

Investigation of Self-directed Learning Performance of Undergraduate Students in English Writing Course

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Abstract

This study aimed 1. to investigate self-directed learning performance (i.e. self-management, self-monitoring, using additional learning tools, seeking assistance from others, and motivation) of undergraduate students with three different levels of writing proficiency (high, medium, and low) in English writing course and 2. to compare self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students with different levels of writing proficiency. This study used a mixed method; quantitative and qualitative in order to respond to the objectives of the study. The participants in this study were fifty-three English major students who studied Academic Writing course. The data were collected by using self-directed learning performance questionnaire and semi structured interview. The data were analyzed by using percentage, means, standard deviation, F-test, and thematic analysis.

The findings were as follows:

1. Self-directed learning performance of the students with high writing proficiency was at high level in the aspects of self-management, self-monitoring, using additional learning tools, and motivation whereas they had low level of seeking assistance from others. The students with medium writing proficiency had high self-directed learning performance in self-management, self-monitoring, and using additional learning tools while their seeking assistance from others and motivation were at moderate level. For low writing proficiency students, they had high level in using additional learning tools. However, their self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation were at moderate level, and their seeking assistance from others was low.

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2. The mean scores of self-monitoring and motivation of high writing proficiency students were significantly higher than medium and low proficiency students at .05 level. However, there were no statistically significant differences at .05 level in self-management, using additional learning tools, and seeking assistance from others among three groups of students.

The findings will be beneficial for teachers or researchers who want to enhance students to be self-directed learners in learning English writing by integrating self-directed learning processes such as self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation into their teaching strategies through online learning.

Keywords: Self-directed Learning Performance, Undergraduate Students, English Writing Course

Introduction

Currently, learning English is very essential because it can assist students to communicate with foreigners. In Thailand education system, Thai students have learned and developed four language skills for instance listening, speaking, reading, and writing all levels (Kalong, 2016). Although Thai students had been learning English for a long time, the English scores from Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) were lower than fifty percent (National Institute of Educational Testing Service (Public Organization), 2021). Moreover, among the four English skills, it was found that Thai students have faced difficulties in writing skills most (Rod sawang, 2017).

The process used to develop students' writing skills is Process Writing Approach (PWA). Hyland (2003) reviewed five-stage of the writing process as follows: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The writing process in the PWA stage could enhance students' writing achievement. Some stages in PWA were similar to the process of self-directed learning (SDL) for instance, planning, implementing, and evaluating (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2018). Students could draft their writing using writing outlines. Also, they could implement outlines to complete their writing. While writing, they could review and revise the progress of the first draft to the final draft. Hence, it showed

that the related process of self-directed learning and PWA could connect and be used to enhance students' writing ability.

Self-directed learning (SDL) was defined by many scholars. Firstly, Knowles (1975) defined it as the method in which people take the initiative with or without assistance from others, set up learning needs, set up learning goals, choose material and learning resources, choose and implement appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes. In brief, Self-directed learning means learning processes and characteristics that learners use to achieve their learning goals. There were many previous studies improving students' writing competence by using PWA and SDL.

Problematically, there is less about the investigation of both processes and characteristics of self-directed learning which students used to be self-directed learners in English writing course. Thus, this study aimed to investigate and compare self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students with different levels of writing proficiency: high, medium, and low in English writing course.

Objectives of Research

1. To investigate self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students with different levels of writing proficiency
2. To compare self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students with different levels of writing proficiency

Research Methodology

This study was survey research using a mixed method; quantitative and qualitative approaches. There were two stages in this study. In the first stage, quantitative data were collected from the participants in five aspects: self-management, self-monitoring, using additional learning tools, seeking assistance from others, and motivation using the questionnaire to investigate and to compare self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students in English writing course with different levels of writing proficiency: high,

medium, and low. Then, in the second stage of the study, the semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data from nine volunteer students (3 students from each group).

The participants in this study were 53 English major students who were purposively selected from School of Liberal Arts, University of Phayao studying Academic Writing course.

Table 1 Background information of the participants

| Levels of Writing Proficiency | Gender | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| High (Grade A, B+, B) | Male | 8 | 15.09 |
| | Female | 28 | 52.83 |
| | Total | 36 | 67.92 |
| Medium (Grade C+, C) | Male | 2 | 3.77 |
| | Female | 9 | 16.98 |
| | Total | 11 | 20.75 |
| Low (Grade D+, D, F) | Male | 2 | 3.77 |
| | Female | 4 | 7.55 |
| | Total | 6 | 11.32 |
| Total | | 53 | 100.00 |

According to table 1, the total number of participants consisted of fifty-three students. There were three levels of undergraduate students in writing proficiency which were high, medium, and low. The high writing proficiency students earned grade points at A, B+, B were eight males (15.09%) and twenty-eight females (52.83%). The medium writing proficiency students earned grade points at C, C+ were two males (3.77%) and nine females (16.98%). The low writing proficiency students earned grade points at D+, D, F were two males (3.77%) and four females (7.55%).

The research instruments were a self-directed learning performance questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The items in the questionnaire and the questions in the interview were revised and confirmed validity by three experts in the field of teaching writing and self-directed learning using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC). Then, the questionnaire was revised and

tried out on students who were not the members of the participants to verify its reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient with its alpha value of .90.

The questionnaire was distributed to participants in the first week of the semester. The participants were taken approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Then, the researcher divided the participants into 3 groups (high, medium, and low) according to their grade points from Paragraph Writing course they earned in the previous semester. After that, a focus group interview was conducted and recorded with nine students (3 students from each group). The interview lasted about 15 minutes for each group.

Percentage, means, and standard deviation were used to analyze the questionnaire. Then, F-test was used to compare self-directed learning performance of the participants among three groups of students. Lastly, the data from the interview was analyzed using thematic analysis and coding method. The five aspects in the questionnaire were used as a framework to identify five main themes: self-management, self-monitoring, using additional learning tools, seeking assistance from others, and motivation. Each data in the interview results was coded by using the coding method.

Results of Research

1. To investigate self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students with different levels of writing proficiency

1.1 The Students with High Writing Proficiency

Table 2 Self-directed learning performance of students with high writing proficiency

| Items | \bar{X} | S.D. | Level of Self-directed Learning Performance |
|------------------------------------|-------------|------------|---|
| 1. Self-management | 3.56 | .86 | High |
| 2. Self-monitoring | 4.11 | .55 | High |
| 3. Using additional learning tools | 4.02 | .61 | High |
| 4. Seeking assistance from others | 2.47 | .92 | Low |
| 5. Motivation | 3.74 | .66 | High |
| Total | 3.67 | .49 | High |

According to Table 2, the total mean scores of self-directed learning performance of high writing proficiency students were at high level (3.67). This meant that they had high level of self-directed learning performance in English writing course. It was shown that self-monitoring (4.11), using additional learning tools (4.02), motivation (3.74), and self-management (3.56) were in high level while seeking assistance from others (2.47) was in low level.

From the interview, the group of high students revealed that to manage themselves before doing assignments, they wrote outlines, and set up timeframe and timeline. Then, they monitored themselves by implementing writing outlines, checking grammar correctness, and knowing their strengths and weaknesses. While they were writing, they stated that online dictionaries, translation programs, search engines, and learning vocabulary and speech from social networking sites were their additional learning tools. They claimed that they seek assistance from classmates, teachers, and friends while they were writing and after they completed their writing. Furthermore, they expressed that preference to write, enjoyment when writing, opportunity to write assignments on their own interesting topics, and the deadline of writing assignment submission were their motivations to do writing assignments.

1.2 The Students with Medium Writing Proficiency

Table 3 Self-directed learning performance of students with medium writing proficiency

| Items | \bar{X} | S.D. | Level of Self-directed Learning Performance |
|------------------------------------|-------------|------------|---|
| 1. Self-management | 3.52 | .93 | High |
| 2. Self-monitoring | 3.71 | .95 | High |
| 3. Using additional learning tools | 4.06 | .49 | High |
| 4. Seeking assistance from others | 2.78 | .87 | Moderate |
| 5. Motivation | 3.21 | .62 | Moderate |
| Total | 3.50 | .69 | High |

Table 3 showed the total mean scores of self-directed learning performance of the medium group. They were at high level (3.50). This meant that the medium group of students had high level of self-directed learning performance in English writing course. It was found that using additional learning tools (4.06), self-monitoring (3.71), and self-management (3.52) were at high level whereas motivation (3.21) and seeking assistance from others (2.78) were at moderate level.

From the interview, the group of medium students explained that when they were assigned to do writing assignments, they managed themselves by having writing outlines and setting up their timeframe. After that, they would monitor themselves including writing following their outlines, evaluating writing structure, checking grammar correctness/parts of speech, and knowing their strengths and weaknesses. Then, online dictionaries, translation programs, and search engines would use as additional learning tools while writing. Moreover, they would ask for help from their classmates, teachers, and friends. They also exposed that the motivations to do writing assignments were an opportunity to write on their own interesting topics, the score, writing skills improvement, and the deadline of writing assignment submission.

1.3 The Students with Low Writing Proficiency

Table 4 Self-directed learning performance of students with low writing proficiency

| Items | \bar{X} | S.D. | Level of Self-directed Learning Performance |
|------------------------------------|-------------|------------|---|
| 1. Self-management | 3.17 | .46 | Moderate |
| 2. Self-monitoring | 3.11 | .52 | Moderate |
| 3. Using additional learning tools | 4.14 | .65 | High |
| 4. Seeking assistance from others | 2.50 | .80 | Low |
| 5. Motivation | 2.97 | .96 | Moderate |
| Total | 3.19 | .50 | Moderate |

Table 4 revealed the total mean scores of self-directed learning performance of the students in low group. The total mean scores were 3.19 which was moderate level. Using additional learning tools was found to be high level (4.14) while the moderate level were self-management (3.17), self-monitoring (3.11), and motivation (2.97). In addition, seeking assistance from others was found in low level (2.50).

From the interview, the group of low students reviewed that before doing writing assignments, they had writing outlines, and set up a timeframe. To monitor themselves, they described that they checked grammar correctness, and knew their weaknesses. The additional learning tools they

used while writing were online dictionaries, printed grammar books, search engines, and social networking sites to learn vocabulary, grammar structure, and speech. Whenever they need some assistance, they would ask classmates and friends. Furthermore, they also told that sometimes they did not ask anyone. They said that an opportunity to write on their own interesting topics, the score, and the deadline of writing assignment submission could motivate them to do writing assignments

2. To compare self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students with different levels of writing proficiency

Table 5 Self-directed learning performance mean scores of the students with three levels of writing proficiency

| Self-directed Learning Performance | Levels of Writing Proficiency | n | \bar{X} | S.D. | f | p |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----|-----------|------|-------|------|
| Self-management | High | 36 | 3.56 | .86 | .562 | .573 |
| | Medium | 11 | 3.52 | .93 | | |
| | Low | 6 | 3.17 | .46 | | |
| Self-monitoring | High | 36 | 4.11 | .55 | 6.707 | .003 |
| | Medium | 11 | 3.71 | .95 | | |
| | Low | 6 | 3.11 | .52 | | |
| Using additional learning tools | High | 36 | 4.02 | .61 | .101 | .904 |
| | Medium | 11 | 4.06 | .49 | | |
| | Low | 6 | 4.14 | .65 | | |
| Seeking assistance from others | High | 36 | 2.47 | .92 | .516 | .600 |
| | Medium | 11 | 2.78 | .87 | | |
| | Low | 6 | 2.50 | .80 | | |
| Motivation | High | 36 | 3.74 | .66 | 4.780 | .013 |
| | Medium | 11 | 3.21 | .62 | | |
| | Low | 6 | 2.97 | .96 | | |

Note. p < .05

In conclusion, table 5 showed that there were statistically significant differences at .05 level in two aspects: self-monitoring and motivation. This presented that self-directed learning performance of undergraduate students

with high, medium, and low writing proficiency in English writing course was different. Furthermore, there were no statistically significant differences at .05 level which were self-management, using additional learning tools, and seeking assistance from others. This revealed that self-directed learning performance among three levels of undergraduate students' writing proficiency: high, medium, and low in English writing course was similar.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Self-directed Learning Performance of Undergraduate Students with Different Levels of Writing Proficiency

1.1 The results of self-directed learning performance of high writing proficiency students

The overall means in all aspects were in high level. It showed that the students in high group had high level of self-directed learning performance in English writing course. The results in each aspect revealed that they had high level in self-management, self-monitoring, using additional learning tools, and motivation while they had low level in seeking assistance from others.

The interview accorded with the quantitative results in which the high group of students expressed that they always managed themselves before writing assignments. Then, they monitored themselves while writing and after completing their writing by implementing writing outlines and checking grammar correctness. They used learning tools while writing such as online dictionaries. They showed high motivation in doing writing assignments. However, it was revealed that they sometimes asked for help when they wrote assignments.

The reason which made the high group had high level of self-directed learning performance could be due to their high motivation. It was supported by the analysis of motivation aspect in the questionnaire that showed the highest mean scores. Filgona, Sakiyo, Gwany, and Okoronka (2020) claimed that the success of learning depended on whether or not the learners

are motivated. Higher motivation to learn can be linked to better academic performance. According to Garrison (1997), self-directed learners can be defined as active, curious, motivated, interested to try new things, and get involved in learning. Therefore, high motivation might be an important factor that made students have high level of self-directed learning performance. It was supported by the study of Abraham, Fisher, Kamath, Izzati, Nabila, and Atikah (2011) which explored first-year undergraduate medical students' self-directed learning readiness to physiology among three groups of achievers: high, medium, and low academic performance in physiology examination. This study explored self-directed learning in three scales: self-management, desire for learning, and self-control. The results revealed that high achievers had higher scores for all three scales compared with medium and low achievers. It also found that the high achievers had the highest median scores in desire for learning.

1.2 The results of self-directed learning performance of medium writing proficiency students

The overall means in all aspects were at high level. It presented that the medium group of students had high level of self-directed learning performance in English writing course. The results in each aspect exposed that they had high level in self-management, self-monitoring, and using additional learning tools while they had moderate level in seeking assistance from others and motivation.

These results corresponded with the interview of the students in this group, they reviewed that the first thing they did before writing assignments was self-management by developing outlines. Then, they monitored themselves while writing, and after completing writing by reviewing and revising the draft, and checking grammar correctness. They also used additional learning tools while they were writing. These interviews presented that they had high level in self-management, self-monitoring, and using additional learning tools. However, they asked for assistance when they confronted difficulty, and when they finished writing, they asked their peers to review their work. Some students showed motivation in improving their writing skills.

The medium group had the highest mean scores in using additional learning tools. This result may cause by students' need to develop writing skills. It was correlated to the interview which expressed their improvement of writing skills. These results agreed with the study of Gilquin and Laporte (2021) which examined the use of online writing tools by learners of English. The results revealed that the use of online writing tools helped learners write better texts. Also, the results corresponded to PHOSA and Patamadilok (2020) which claimed that using internet-based technology such as online dictionaries and online websites could assist students to increase English writing proficiency because they could help students to understand word definition, and ensure grammar correctness while writing. Conversely, they had the lowest mean scores in seeking help from others. The medium group may use the tools to support themselves while writing, so it was not necessary for them to ask for assistance from others. These results were accorded with the interview that revealed occasional asking for help from others.

1.3 The results of self-directed learning performance of low writing proficiency students

The overall means in all aspects were at moderate level. It presented that the group of low students had moderate level of self-directed learning performance in English writing course. The results in each aspect showed that they had high level in using additional learning tools. They had moderate level in self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation. They also had low level in seeking assistance from others.

It agreed with the interview that the students in low group said about the several additional learning tools they always used while writing. This showed that they had high level in using additional learning tools. They stated they managed and monitored themselves before and after completing writing by developing outlines, evaluating writing structures, and editing word usage and grammar structures. They explained that writing scores motivated them to do writing tasks, and the deadline drove them to finish the tasks. They rarely sought assistance from anyone while they were writing.

The results showed that the low writing proficiency students had low level in self-directed learning performance in English Writing course. However, they had high mean scores in using additional learning tools. These may be from the easy access to learning aids. The students could find further information from a variety of social networking sites. This meant that they could write assignments conveniently. It was consistent with the interview that showed the various learning aids they used while doing assignments such as online dictionaries and printed grammar books. Nonetheless, this convenience could decrease the students' thinking skills. When they wrote using the information from learning aids, they did not apply their own knowledge and their thought. Hence, this may affect them in improving their language knowledge and skills. Lack of knowledge and skills cause them got low level of self-directed learning performance and low-grade points in Paragraph Writing course. It was supported by the previous study of Navarro-Martinez and Peña-Acuña (2022) which investigated the relationship between Spanish teenage students' academic success and their use of technology and social networks. The results showed that excessive use of technology and social networks impairs academic performance, leading to lower grades because students' academic performance could depend on themselves and the socio-affective which were around them. On the contrary, these results did not agree with the study of Alshalawi (2022) which found that the higher undergraduate students' social networking sites usage, the better academic performance they performed.

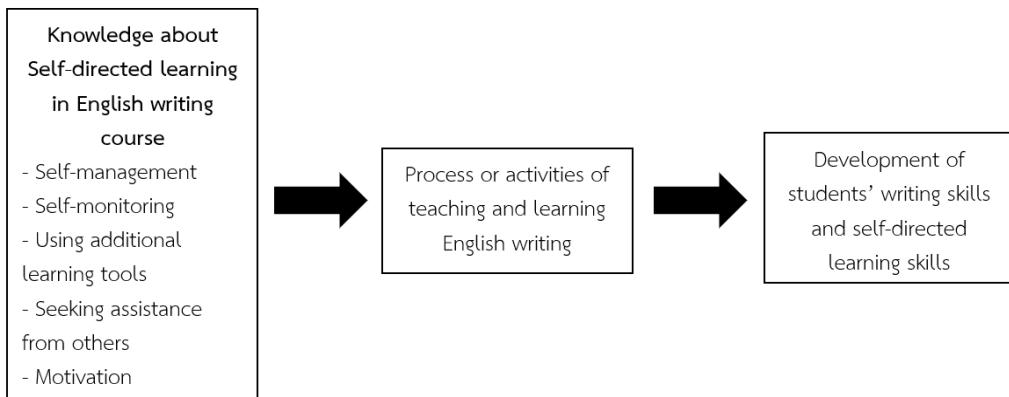
2. The Comparison of Self-directed Learning Performance of Undergraduate Students with Different Levels of Writing Proficiency

The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences at .05 level in two aspects: self-monitoring, and motivation among three groups. This indicated that the high and the medium group could monitor themselves to follow their writing outlines meanwhile the low group would change their outlines while writing assignments. It was supported by the analysis of the interview which expressed that the high and the medium group always implemented writing outlines while the low group did not always follow the writing plans based on the outlines. Additionally, the analysis of

motivation from the questionnaire showed that the high writing proficiency students had higher motivation than the medium and low writing proficiency students. This could be discussed that students' motivation impacted their writing proficiency. Rosmayanti and Yanuarti (2018) indicated that students' motivation can influence their English language achievement. On the other hand, this statement was not accorded with the study of Razali, Xuan, and Samad (2018) which investigated students' self-directed learning readiness (SDLR) among foundation students from high and low proficiency levels to learn English language. The results showed that students with lower and upper proficiency levels had similar level of motivation.

Nevertheless, there were no statistically significant differences at .05 level in three aspects: self-management, using additional learning tools, and seeking assistance from others among three groups. It indicated that self-directed learning performance in self-management, using additional learning tools, and seeking assistance from others were similar. For the students' self-management, it may result from the teachers' assignments that required everyone to write the outline before writing. Meanwhile, all students used learning tools to support them in searching information while writing. These corresponded with the previous study of Demir and İlhan (2022) which examined self-directed online learning skills of undergraduate students. From the Self-directed Online Learning Questionnaire, it was shown that there were no statistically significant differences between grade levels of undergraduate students in help seeking, and time management. It was agreed with the study of Sriwichai and Inpin (2019) which examined the effectiveness of the writing instructional model based on blended and self-directed learning on promoting writing proficiency and self-directed learning of EFL university students with different levels of English proficiency (high, average, and low). The results found that there were no significant differences in all aspects among three groups of students at .05 level both from pre-assessment and post-assessment. The students with different levels of English proficiency showed similar level of self-directed learning, especially in high, and average groups. Conversely, it did not agree with the study of Alghamdi (2016) which revealed the statistically significant differences between successful and less-successful English language learners in self-management.

New Body of Knowledge



This study provided more knowledge about self-directed learning in English writing course in the aspects of self-management, self-monitoring, using additional learning tools, seeking assistance from others, and motivation. This knowledge can be used as a guideline to design the process or activities of teaching and learning English writing. Teaching and learning process that include self-directed learning activities can assist students to develop their writing skills and self-directed learning skills.

Suggestions for Research

1. It is suggested for further research as follows:

To get more accurate information, data collection should be conducted to a greater number of participants. Also, this study investigated the undergraduate students in English writing course, so it will be useful for the researcher to examine self-directed learning in other skills such as learning reading, speaking, and vocabulary.

2. It is suggested for implications as follows:

According to the results, they will be beneficial for teachers or researchers who want to enhance students to be self-directed learners in learning English writing by integrating self-directed learning processes such as self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation into their teaching strategies through online learning. The teachers should give students the chance to write

their writing plans, take the responsibility to follow the plan, evaluate their own mistakes, and motivate them to practice writing by allowing them to select the topic that they are interested in.

The results showed that the students in three group asked for help from classmates and teachers. Therefore, to promote self-directed learning, both synchronous and asynchronous platforms should be provided for students to communicate with teachers and their peers when they need help.

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