Readiness for self-directed learning among pharmacy students at a Chinese university

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Introduction
Abilities to self-directed learning are becoming important in pharmacy education. The objective of this study is to understand the perceptions of pharmacy students at a Chinese university about the effectiveness of self-directed learning, and to provide insights into strategies to strengthen the pharmacy curriculum to equip future Chinese pharmacy students with better abilities to be active learners.

Method
Undergraduate students majoring in pharmacy at Shenzhen University are requested to participate in a problem-based self-directed project as part of a course entitled “Pharmaceutics”. Students were then randomly sampled, and in-depth interviews were performed. Scripts of the interviews are analyzed by content analysis, which encompasses a 4-step process: coding, conceptualizing, categorizing and explanation.

Findings
90% of the subjects mentioned that the subject knowledge in a course is often delivered fully by lecturing. They stated that teachers in the past have rarely requested them to exercise their self-directed learning abilities. Few subjects have pointed out that, even though they understand the importance of self-directed learning, they are not accustomed to this practice, and are more comfortable to be passive learners.

Conclusion
Our results reveal that the readiness of Chinese pharmacy students for self-directed learning is yet to be satisfactory. More efforts should be directed at improving the curriculum design and prevalent teaching styles to strengthen students’ capacity to be active learners.