	This learning approach improves responsibility so much. I must finish the text readings and understand them before discussing the related information with the teacher and other students in the classroom. (S08)
	The procedures of learning through self-directed learning stimulate me to improve my responsibility. Self-study and punctuality are emphasized so much to finish assignments. (S17)

Table 7

Participants' Opinions on the Enhancement of English Reading Comprehension Through Self-Directed Learning from Students' Journals (continued)

Themes	Sample responses
Learning development	From my point of view, self-directed learning enables me to develop my knowledge and skills through learning by doing under the teacher's guidance. I have learned to apply strategies to solve English reading problems, especially when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar, by using various learning channels to achieve better understanding. (S20) Self-directed learning prompts me to learn through various learning channels which are easy to access. It enables me to learn unfamiliar English vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar to improve English reading comprehension. (S04) This learning approach encourages me to learn through self-study. Therefore, it is essential for me to search for information, consult knowledgeable people, and analyze what I have learned to enhance my knowledge. (S16)
Negative opinions	
Unfamiliar learning approach	In my opinion, this may be a good learning approach, but it is still unfamiliar to me, especially when it comes to self-study. Some English lessons are too difficult to learn in this way. (S03)
Less guidance and explanation	Self-directed learning is a useful approach, but guidance and explanations should also be provided because English is a difficult subject. Some topics are hard to understand on my own. (S15)

According to the information from Table 7, although some students expressed negative opinions regarding the improvement in English reading comprehension through self-directed learning, most opinions were positive. Firstly, the students believed that self-directed learning is a flexible learning approach that enables them to learn more independently. They could learn both inside and outside of the classroom, including selecting learning resources and channels with the teacher's guidance. Next, most of them also believed that their learning responsibility developed. They were motivated to finish their assignments and activities on time. Also, the students reported that their learning was enhanced. They were encouraged to learn by doing, which is an effective approach to develop learning. Regarding English reading

comprehension, students were encouraged to search for information and practice. They used reading strategies to solve reading challenges, such as unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar, to improve their English reading comprehension.

Discussion

According to the purposes of this research, the enhancement of Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension through self-directed learning was investigated. The mean score of the post-test was higher than the mean score of the pre-test. It can be inferred that students' English reading comprehension improved after self-directed learning was applied in this experiment. Moreover, the students' opinions on the enhancement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning were surveyed. The mean score for the overall picture was high. It can be inferred that their opinions were positive.

Concerning research question 1: Can Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension be enhanced through self-directed learning? It is possible to mention that the students' English reading comprehension was enhanced through self-directed learning. According to the principles of this learning approach, the students were encouraged to set their English reading goals, plan to achieve the goals, select learning strategies and resources, manage time, monitor and evaluate tasks, and revise them for better outcomes. Hence, the students were stimulated to learn and improve their English reading comprehension actively. Moreover, self-directed learning provided more opportunities for practice. The reason might be that these students were supported to learn and practice actively both inside and outside the classroom. These could take place without limitation of place or time. To accomplish this learning and practice, accountability is essential. According to the procedures of self-directed learning, students were encouraged to initially search and understand how to develop their English reading comprehension through any learning channel outside the classroom. Next, they attended class for discussion and practice regarding English reading comprehension with their peers and the teacher. Then, they were assigned to learn and practice English reading comprehension for four weeks. In each week, two English reading passages were sent to them. Thus, the students needed to take responsibility for achieving their English reading goals.

Based on the procedures of self-directed learning, students were encouraged to consider how to acquire knowledge and improve their skills. In terms of English reading comprehension, the students were motivated to employ learning strategies to better

understand what they read. For instance, the research findings revealed that linguistic knowledge was their English reading problem, particularly unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar. In order to solve this problem, most students normally searched for the meaning of English vocabulary on the internet and consulted with their peers and the teacher to better understand English grammar. Therefore, their English reading comprehension was noticeably enhanced. These results were consistent with Zhao and Lertlit (2023), indicating that self-directed learning is beneficial in providing students with additional opportunities for learning and practice. They have additional opportunities to learn and practice English reading comprehension both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, these findings were also congruent with Phungsuk et al. (2017), who showed that self-directed learning encourages students to learn and practice through more flexible and varied learning approaches. This fosters a greater sense of accountability, which is an essential aspect of learning, including the development of linguistic knowledge, to improve their English reading comprehension.

However, some aspects of the students' English reading comprehension still seem unsatisfactory. It is the critical level of reading comprehension. According to the results of the pre-test and the post-test of English reading comprehension, the post-test mean scores for the literal and inferential levels were significantly higher than the pre-test mean scores. At the critical level, although the post-test mean score was higher than the pre-test mean score, the difference was not significant. From these issues, the reason might be the complexity of the critical level, which is different from the literal and inferential levels. For the literal level, it seems to be the easiest level for understanding content because the information is clearly stated in the text. Readers just know the meanings of words and phrases, and grammatical rules to comprehend what is read. At the inferential level, this is more complex than the literal level since the information is indirectly identified in a text. Readers have to draw conclusions from indirect information to comprehend the meaning of the written content. However, although this level is more complex than the literal level, it is usually easier than the critical level.

In the case of the critical level, it can be considered the most complex level of the three levels of reading comprehension. This is a deep understanding that readers need to analyze information and apply it to express opinions, develop insights, or create new ideas. Hence, the complexity of this reading level seems to be the main cause of the unsatisfactory result. The post-test mean score for the students' English reading comprehension at the

critical level showed only a slight increase. This result was in line with the study of De-La-Pena and Luque-Rojas (2021), indicating that many students still struggled at the critical level, particularly with analyzing complex information. Their mean score was at a low level. At the same time, their mean scores at the literal and inferential levels were higher than those at the critical level. This finding was congruent with the study of Romadhoni (2010), which reported that this level of reading comprehension was a problem for many students when they were trying to understand complex content. The inferential level is easier than the critical level. The literal level represents the basic and easiest level of reading comprehension. Regarding this issue, the students might need to spend more time learning and practicing how to analyze complex content. Moreover, higher linguistic knowledge with regard to words, phrases, and sentence structures might be an important factor in developing this level of reading comprehension.

Regarding research question 2: What are the opinions of Thai EFL students on the enhancement of English reading comprehension through self-directed learning? The findings can be divided into two parts: positive opinions and negative opinions. For the positive opinions, these were the majority among students. The results, in which the majority of students believed in the benefits of self-directed learning, might be due to more flexible and independent learning. Time and place were not limited, so they could learn and practice anywhere and anytime. Moreover, these students were also able to select what they would like to use as the learning channels. They had to consider any suitable approaches to learn and practice. From these learning aspects, their learning enthusiasm tended to increase. In addition, the students had great control over their learning and practice since there was not too much peer pressure or teacher oversight. This finding was consistent with the study of Zhao and Lertlit (2023), indicating that most students believed self-directed learning to promote more flexible and independent learning. They could select appropriate learning channels according to their interests. Besides, the results were also congruent with the research of Swatevacharkul (2017). This showed that self-directed learning supported students in learning more actively, as they were encouraged to make decisions to complete their tasks. Besides, less teacher oversight and peer competition were factors motivating students to put more effort into learning.

In contrast, there were some negative opinions about self-directed learning among the students. A few students reported that they did not believe in self-directed learning since

this learning approach was unsuitable for learning in some courses. One reason might be that these students felt they still had to rely on the teacher's guidance for learning in a challenging class like the English language. This finding was consistent with the results of Wichadee (2011), specifying that some students disagreed with self-directed learning because they needed more lectures in the classroom. If there is no adequate guidance and suggestions from the teacher, these students can only learn and understand content based on their existing knowledge. This means that students with less tenacity or insufficient knowledge of a subject may struggle with self-directed learning. Moreover, the finding was consistent with Zhao and Lertlit (2023), who revealed that many Thai students might be accustomed to a teacher-centered approach. When this group is taught using a different teaching approach, they encounter difficulties in learning.

Conclusion

In the current era, people can learn more independently because learning can take place anywhere and at anytime through various learning channels. For learners, there are more opportunities to learn both inside and outside the classroom, where self-control for learning is a very important aspect of this learning approach. This study aimed to investigate the enhancement of Thai EFL students' English reading comprehension through self-directed learning, and to survey their opinions on the enhancement of English reading comprehension through this learning approach. The findings of the research indicate that the students' mean score in English reading comprehension was higher after learning through self-directed learning. Among all levels of reading comprehension, only the critical level showed a slight increase, while the literal and the inferential levels increased significantly. Overall, the students' opinions on the enhancement of English reading comprehension through this learning approach were positive, though a few expressed negative views.

With regard to pedagogical implementation, it can be mentioned that this research is beneficial for students in enhancing their English reading comprehension and can be applied as guidance for English learning and teaching management. From the results, students need to apply reading strategies to understand word meanings, sentence structures, and grammatical rules in order to comprehend texts at the literal level. Besides, they also need to apply reading strategies to analyze indirect and more complex information in order to comprehend the inferential and critical levels, which are higher levels of reading

comprehension. In addition, a significant thing about learning through self-directed learning is responsibility. Students must take responsibility for their learning to enhance its effectiveness. For teaching English reading through this approach, an English language teacher needs to give suggestions and feedback to the students, which is highly beneficial. These enable students to understand how to learn and practice effectively to improve their English reading comprehension. Also, they will understand what is correct and why some things are incorrect, helping them avoid mistakes. Moreover, students need to practice reading English passages regularly. An English language teacher should encourage them to use reading strategies before practice, and provide feedback after each practice to improve their English reading comprehension.

Regarding a limitation of the study, the sample size should be noted since it was quite small. Only one group of students and one study program participated in the research. This limitation made it difficult to conduct comparisons with other student groups. For further research, the sample size and the number of study groups should be increased to enable comparisons across various groups.

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