

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background of the study with the focus on the importance of English and all the variables of the study, which are autonomous learning and learner independence, web-based instruction, levels of general English proficiency, and the importance of English reading skill in order to illustrate the relationship of all these variables. Next, the objectives of the study, research questions, statements of hypothesis, scope, limitations and assumptions of the study, and definitions of terms are stated, which is followed by the significance of the study. Lastly, the overview of the research is given.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 The Importance of English

In this early 21st century, it is obvious that English language has enormously increased its crucial role in many fields. Firstly, English is now viewed very essential for the Thai educational system. English has been taught in every school since the primary level. Also, English has currently been covered in the course curriculum of every department in universities. At least every student has to take a foundation English course. In addition, the number of international schools in Thailand has been continuously increased. They rose by 20% in 2000 and it was expected to grow in the same rate in 2002 (Bunnag, 2002). This reflects the importance of English in a wider scope, i.e. English is used as a medium of instruction. Secondly, English is the international language or *lingual franca* used in business and commercial as a tool for communication. Discussion and negotiation of international political and economical issues are based on the use of English language as well. Thirdly, the world at present is in the information technology (IT) era, every part of the world can be easily connected by a computer. Computer-based information can be obtained via the Internet and e-mail. Once again, English is a major means for communication and information transfer in the digital world.

Since the importance of English for the educational system, business field, and information technology is appreciated, the educational system is considered as the

first and most vital variable that will lead to an effective use of English in both business and information technology fields. Therefore, the educational system needs to promote effective learning of English among learners.

However, it cannot be denied that the educational system of Thailand using Thai as an official language and English as a foreign language does not allow Thai students to have sufficient exposure to English, which will help facilitate and enhance the effective English language learning. According to Newton (2002), the important conditions for language learning consists of four factors namely motivation, exposure, use, and instruction. In the language learning situation of Thailand, it is apparent that the exposure is minimal and this results in a low motivation; therefore, the use of English is limited, particularly outside the classroom. Therefore, there is only one condition that seems appropriate to provide the effective learning situation, which is instruction.

1.1.2 Autonomous Learning and Learner Independence

In recent years and in the field of language teaching greater emphasis has been put on learners and learning methods rather than on teachers and teaching (Benson and Voller, 1997); therefore, the notions of 'learner-centred' approach and 'learning-centred' approach (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) emerge in the field. There seems to be a mismatch between the Thai learning context, where English is used as a foreign language (EFL) and instruction is essential, and the trend of language teaching that focuses on learners. Nevertheless, a shift from teacher-centred approach to learner-centred approach does suggest a crucial role for teachers and the educational system in teaching learners learn how to learn. Therefore, it cannot be denied that instruction is not essential, but it needs attention on teaching learners how to become independent learners, which will make them better learners (Wenden, 1991; Yang, 1998). Autonomy which is sometimes used interchangeably with 'independence' has in fact been very popular as a concept of discussion in foreign language teaching for many years (Littlewood, 1996). According to Benson (2001), autonomy is broadly defined as the capacity to take charge of one's own learning, and it is a prerequisite of effective learning. Autonomy is therefore the ultimate goal of every educational system.

The concept of autonomous learning is also emphasised in the Thai higher educational system. In terms of English language learning, the Ministry of University

Affairs (2001) has proclaimed the curriculum standards of the Thai University English Foundation Courses 1 and 2, which have been framed around two goals and seven standards. Goal 2 specifies that *'To use English to help achieve personal and academic goals and to promote life-long learning'*. Standard 3 under Goal 2 states that *'Students will use appropriate learning strategies to acquire, construct, and apply academic knowledge and to develop critical thinking skill'*. Clearly, to promote life-long learning students need to have learning tools or strategies which will assist them to learn the language independently. Independent learning which implies autonomous learning consequently leads to life-long learning.

Autonomy is recognised as an important 'pedagogical goal' (Wenden, 1987). Dickinson (1987) also maintains this perspective but adds that both learning and personal autonomy should be developed as an important educational goal, which is facilitated through self-instruction. Autonomous mode of learning, according to a number of research findings, has a strong relationship with learning effectiveness.

Research conducted by Dam and Legenhausen (1996) reveals that an autonomous learning approach yields very successful results of vocabulary acquisition when compared to those from textbook-based traditional learning approaches. This finding is supported by the experimental work executed by Thong-ngarm (2002) who found that the experimental group of Thai learners who learned science through the self-directed learning model had more characteristics of autonomous learners than the traditional learning group; and the former group obtained a higher academic achievement than the latter group.

In Thailand, research on learner autonomy and English reading skills has been conducted; however, most of these studies aimed to investigate whether autonomous learning yielded a positive learning outcome. So far, it seems that no research has been carried out to investigate the effects of degrees of autonomous learning on reading comprehension ability.

Vibulphol (1996) found that Mathayom Suksa 5 students who were more ready for autonomous learning achieved a more favourable English reading ability. Likewise, the achievement in English reading comprehension of the Mattayom Suksa 6 students who were taught by the self-instructional mode was significantly higher than that of the students taught by the traditional method (Petpradab, 1986). Dated back in 1979, Thammongkol discovered that the first year undergraduate students of Chulalongkorn University who took English reading course based on the mode of

autonomous learning gained increased scores at a significant level of 0.01. Similarly, a study of achievement in English reading through the self-directed learning of Khon Kaen University first year students illustrates that the students' ability of English reading skill was increased at a significant level of 0.01 (Karnphanit et al., 1999). Recently, Leetim (2001) investigated the effects of self-instruction on achievement of English reading skills of 40 Mathayom Suksa 3 students and found that the scores on achievement towards English reading of the experimental group were significantly higher at 0.05 level than the control group taught by using a teacher manual.

It is evident, based on the existing research findings, that autonomous learning can effectively improve students' language learning. However, there are degrees of learner autonomy and each learner does not possess the same level of learning autonomy. According to Nunan (1997), there is the possible or desirable extent for learners to become autonomous learners, which depends on various factors such as personality, goals, philosophy of the institution, and cultural context. Sinclair (1996) supports that each learner possesses different degrees of autonomy according to a number of variables or conditions such as learning situation in which they are in, the topic of study and learning tasks, awareness of task demands, competence level, confidence level, mood, motivation and so on. One learner may require direction from the teacher to complete a certain task in class but may be an autonomous learner outside class. As suggested by Dickinson (1987), total autonomy can be when there is no teacher involvement at all, while semi-autonomy can involve a conventional teaching and learner self-instruction. Therefore, learner autonomy signifies 'freedom' to learn in the view of Little (1990), and levels of freedom are different in different learning contexts.

Learning autonomy, a very crucial concept that is widely recognised nowadays by many educational institutes around the world (Crabbe, 1993), is interchangeably used with the notions of 'interdependence, self-direction or self-directed learning, self-regulation (Benson and Lor, 1998), and independence (Sheerin, 1991; Benson and Voller, 1997). Therefore, it should be worthwhile to differentiate the meanings of the two key terms that will appear in this present study, that is, *autonomy* and *independence*.

According to Holec (1981: 3), the definition of 'autonomy' is the ability 'to take charge of one's learning' which means to have and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of his learning, i.e. determine the objective,

define the contents and progressions, select methods and techniques to be used, monitor the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.), and evaluate what has been acquired.

Based on Holec's definition of autonomy, all aspects except the content determination were applied for this present study since learners were provided with web-based lessons for their independent learning. Besides a lack of the content determination as one aspect of autonomy, students participating in this present study will be classified into partial, semi-, or least support for learner independence group at the outset of the study. Therefore, due to a control of learning materials and levels of support for independent learning, the present study will employ the term *learner independence* rather than learner autonomy. However, the term autonomy will be maintained in the reviewed literature according to an original use of the term by Holec.

1.1.3 Learner Independence and Web-Based Instruction (WBI)

In order to foster and enhance learner independence and autonomy, one of the several approaches suggested by Benson (2001) is 'technology-based approaches', which focuses on independent interaction with educational technologies. In this era of information technology, computer technology is most likely to serve this educational purpose. Currently, web-based instruction (WBI) is viewed as an innovative instructional approach (Khan, 1997). WBI is advantageous in helping promote autonomous and independent learning because it has a 'learner-controlled' feature and it allows learners to control their own learning – they have a choice of content, time, resources, feedback, and a variety of media for expressing their understanding. Furthermore, WBI if designed for collaborative learning and social interaction can foster a sense of learning responsibility among learners since WBI extends learning beyond one classroom and enhances learning outside the classroom. Learners can discuss, solve problems, or ask questions to their peers on the Internet (Relan and Gillani, 1997). WBI is also beneficial due to its 'self-contained' feature. A WBI course can be taken completely online. Learners can log in anytime and from any place they wish, have access to all resources, take quizzes and exams, and obtain results. Learners can meet their own special needs in a self-paced and self-assessing environment (Khan, 1997).

Based on the benefits of WBI, it is obvious that learners are encouraged to be independent learners and make commitments to life-long learning (Dyrli and Kinnaman, 1996, cited in Quinian, 1997). A relationship between independent and autonomous learning through WBI and learning achievement can be seen from the research carried out by Chantrau-krit (2003); Intarapoo (2004); Manodee (2001); Petcharat (2004); Phadungsilp (2003); Sattayakitkajohn (2004).

In language learning, Liou (1997) investigated how the use of the web texts has an impact on college English as EFL learning. Students of the experimental group read the news on the web and wrote a personal journal entry every week, while the control group took regular composition instruction without reading the web news and did not write the journal entries. The findings show that although the experimental group did not increase their vocabulary repertoire, their writing skill improved. They also improved their reading comprehension ability more than the control group.

It is very promising that enhancement of independent learning through WBI can improve learning achievement. However, learning achievement involves other factors, which gives rise to different levels of learning achievement in each learner. As Dickinson (1987) points out, learners are different in terms of language aptitude, cognitive styles and strategies, and preferred learning styles. Therefore, learner differences should be taken into account whenever there is an attempt to provide the most appropriate and effective mode of learning.

1.1.4 Levels of General English Proficiency

According to Brown (2001), one of the learner variables that should be taken into consideration in language teaching is the proficiency level of students. Due to a different proficiency level, a teaching approach cannot be the same for every student. A great deal of research reveals that students with high English proficiency level achieve a higher level of learning achievement than those with low English proficiency level no matter whether they learn in a traditional mode (Rossuk, 1985), by computer-assisted language learning (Chollatarn, 1987; Sukamolson, 1998; 1998-1999), or WBI (Homchan, 1999). Moreover, it is interesting to perceive that computer-based learning helped improve learning achievement of all proficiency level students (Watchai, 1990).

Research findings also suggest that high achievers perform better than low achievers due to language aptitude (Garnrunsri, 1991) and different learning

approaches (Ratchadawisitkul, 1986; Jerdan, 1993). In addition, attitudes towards learning are different between the high and low English proficiency students. Soinam (1999) found that high proficiency students had more favourable attitudes towards English language learning and autonomous learning than low proficiency students did. This reflects that high proficiency students are more likely to be independent learners than low proficiency students are, which will give rise to better language learning achievement.

It is noticeable that independent learning and WBI help language learning achievement. However, the proficiency level is the crucial factor affecting degrees of learning achievement. It is therefore the interest of this study to include general English proficiency as a variable in addition to the degrees of support for learner independence in order to investigate its effects with different degrees of support on English reading achievement. This is as pointed out earlier based on the fact that existing research carried out usually aimed at fostering the same degree of learner independence for every proficiency level of learners.

1.1.5 The Importance of English Reading Skills

In Thailand where English is a foreign language, English reading skill is vital. As pointed out earlier, one feature of Section 24, No. 1 of the National Educational Act of Buddhist Era 2542 is the emphasis on 'the love to read.' Alderson (1984: 1) states clearly that 'A reading ability is often all that is needed by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as well as of other foreign languages'. The importance of reading is asserted by Carrell (1989: 1) as follows:

'In second language teaching/learning situations for academic purposes, especially in higher education in English-medium universities or other programmes that make extensive use of academic materials written in English, reading is paramount. Quite simply, without solid reading proficiency, second language readers cannot perform at levels they must in order to succeed'.

Anderson (1999: 1) also advocates the significance of reading in ESL and EFL situations that:

'Reading is an essential skill for English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) students; and for many, reading is the most important skill to master. With strengthened reading skills, ESL/EFL readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas'.

However, there are some problems concerning English reading instruction. Durkin (1979 cited in Dreyer and Nel, 2003) conducted a study and found that only 2% of the classroom time was given for reading instruction. Dreyer and Nel themselves mention that this situation in South Africa is not different. Like the situation in Thailand, most of the class time is not devoted for reading. It seems the class time is never adequate for teaching reading. Furthermore, there is a tendency to place too much concern on preparing students for examination; therefore, reading teachers are more likely to teach test taking techniques rather than teaching reading. As Anderson (1999: 8) points out, 'in many reading instruction programmes, a great amount of emphasis and time may be placed on testing reading comprehension than on teaching readers how to comprehend'. In addition, grammar translation seems to be the teaching approach that reading teachers in Thailand apply for the reading instruction (Thakhong, 1994).

The consistent findings of weak English reading skills of Thai students predominate the literature. Research executed by Thammongkol (1969) shows that Thai undergraduate students were strongest in reading for main ideas, but their reading skills for details, implications, inferences, conclusions, and understanding of organisational patterns of a story, or the tone and intent of the author, or cause and effect relationships were underdeveloped. Similarly, Wiruhayan (1987) found that Thai students of the upper secondary education level possessed the English reading abilities of transfer, communication, and criticism below the criteria. Consequently, the level of English reading ability of Thai students is not at a satisfactory level (Vibulphol, 1996; Sutta, 1994) or even below the low level (Thakhong, *ibid.*; Youngsathien, 1999).

Although English reading skill is very problematic for Thai students, which deserves careful solutions, there is strong evidence showing that English reading skill of Thai students can be improved. Petpradab (1986) and Thammongkol (1979) found that students who developed reading skills based on autonomous modes of learning could improve their reading comprehension ability at a significant level.

As suggested by Carrell and Eisterhold (1989), to assist students in strengthening their reading skill teachers are crucial; they must develop independent readers outside the EFL/ESL classroom. This is the long-range goal for reading teachers; however, students must be able to apply classroom activities and techniques learned from the classroom to the real world beyond the reading classroom. Clearly,

Carrell and Eisterhold reveal the significant relationship between autonomous learning and reading skills, and the virtue of learning autonomy for knowledge transfer to real use in real life.

Based on the literature and research findings on independent and autonomous learning, WBI, and English reading skill, it is very promising that independent learning through WBI can help improve English reading comprehension ability of Thai students whose proficiency levels are either high or low. It is clear for WBI that students show positive attitudes towards learning in the technology-enhanced learning environment (Brett, 2000; Zhang, 2002). The WBI therefore increases motivation to learn and motivation to read electronically can be enhanced. Warschauer and Healey (1998) assert that it is essential for students to be able to read, write, and communicate effectively over computer networks in order to be successful in almost every part of life.

In conclusion, since learner autonomy can be considered in terms of degrees, students with different proficiency levels of English may require different degrees of independence in order to be successful in their language learning. However, according to the existing research findings it is obvious that autonomous or independent learning can help improve students' language learning achievement. Therefore, this study aims at fostering learner independence to every student based on the justification that autonomy or independence is the pre-requisite for learning effectiveness. Moreover, the teacher's role in this mode of learning is vital to help students become independent. Students must be able to receive help and support from their teacher. However, Brockett and Hiemstra (1993) assert that degree of guidance and directions from teachers must be in line with wants of different learners in order to yield successful learning. Therefore, help and support of the teacher is the key concept for a classification of degree of learner independence for this study.

As pointed out earlier, although there is a lot of research conducted to investigate effects of independent learning on student's learning achievement, much attention has been paid only on fostering the same degree of independent learning in both high and low proficiency students. There is no research carried out to explore effects of different degrees of learner independence through WBI on English reading comprehension ability of Thai students. Therefore, it is the focus of this study to investigate the effect of different degrees of learner independence in terms of support through WBI on English reading comprehension ability of Thai undergraduates; the

effect of levels of English proficiency of Thai undergraduates on their English reading comprehension ability; and the interaction effect of degrees of support for learner independence through WBI and levels of English proficiency on English reading comprehension ability of Thai undergraduates.

1.1.6 Reasons for Selecting Prospective Subjects

The researcher selected the subjects from Dhurakit Pundit University (DPU) for this study for four major reasons. Firstly, DPU has a strong intention to improve the learners' learning habits (Vongvipanond, 2004). Some of them lack motivation to learn English, particularly reading; consequently, they are less proficient in English ability. Moreover, every attempt has been made to help them become self-directed and responsible learners (Vongvipanond, 2004). Secondly, in response to the aim of DPU as mentioned earlier, the Language Institute (LI), of which the researcher is an instructor has had a policy to integrate computer technology into every English language course. The rationale of the policy is that computer technology promotes a learner-centred instruction, and it requires all students to commit to their learning. In addition, computer-based instruction prepares students to enter the professional world of today and tomorrow, where people communicate electronically (Vongvipanond, *ibid.*). Furthermore, very importantly computer-based instruction promotes independent and life-long learning, which is the concept of independent learning and in line with Goal 2 of the Thai National Educational Act.

Thirdly, every English language course integrates self-access language learning as part of the course in order to enhance student's self-directed learning ability. There has been an emphasis on using computer technology to achieve this aim. However, the actual practice seems not to go hand in hand with the self-access learning philosophy. Students were assigned to study on the computer in the Self-Access Language Learning Centre (SALLC) based on the online materials selected by the instructors. These materials usually related to the contents of each unit in the course book. Students were asked to either copy the online materials or write answers of exercises into the SALLC book for submission. Clearly, this practice did not promote independent or self-directed learning ability. Students appeared not to value this mode of learning, as a consequence. Lastly, there is no research on independent language learning conducted before focusing on students at DPU.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. to compare the main effects of different degrees of support for learner independence, i.e. most support (MS), semi-support (SS), and least support (LS) through web-based instruction on English reading comprehension ability of the students, and their effect size.
2. to compare the main effects of different levels of students' general English proficiency, i.e. high and low proficiency levels on English reading comprehension of the students, and their effect size.
3. to study the interaction effect of degrees of support for learner independence and levels of students' general English proficiency on English reading comprehension ability of the students, and its effect size.
4. to investigate learners' attitudes towards learner independence through web-based instruction.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. Do the different degrees of support for learner independence through web-based instruction have an effect on learners' general English reading comprehension ability? If so, how much is the effect size?
2. Do the different levels of learners' general English proficiency have an effect on their English reading comprehension ability after learning it through web-based instruction? If so, how much is the effect size?
3. Is there an interaction effect between degrees of support for learner independence through web-based instruction and levels of students on English reading proficiency? If so, how much is the effect size?
- 4.1 On average, are learners' attitudes towards learner independence significantly increased after the treatment?
- 4.2 Are learners' attitudes towards learner independence after the treatment at the level of greater than 3.50 (out of 5.00)? (see page 114 for more information)

1.4 Statement of Hypotheses

1. There is a significant difference among levels of English reading comprehension ability of undergraduate learners learning through different degrees of support for learner independence by web-based instruction.
2. There is a significant difference among levels of English reading comprehension ability of undergraduate learners with high and low levels of general English proficiency learning through different degrees of support for learner independence by web-based instruction.
3. There is a significant interaction effect between the different degrees of support for learner independence and levels of learners' proficiency on English reading comprehension of undergraduate learners.
- 4.1 Learners' attitudes towards learner independence in the post-test will significantly increase from the pre-test.
- 4.2 Learners' attitudes towards learner independence after the treatment will be greater than 3.50.

1.5 Scope of the Study

1. The population of this study was the high and low general English proficiency second year undergraduate DPU students, who studied the first semester in the academic year 2006. The total population of this study was approximately 841 undergraduate students.
2. There are two independent variables in the study, which are:
 - 2.1 Degrees of support for learner independence through web-based instruction, which consists of three learning approaches, i.e. most support (MS), semi-support (SS), and least support (LS).
 - 2.2 Different levels of students' general English proficiency, which consists of high and low English proficiency levels.

The dependent variable of the study is English reading comprehension ability.
3. The web-based instruction, which consists of three levels of reading modules from the English Discoveries Online or EDO (<http://ed201thailand.engdis.com/rosukhon>), i.e. basic, intermediate, and advanced, was complementary to reading lessons for the General English (GE) 2 course taught at DPU.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

1. Genders of the students were not taken into consideration since some research findings indicate that there is no difference of the degree of autonomous learning readiness between male and female (Kulsirisawatdi, 1994; Tangsriripai, 1999).
2. The subjects were less than the sample size suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), i.e. 265. This was due to a limitation concerning a number of students in each English class, which was normally 40 students approximately; consequently, generalisation of the findings should be done with cautions.

1.7 Assumptions of the Study

1. All participating students of this study possessed a computer literacy more or less the same.
2. This study assumes that, in general, interest and attitude towards English learning through the computer of all groups of students had an effect on the students' learning of reading lessons through the web-based instruction more or less at the same level because they have experienced learning through the computer since the first academic term and year.
3. This study assumes that all subjects understood well how to use the web-based instruction programme since the researcher/author provided explanations and demonstration to the subjects clearly and sufficiently how to use it at the beginning of the semester.
4. This study assumes that all subjects understood how to answer the questionnaire and honestly answered every questionnaire item because they had a full freedom to do so. They were informed that their answers would not affect their scores or grades in any cases.
5. Normally, the power of nonparametric tests is less than that of parametric tests (StatSoft, Inc., 1984-2003). Since some nonparametric tests were used in this study to suit most the basic assumptions of the tests, the significance levels were then set at $p = 0.03$ for $p = 0.05$ in such cases. It is assumed that they were compatible.

1.8 Definition of Terms

In this study, the important terms were defined as follows:

1. *Autonomy* refers to responsibility held by each learner for all the decisions concerning all aspects of his/her learning, i.e. determine the objective, define the contents and progressions, select methods and techniques to be used, monitor the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.), and evaluate what has been acquired.
2. *Learner independence* refers to an independent learning activity of reading comprehension skills through the web-based instruction. Having freedom to learn, learners take charge of their own learning by determining objectives, selecting provided contents and learning strategies, monitoring learning procedure, and evaluating progress. The only differences from the term 'autonomy' is that learners did not define contents by themselves, but they selected online contents from the provided website (EDO), and their level of support for independent learning was controlled at the outset of the study by being classified into most, semi-, or least support for learner independence groups.
3. *Degrees of support for learner independence* refers to the teacher's support given to students who took charge of their own independent learning through the web-based instruction. The support was given in various means, i.e. written feedback and counselling.
4. *Most support (MS)* refers to the teacher's support in terms of written feedback and counselling given to learners. Learners were required to submit their work every week to obtain teacher's written feedback (10 times) and receive counselling every two weeks (5 times). Learners were least independent.
5. *Semi-support (SS)* refers to the teacher's support in terms of written feedback and counselling given to learners. Learners were required to submit their work every two weeks to obtain teacher's feedback (5 times) and receive counselling once a month (3 times). Learners were moderately independent.
6. *Least support (LS)* refers to the teacher's support in terms of written feedback and counselling that were given to learners upon their request. Learners would make the decision whether and when they needed help and support from the teacher/researcher. They controlled their own independent learning. Learners were most independent.

7. *Web-based instruction (WBI)* refers to a hypermedia-based instructional programme that utilises the attributes and resources of the World Wide Web to promote the development of English reading skill, which is additional to the classroom learning. The subjects taking the GE 2 course studied English reading comprehension skills from the English Discoveries Online (EDO), which is the web-based instructional programme, by themselves anywhere and anytime they wished without the presence of a teacher/researcher.
8. *Learners* refers to the high and low English proficiency second year undergraduate students at Dhurakit Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand.
9. *Reading comprehension ability* refers to the scores the students obtained from taking the reading comprehension post-test.
10. *Attitudes* refers to learners' beliefs about their learning independence that it was valuable and acceptable; they understood that learner independence could lead them to learning achievement, rather than try to avoid it. In addition, attitudes signify components of independent learner characteristics namely willingness to learn, self-confidence to learn, and motivation. Attitudes were measured by the questionnaire.

1.9 Significance of the study

1. If some or all hypotheses are accepted, administrators and teachers of DPU and other universities can use the findings as guidelines to provide appropriate degrees of support for learner independence particularly in terms of teacher's help and support for students with different levels of English proficiency, especially when they have to study independently as part of any English courses. Moreover, teachers can use WBI for teaching English reading skills with more confidence that it will help improve English reading comprehension ability of Thai students. Students can be assigned to work more on their own through the web-based instruction in order to increase their English reading ability.
2. If some or all hypotheses are rejected, administrators and teachers of DPU and other universities can use the findings as the guidelines to implement independent learning through WBI at the same level for every student. Moreover, it will pave the way for further research on different degrees of support for learner independence as well as learning effectiveness.

3. Based on the findings on the students' attitudes towards learner independence and other relevant factors, teachers can be well aware of the students' independence level and adjust their role in providing appropriate and professional advice to aid students to be more independent in their learning, which will give rise to more learning effectiveness and achievement.

2.0 Overview of the study

The present chapter provided the introduction of the study and stated the objectives, research questions, and statement of hypotheses. Scope, limitations, and assumptions of the study were also discussed. Some key terms were defined and significance of the study was stated.

Chapter Two will review related literature, starting from the related theories and learner autonomy. Then, learner training will be explored, followed by supporting learners in the independent learning. After that, web-based instruction, levels of proficiency, and English reading will be reviewed with a focus on a link of these concepts to independent learning. Next part will deal with related existing research findings. The next part will discuss the framework of and the classification of learner independence of the present study.

Chapter Three will provide details on the research design and procedures. Firstly, the research design will be described, followed by discussions on population and subjects. Next, the learner training model applied for this study will be explored. Then, the instruments used for data collection will be described. After that, data collection procedure of both quantitative and qualitative methods will be explained, followed by the discussions on the values and weaknesses of the mixed research methods.

Chapter Four will mainly concern the results of data analysis. The findings will be presented according to the research objectives in the tabular and descriptive forms.

Chapter Five will firstly provide summary of the study in details. After that, discussions of the findings will be done as per the research objectives. Then, recommendations of the study will be given.