High Hopes for Self-Access Learning at Two Secondary Schools in Thailand
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High Hopes for Self-Access Learning at High School

Richard Watson Todd

Sonthida Keyuravong

Kullakan Suthidara

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand

The Motivation for Change

In this paper, we intend to examine how the establishment of self-access centers at two secondary schools in Thailand has affected classroom teaching and the curriculum. Self-access is an approach to language learning which usually involves the setting up of a self-access center, or a place where "students can select and work on tasks on their own and obtain feedback on their performance" (Sheerin, 1991: 143). To do this, a suitable location and appropriate facilities need to be allocated, learning materials appropriate for independent learning need to be provided together with relevant equipment such as computers, systems for managing and organizing the center need to be set up, teachers need to be

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trained, and learners need to be inducted into how to use a self-access center and trained in how to learn (Gardner and Miller, 1999; Rost, 2002).

This last point has implications for classroom learning in that most induction into and training for self-access learning takes place in classrooms. The potential impact of self-access on classrooms is not restricted to training learners. A self-access center can provide an effective and individualized way to supplement classroom learning. More importantly, the availability of self-access learning in a situation can actually change classroom teaching practice, especially in terms of a refined and more autonomy-focused teaching philosophy and a greater focus on skills and strategies in the classroom (Moore and Reinders, 2003). The introduction of self-access learning into a school could therefore have a revitalizing effect on classroom teaching and the curriculum within that school.

The provision of self-access learning facilities in schools follows the legislation governing education in Thailand. In 1999, the National Education Act was promulgated. Amid the standard bureaucratic legislation about educational administration, the Act contains some forward-looking sections which provide progressive guidelines for developing education. For example, Section 24 of the National Education Act concerns the nature of the learning process and requires that educational institutions shall "provide substance and arrange activities in line with the learners' interests and aptitudes, bearing in mind individual differences" and "enable individuals to learn at all times and in all places", alongside other laudable goals (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). Education in Thailand, therefore, has a solid

foundation for progressive learning-oriented practice and the law provides a clear motivation for schools and teachers to develop.

There is, however, a yawning gap between the ideals of the National Education Act and the reality of teaching and learning, particularly in secondary schools. For several years now, the Ministry of Education has been pushing for secondary education to be more leaner-centered with few signs of success. Reliance on ineffectual top-down strategies to manage change and general educational inertia have meant that, in most schools, lecturing still dominates, memorizing and rote learning are still rewarded with good grades, and English lessons are still conducted primarily in Thai (Watson Todd, 2001). In those few schools which have switched to a learner-centered curriculum, the practice often falls short of the ideal with students complaining that teachers do not understand learner-centeredness and simply assign students to write long reports outside class (Bunnag, 2000).

While very few schools could be considered successful in their efforts to implement learner-centered education, some key Ministry of Education initiatives suggest a more promising future (Wiriyachitra, 2002). Of particular relevance to this paper is a new Basic Education Curriculum based on standards (in contrast to the previous model which just dictated what textbooks should be used in classrooms). This new curriculum allows teachers far more freedom in their teaching than previously and, for English language teaching, states that learners should be encouraged to "engage in self-directed learning" (Ministry of Education, 2001). This stress on self-directed learning has led to the introduction of self-access learning at secondary schools, including the two schools investigated in this paper.

Both of these schools were part of a large, World Bank-funded project to improve secondary education in Thailand. Part of this project involved establishing self-access centers, called Student English Access Rooms (SEARs), at 80 schools throughout the country. Within the project, rooms for the SEARs were assigned at each school and furniture provided, extensive teacher training was given at three points in the project, and self-access materials were provided (for full details of the project, see Watson Todd, 2005). These materials, in both paper-based and electronic formats, consisted of both published materials appropriate for self-access use and materials specifically designed for secondary self-access contexts in Thailand. The SEARs started to be used in June 2004 and so had been in operation for over a year when we began investigating their impact on classroom teaching.

All three authors of this paper have been involved in the SEARs project, albeit not in the role of secondary school teachers implementing self-access learning. The first author (RWT) acted as a consultant throughout the project and thus was involved in many of the decisions concerning the training of teachers, resources for SEARs and monitoring the project. The second author (SK) was one of the key designers of the self-access materials specifically designed for the project. The third author (KS) conducted an initial evaluation of the effectiveness of the self-access support systems in SEARs. We were therefore familiar with many of the aspects of the SEARs and interested in examining their wider impact.

This paper, then, examines the effects of additional learning facilities in the form of a self-access center on the curriculum and classroom teaching. With pressure from government legislation and Ministry of

Education directives to develop teaching to be more learner-centered, with more freedom for teachers to implement changes due to the standards-based Basic Education Curriculum, and with the potential impacts of a self-access center on classroom teaching and learning, the situation in the two schools examined is one ripe for curriculum and teaching development. We therefore hope to show how the provision of self-access learning facilities can lead to the revitalization of a secondary English language curriculum.

Curricular Context

The two schools focused on in this study are both provincial secondary schools in the central plains of Thailand. They were selected based on their accessibility and typicality. Both are government-funded and cater to children within the province. They are somewhat different in size with Pakklang School having 650 students in the last three years of secondary education for whom the SEAR is provided (equivalent to US grades 10-12), and Nakhao School having 1,320 students. Similarly, the English language departments are also different, with 10 Thai and 2 native speaker teachers in Pakklang School and 16 Thai and 4 native speaker teachers in Nakhao School. In both schools, the Thai teachers were fully responsible for the SEARs, since a high turnover of native speaker teachers meant that they could only play a minor role in the departments.

The curricula at both schools are fairly traditional. English courses, given three hours per week in the timetable, follow a coursebook chosen to meet the Ministry of Education standards. Generally, the Thai teachers simply teach the coursebook for two hours a week focusing largely on grammar and vocabulary in their teaching with the third hour being given for a native speaker teacher to cover speaking skills. Evaluation is

conducted through a mix of continuous assessment based on homework and traditional multiple-choice examinations.

One key difference between the two schools, however, is that Nakhao School had already set up a self-access center prior to the SEARs project. About 4 years prior to the establishment of SEARs, two teachers from the school were sent to the UK for training in self-access. On their return, one was assigned to set up a self-access center, in addition to her normal teaching workload. She was expected to provide books and worksheets for the students, but only a few students were permitted to use this self-access center. With a general lack of materials and restricted use, the self-access center was not a success and had almost no effect on the teaching and learning of English at the school. When the SEAR was established, the limited materials and equipment from the previous self-access center were incorporated into the SEAR.

In taking part in the SEARs project, after some initial problems the school principals at both schools were sympathetic and supportive, so that there were no problems in assigning rooms, setting up the rooms or getting other staff members to cooperate in the SEARs. In both schools, after an initial period of all staff working together to set up the SEAR, two teachers took prime responsibility for running the SEAR.

The SEARs at both schools have similar resources. Both were provided with tables, chairs and shelving, both received around 150 published books and 12 sets of computer software, both received 192 sets of materials specifically designed for Thai secondary self-access, each set covering one hour of use, and both contain multiple copies of self-access support materials such as generic worksheets and learner contracts

(examples of these can be found at http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/SEARs/Workshop.htm). Because of procurement problems, the computers and other equipment expected to be provided never arrived. In both schools, however, the school director ensured that some computers were allocated to the SEAR, five in the case of Pakklang School but only two workable computers in the case of Nakhao School. One further difference between the two SEARs is that, while the SEAR in Nakhao School consists of one large room, in Pakklang School two rooms are used for the SEAR, one of which also acts as a classroom.

To investigate the effects of the establishment and use of the SEAR on the English language curriculum, we sought four main sources of data: two document-based and two interview-based.

For documents, firstly, any documentation available from the running of the SEAR project was examined. These included questionnaires regarding the challenges and successes in setting up and running the SEAR, interviews with the teachers responsible for the SEAR in the first semester of SEAR use, and observations of how students used the SEAR. These documents were collected by the Ministry of Education committee responsible for implementing the SEARs project, and their prime purpose was to monitor the implementation of the project and to identify areas where schools could benefit from further support. The second type of documentation, which was collected specifically for the present study, was the handouts used by teachers in class to induct their students into the SEAR and to train students in how to learn.

For the interviews, first of all, interviews were conducted with the teachers responsible for the SEAR at each school. In both cases, two

separate interviews, the second being a follow-up interview with the same interviewees, were conducted, both lasting around an hour. In all interviews, teachers were interviewed together as pairs, because of time constraints and because the teachers stated that they felt more comfortable being interviewed together. At Pakklang School, the Head of the SEAR (named Siriluck for this paper; all names are pseudonyms at the request of the interviewees) and another teacher responsible for assisting in the SEAR (named Pranee) were interviewed. Similarly, at Nakhao School, the Head of the SEAR (Praphai) and another involved teacher (Somjit) were interviewed. The topics covered in these interviews were:

- Background knowledge of self-access learning
- Ways of preparing students to use the SEAR
- How the SEAR is used
- How the English curriculum at the school is organized
- Effects of the SEAR on teaching and assessment
- Attitudes towards the SEAR

The second type of interview was group interviews with students. Three groups of five students at Pakklang School and two groups of five students at Nakhao School were interviewed as groups. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. The topics covered in the interviews were:

- Frequency of SEAR use
- Reasons for using the SEAR
- Evaluation for SEAR work and for courses
- Support for using the SEAR
- Relationship between the SEAR and the classroom

- Differences in learning English between the time before the SEAR was established and the present time

In relying on interviews as the prime source of data in this study, we tried to avoid the problems of biasing the interviewees' responses, both subconscious biases evinced through supralinguistic and kinesic signals and more general biases deriving from interviewer-interviewee power differences (Brown, 2001). For the teacher interviews, the authors who conducted the interviews held similar social positions to the interviewees allowing a relatively symmetrical interviewer-interviewee relationship. In addition, the interviewees' first language (Thai) was used in all interviews and care was taken to retain an interested and nonjudgmental atmosphere during the interviews.

The documents collected and the data from the interviews were analysed to examine how the establishment and use of the SEAR at each school had affected the curriculum in terms of how English learning was conducted, how students were evaluated, and how attitudes had changed. For the interviewee data, interviewee utterances were recursively categorised following the topics of the interviews given above, which allowed the categorisation of the vast majority of the interview data. The quotations shown below are fairly loose translations from the interviews in which we try to represent the meanings that the interviewees were trying to convey. Loose translations are used for clarity, since the actual interview data contain frequent repetitions, false starts, redundancies and references to knowledge about the school and Thailand shared with the interviewers. Table 1 below summarises the sources of data and how they are used in this study.

Table 1   Data sources and uses

Data source	Date of data collection	Uses in the present study
Ministry of education project data (questionnaires, interviews, observations)	March-September 2004	Background information concerning setting up the SEAR and initial running of the SEAR
Documents for training students in SEAR use	August 2005	Illustration of how students are trained for and use the SEAR
Interviews with teachers	August 2005	Background information concerning numbers of students using the SEAR and methods of encouraging students to use the SEAR Findings concerning the effects of the SEAR on teaching and attitudes towards the SEAR
Interviews with students	August 2005	Background information concerning methods of encouraging students to use the SEAR Findings concerning attitudes towards the SEAR

Process of Integrating the SEAR into the Curriculum

The first half of 2004 was devoted to setting up the SEARs. With rooms, furniture and materials ready, a small group of teachers at both schools

started work. Although there were some constraints on the amount of time that could be devoted to setting up the SEAR especially in Pakklang School, the SEARs were ready for students to use in May 2004, the start of the academic year. At this point, in the Ministry of Education documentation teachers at both schools indicated that they were worried about setting up appropriate administrative systems such as user registration and materials classification and about getting the students to use the SEARs.

In the first semester of SEAR use from May to September 2004, as part of the overall project the implementation of self-access learning at both schools was monitored and documented by the Ministry of Education. From this documentation, at Pakklang School, the teachers reported that they were particularly pleased with the effectiveness of the user registration system they had set up and were rightly proud of the extent to which the students were using the SEAR. At Nakhao School, there was a similar feeling of achievement because of heavy student use of SEAR and the system for classifying materials was noticeably effective. It was therefore apparent that the teachers at both schools had successfully managed to deal with the issues that had worried them while setting up the SEARs. However, having run the SEAR for a couple of months, a new worry had arisen at both schools, namely, how to integrate the SEAR with classroom teaching. The teachers were concerned that the SEAR did not play any major role in the curriculum, but was just a separate, isolated add-on to English teaching with little relationship to the classroom. This was a concern common to many of the 80 schools with SEARs throughout Thailand, so in December 2004 a workshop specifically addressing this issue was organized.

In collecting the data for the present study in August 2005, we hoped that the teachers would have had time to work on issues such as integrating the SEAR and classroom teaching so that we would be able to see the full effects of the SEAR on the curriculum. However, the limited size of the SEARs and the extent to which the teachers were involved in running the SEAR (for example, a high turnover of native speaker teachers at both schools means that these teachers never get familiar with the SEAR) mean that the SEAR is fully utilized by only a proportion of students. In the following discussion, we will focus on how the SEARs are used at the two schools and the effects of the SEARs for those teachers and students who use them the most.

Let us first look at Pakklang School. The SEAR is intended for the students in the three years of upper secondary school termed M4 to M6 (equivalent to grades 10 to 12). For the M4 students, since it is the first time they will use the SEAR extensively, there is a need for learner training to introduce them to the SEAR and how to use it effectively. This typically takes two hours of classroom time and involves the teacher bringing sample worksheets into the classroom to show how the students can learn English from the SEAR, giving students a tour of the SEAR (using the tasksheet shown in Figure 1) and explaining regulations, introducing how to make study plans (using the handout shown in Figure 2) and keep records of learning, and demonstrating briefly how to use the computer programs available. After this, the students take a placement test (available at http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/sears/Placement_test.htm) to identify the aspects of English which they need to focus on.

Figure 1   Tasksheet for introducing the students to the SEAR at Pakklang School

INSERT FIGURE 1

Figure 2   Handout for making a study plan used at Pakklang School
INSERT FIGURE 2

To encourage the students in M4 and M5 to use the SEAR, they are assigned to complete some work in the SEAR and 20% of the marks for their English course are allocated for the completion of a SEAR portfolio. For M4 students, although they are free to decide for themselves exactly what to do in the SEAR, there is some control over this. The teacher assigns these students to read at least one graded reader, to complete at least 10 computer-based lessons and 10 worksheets, and to work on at least 5 listening tapes. For M5 students, there is more freedom, in that they are simply asked to do at least 60 things in the SEAR in a semester. M6 students are not assigned to use the SEAR, but many come anyway because they enjoy using the facilities and find them useful. For all of these students, their teachers may also occasionally recommend specific worksheets or activities in the SEAR as follow-up on what they learn in the lessons. The M1 to M3 students of lower secondary school are not required to use the SEAR, but are encouraged to come to watch videos and listen to music to become familiar with the SEAR. From these requirements and encouragement, most M4 and M5 students use the SEAR for 2 to 3 hours per week (in addition to their 3 hours of classroom English). From attendance records, on average 70% of M4 students and 55% of M5 students use the SEAR every week. Although there are no records of the use of the SEAR by M6 students, in the interview the teachers stated that many of them use the SEAR at least once a week. Finally, a significant minority (roughly 40%) of lower secondary school students visit the SEAR occasionally.

For M4 students at Nakhao School, the situation is similar to that in Pakklang School. At the beginning of the year, students are trained in how to use the SEAR (using a tasksheet similar to that in Figure 1 to familiarize the students with the SEAR and the study plan shown in Figure 3) and are then assigned to complete a SEAR portfolio each semester. However, when compared to Pakklang School, teachers exert a substantial amount of control over students' learning in the SEAR in two main ways. Firstly, the teachers sometimes take the whole class to the SEAR so that the students' use of materials can be closely monitored. Secondly, the teacher may assign specific work to be completed in the SEAR. For example, where the classroom learning focuses on the vocabulary of the home, the teacher may require the students to find further related vocabulary items in the SEAR and present these in the next lesson; or the teacher may ask the students to watch a particular movie related to the content of the lesson (using the generic worksheet shown in Figure 4). The teachers say that they exert such control over the students because they are worried that, if the students do not focus on the content of the English course, they will fail the exam. In contrast to the control over the M4 students' SEAR use, neither M5 nor M6 students at Nakhao School are assigned to use the SEAR, although occasionally teachers take SEAR materials into the classroom to help their teaching. Nevertheless, a number of these students either visit the SEAR to study every week or borrow materials from the SEAR to study by themselves. From the attendance records, around 12% of M5 students and 17% of M6 students use the SEAR at least once a week. There is also a minority of lower secondary students (around 10%) visiting the SEAR occasionally.

Figure 3   Handout for making a study plan and keeping records of SEAR use used at Nakhao School

INSERT FIGURE 3

Figure 4   Generic worksheet used when students watch movies in the SEAR at Nakhao School

INSERT FIGURE 4

From these descriptions, we can see that, after initial learner training, the SEARs are used in four different ways with different levels of teacher control. Starting with the most teacher control, these are:

1. Assigned SEAR portfolio where work to do is specified and/or monitored by the teacher (M4 students at Nakhao School).

2. Assigned SEAR portfolio with some restrictions on student choice (M4 students at Pakklang School).

3. Assigned SEAR portfolio where there is freedom of choice for students (M5 students at Pakklang School).

4. Voluntary use of SEAR (M1-M3 and M6 students at Pakklang School; M5 and M6 students at Nakhao School).

Let us now turn to the effects that these uses of the SEARs have had on the curriculum.

The Effects of the SEARs on Teaching, Teachers and Students

The curricula at both schools are based on very broad objectives, such as "ask for and give basic personal information", which in turn are based on Ministry of Education standards (e.g. Section 1 states that students should be able to "use simple language to ask for and give information about people and things"). From these objectives, the English department chooses a coursebook appropriate to each level of students. The teaching

and learning process in reality is closely controlled by this coursebook, with the content of both teaching and examinations matching the content of the coursebook. Furthermore, restrictions on the number of students who can use the SEAR mean that, while some teachers can encourage their students to use the SEAR to the full, others cannot and the students of these latter teachers must rely primarily on classroom learning. To ensure that different groups of students studying the same course meet the same objectives and are evaluated in similar ways, priority is given to classroom learning and the coursebook. The constraints of meeting the standards-based course objectives, following the coursebook and preparing students for examinations mean that, within the English curriculum, there appears to be little leeway for the SEAR to lead to change or development.

For Nakhao School, these constraints appear to have limited the potential impact of the SEAR on the curriculum. Rather than enabling the curriculum to develop, the SEAR has become just one more resource that can be used to reach existing objectives. In the words of Somjit, the teacher helping with the SEAR:

> "I think that the objectives of the curriculum haven't changed. We simply use the SEAR as a place for extra learning activities. Previously, one objective of the curriculum was to have the students learn outside the classroom as well as within it. This objective is still in the curriculum, but the method of reaching the objective has changed from assigning extensive reading of newspapers or short stories to making use of the SEAR."

Furthermore, although the teachers agree that the SEAR is potentially useful, they have no intentions of integrating the SEAR with the curriculum more in the future. As Somjit says,

> "I think the concept of the SEAR is good, but it's not easy to put this into practice. We need a lot more training if we are going to improve the implementation of the SEAR. We don't have any plans to integrate the SEAR and the curriculum yet. To do this, we need a lot more time and we need personnel to work in the SEAR regularly."

In addition to their concerns about a lack of training and time, the teachers at Nakhao School who use the SEAR extensively are also worried about the constraints of the English courses. Compared with those teachers who do not utilize the SEAR in their teaching, these SEAR teachers are worried that, if they ask their students to use the SEAR a lot, they may not be able to cover all of the required content of the coursebook in class, the students' classroom learning will be adversely affected, and thus the students will not be fully prepared for the examination. For Nakhao School, therefore, it appears that the constraints existing in the school context have meant that the SEAR is not exploited to its full potential and its impact on the curriculum has been limited.

Nevertheless, even with the constraints and the limited use of the SEAR, some of the students at Nakhao School, as we have seen, are willing to use the SEAR to learn even when their teacher does not assign them to do so. Their reasons for this may derive from their positive attitudes towards the SEAR as they stated in the interview.

> "We like the SEAR because it has many resources available and we can choose what to study ourselves ... I especially like the song corner ... It's not difficult to use the SEAR but it's

more suitable for proficient and hard-working students because we have to study by ourselves ... We need to both learn in class and find something for our own interest."

The students at Pakklang School have an even greater willingness to use the SEAR and wider-ranging reasons for doing so.

"At first, when the SEAR was first set up, we were forced to use it by our teachers, but later we became more willing to come and use it by ourselves ... Originally when we used the SEAR, we would always watch TV but later we moved on to do other things in the SEAR ... Now we often use the SEAR at lunchtimes or when we have free time, because we feel happy using it and it's fun ... I like the computer programs such as *Discovery* where we can practice listening, speaking and reading and we can record ourselves ... If we don't understand something in the classroom, we can come to the SEAR to find something extra to read such as grammar, vocabulary and short stories ... The knowledge that we get from the SEAR and the classroom is different. From the SEAR we get more general knowledge, but in the classroom we get more specific knowledge."

In fact, from the group interviews the students at Pakklang School showed a greater depth of awareness concerning the purposes and uses of the SEAR and more positive attitudes than the students from Nakhao School. These differences may be due to the extent to which the SEAR at Pakklang School has influenced the curriculum.

Although, as with Nakhao School, the existing formal objectives of the English curriculum at Pakklang School have remained intact, the teachers

have felt the need to add an extra objective. As Pranee, the teacher helping with the SEAR, says,

> "We have inserted the idea into the objectives of the courses that students should engage in extensive self-study. We use the SEAR in this way, although it's now just a pilot program."

If, as seems likely given the students' responses to learning through the SEAR, the students' self-study proves effective, the teachers are considering opening a new optional course based very heavily on SEAR use, which would clearly imply a new direction for the curriculum at Pakklang School. As yet, there are no solid plans concerning this course.

In addition to the extra course objective, at Pakklang School the SEAR has also had an impact on teaching. As well as devoting time to learner training in the classroom, the existence of the SEAR has also led the teachers to adapt the ways they extend learning beyond the classroom. According to Siriluck, the SEAR Head,

> "The teaching methodology has changed because of the SEAR. The nature of the SEAR has made this change inevitable. Previously, we taught the lesson in the classroom and finished teaching within that period. Except for assigning homework to students, we didn't extend the class learning outside of the classroom, and there was no real structure to the homework we assigned. Now, from only teaching in the classroom, we can give the students assignments to do in the SEAR to follow up on their learning, and the students now have a choice of what to do for their assignments ... Another change is when the students have problems or difficulties with their learning in the classroom. Previously I would just give the answer to the student in the classroom. Now, we assign the

students to go and look for the answer in the SEAR, especially for grammar and pronunciation ... Students have a new resource for learning, they are more responsible for their own learning, and they have more options available to them for learning."

In turn, these changes in dealing with students' problems and extending learning beyond the classroom have affected teachers' and students' attitudes at Pakklang School. As Siriluck says,

"The students' perceptions about language learning have changed, so that they like English more. For example, in class students were always quite shy about speaking out, especially for pronouncing words, but with the CALL (computer-assisted language learning) program, they aren't shy. Instead of being embarrassed in front of their peers in class, they can repeat and practice pronunciation on their own with the computer, and this helps to create self-confidence."

Thus the teachers see that the SEAR has brought many benefits to the school.

"The SEAR is really good and useful. It helps reduce our teaching load, students don't feel bored with learning English or get tired of listening to the teacher all the time, and it offers something different so that our teaching and working are more interesting than before."

Overall, the reactions of both students and teachers to the SEARs are positive, and the extensive use of the SEARs by students, especially the voluntary use, highlights the potential value of the SEARs as an extra resource for English language learning. However, the students and

teachers at Pakklang School seem to have taken to self-access learning more than at Nakhao School, with students at Pakklang School showing a greater willingness and responsibility for learning through the SEAR and teachers appearing committed to implementing self-access learning and not overly concerned about constraints.

Issues Underlying the Impact of the SEARs

While the experience at the two schools *suggests* that the SEARs are valuable additions to the English language curricula, *proving* this is not possible. Self-access centers are incredibly complex entities, and the number and range of factors potentially influencing their effectiveness makes any evaluation of self-access learning difficult at best (Gardner, 1999). Nevertheless, from the interview data some patterns emerge that have implications for other situations which may be considering revitalizing the English curriculum through the implementation of self-access learning.

The most noticeable finding in this study concerns the students' willingness and desire to use the SEAR, even when not required to do so by the teacher. This independent learning suggests that the students have become, at least to some extent, autonomous in their learning. At Pakklang School, this autonomous behavior is very apparent as the students, perhaps because of the teachers' initial encouragement, use the SEAR to attempt to solve their learning problems by themselves.

Such autonomous learning behavior among Thai students contrasts with previous studies in two main ways. Firstly, a previous investigation of self-access learning in Thailand (Rujiketgumjorn, 2000) suggested that independent learning is a point of particular difficulty for Thai students

and thus that extensive support and assistance for self-access learning is needed. In this study, however, the initial support provided was not extensive and assistance in using the SEAR is minimal (for example, there is no counselling service available). Despite these limitations, the students' independent use of the SEAR highlighted in the present study suggests that with the provision of sufficient appropriate resources Thai students are not only able, but also willing, to engage in autonomous learning.

The second contrast with previous studies concerns the importance of learner training for effective self-access learning. In the literature, the aspect of self-access learning most frequently identified as crucial to success is learner training (e.g. Miller, 2000; Yeung and Hyland, 1999), leading to suggestions for long-term learner training courses (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair, 1989). In the present study, however, the learner training provided could probably be described as perfunctory, yet the students actively engage in self-access learning (although we do not know the extent of the effectiveness of their learning). Instead of identifying learner training as the key issue influencing self-access learning, perhaps we should examine the differences between Pakklang School and Nakhao School (which both provided similar training) to see how these may have influenced the impact of the SEAR.

From the interviews, it appears that at Nakhao School the SEAR is viewed as just an extra resource for English language learning which has had little impact on the curriculum in general. At Pakklang School, on the other hand, there is evidence that the SEAR has had a greater impact on the curriculum, with the addition of an objective concerning self-study and changes in the teaching methodology, and on the students, especially in terms of their attitudes towards English and learning in general.

At Nakhao School, although the teachers are dedicated and generally view the SEAR positively, they do not seem to have truly accepted the idea of self-access learning, since their implementation of the SEAR involves high initial levels of control over how the students engage in self-study. They are also worried about the constraints associated with self-access, perhaps to a greater extent than they are enthusiastic about the extra learning opportunities it opens up. Together with a certain lack of confidence as evinced by their expressed need for further training, it appears that the teachers at Nakhao School, despite their positive attitudes, have neither a sense of ownership over the SEAR nor positive beliefs in their own ability to implement effective learning through the SEAR.

The teachers at Pakklang School, on the other hand, are much more committed to both the principles of self-access learning and the SEAR itself. In integrating the SEAR into the curriculum, students are given control over their learning, and, instead of assigning work for students to do in the SEAR, the teachers encourage the students to find their own answers and solutions. The teachers at Pakklang School have also started developing additional materials for the SEAR, including paper-based self-access worksheets, CALL materials to review classroom learning, and a set of materials concerning careers to cover a student need that was not being otherwise addressed. Such involvement in developing the SEAR is likely to lead to a greater sense of ownership among the teachers, which, together with their commitment to self-access learning, may be the key factor behind the greater impact of the SEAR at Pakklang School.

The experience at Pakklang School leads us to conclude that, where teachers accept and are committed to self-access learning, the provision of sufficient and appropriate self-access facilities can have a positive impact on the curriculum. This impact may not be directly observable at the surface level of the curriculum in terms of altered objectives and classroom materials. Rather, the impact may be deeper and more pervasive in the long term through beneficial changes to teaching methodology, to the ways in which students approach learning, and to the attitudes of both teachers and students. The implementation of self-access learning at secondary school can therefore give new life to English language learning.

Resources

The main widely available resource for SEARs is the SEARs website available at: http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/sears/. This site is designed to provide support for teachers and includes materials for learner training and supporting student self-study, a placement test and a discussion forum. Within the first year, the website was visited over 1,500 times by teachers from the 80 schools with SEARs.

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The Writers

Richard Watson Todd is Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). He holds a PhD from the University of Liverpool and is the author of several books and articles on a wide range of topics.

Sonthida Keyuravong is also Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at KMUTT. She is interested in self-access learning, and her most recent project has been setting up self-access centers in community colleges across Thailand.

After graduating with a Master of Arts in the field of Applied Linguistics (Resource Based English Language Learning) from KMUTT, Kullakan Suthidara has been working on the design of e-learning materials. She is interested in Thai education reform, and especially in its encouragement of self-study and life-long learning.

Figure 1　　Tasksheet for introducing the students to the SEAR at Pakklang School

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SEAR

Orientation Quiz

Name .... Class .... No. ....

1. How many corners are there in the SEAR? What are they? ....
    ....

2. How many different newspapers are there in the newspaper corner? What are they? ....
    ....

3. Write the name of an English dictionary in the dictionary corner ....

4. If you want to improve your speaking, which corner will you go to? ....

5. The first thing you should do when you visit the SEAR is ....

6. How many TVs and VCD players are there in the SEAR? ....

7. Write the name of one game you can find in the SEAR ....

8. Write the name of a graded reader from the reading corner ....

9. What does KMUTT stand for? ....

10. Write down one motto from the notice board ....

11. What do we call the students who help in the SEAR? ....

12. What colour is the reading skill in the KMUTT materials? ....

13. How many levels are there in the KMUTT materials? ....

14. If you don't understand about the use of the past perfect tense, which corner should you go to?
    On which page can you find help about the past perfect? ....

15. Which corner do you like most? ....

16. What does CALL stand for? ....

17. Which program do we use to practice English through CALL? ....

Figure 2   Handout for making a study plan used at Pakklang School

Self-Study Plan

Date ....

Name .... Class .... No. ....

Number of hours a week I will spend on self-study ....

The best time of the day/week for me to study is ....

The number of weeks this plan covers is ....

In my study I need to ....

....

The thing(s) I need to improve most is/are ....

....

My self-study timetable

Week no.	Number of hours	Activities planned

Figure 3   Handout for making a study plan and keeping records of SEAR use used at Nakhao School

Learner Profile for

Name ....

Surname ....

Class .... No. ....

To learners

The contents of this profile are all about you. The purpose of the profile is to give an accurate picture of what you are able to do well and what you need to improve. You can add whatever you like to this profile.

Section 1: What you are able to do well

Instructions: Please tick ( ) the items that you are able to do well.

Language focus	What I can do well
Listening	
Speaking	
Reading	
Writing	
Grammar	
Vocabulary	
Pronunciation	
Other	

Section 2: Needs analysis: What you need to improve

Instructions: Please tick ( ) the items that you need to improve.

Language focus	What I need to improve
Listening	
Speaking	
Reading	
Writing	
Grammar	
Vocabulary	
Pronunciation	
Other	

Section 3: Your study plan

Instructions: Fill in the blanks by choosing 3 items from section 2 that you want to learn first.

3.1 ....

3.2 ....

3.3 ....

Figure 4   Generic worksheet used when students watch movies in the
SEAR at Nakhao School

Generic worksheet for movies

Instructions: Put a tick (✓) in the boxes and fill in the spaces provided.

1. Name of the movie ....

2. Type of movie

   ☐ historical   ☐ drama   ☐ horror

   ☐ action   ☐ musical   ☐ detective

   ☐ adventure   ☐ romance   ☐ other ....

3. Main characters ....
   ....

4. Main points in the story ....
   ....
   ....
   ....

5. New words I have learnt

New word	Meaning

6. Interesting sentences/expressions I have learnt
   ....
   ....

7. New information or knowledge I have learnt
   ....
   ....

Name .... Class .... No. .... Date ....