

Non-English major students' perceptions of their autonomy in English language learning

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ABSTRACT: *This research mainly aims at investigating non-English majored students' awareness of autonomous English learning. To obtain the data for this research, one hundred non-English majors, from The Saigon International University, were surveyed. The objectives were to explore the students' perceptions of their responsibility in learning English as well as the main factors affecting students' autonomy. In addition to the survey, five students were also interviewed to discover the roles of autonomous English learning in students' view. The findings indicate that the majority of students perceive themselves as autonomous learners who are willing to take responsibility for their English learning inside and outside the classroom. Besides, according to the results, there are various factors influencing autonomous English learning which includes laziness, a lack of learning strategies, and a lack of motivation. Moreover, the results show that autonomy does play an integral part in English learning. This study concludes by suggesting various methods to promote non-English majors' autonomy in their English language learning process.*

KEYWORDS: Autonomy, English learning, students' perceptions.

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1. Introduction

Oxford University Press ELT (2013) highlighted that autonomy is an approach that leads students to take control and accountability for their learning, both in terms of what they learn and how they learn it. Le (2013) added to Oxford University Press ELT's statement by outlining autonomy plays a significant role in not only improving knowledge acquisition but also boosting independent problem-solving skills. Therefore, autonomy is a necessary skill that helps students to increase their learning efficiency. However, since Vietnamese students usually learn in teacher-centered classes, they are accustomed to being dependent on teachers' role as the core source of knowledge and do not have adequate opportunities to develop their autonomy. Besides, many students do not actively study in class (Dang, 2019). They rarely make questions, discuss a problem or share their opinion about a topic (Dang, 2019). With the development of the Internet, it is now very convenient for students to search for a word or the meaning of phrases (Dang, 2019). However, they tend to use the Internet for recreational rather than educational

purposes (Dang, 2019). Although the number of students who are aware of the importance of autonomy has been on the rise recently, the majority of them do not have enough motivation or effective autonomous learning strategies, which results in inefficiency in their autonomous learning (Pham, 2009).

This research mainly focuses on investigating non-English majors' attitude towards their autonomy in English language learning. Specifically, this study will address how students understand their responsibilities in autonomous English learning, the major factors influencing their autonomy, and the vital roles of learner autonomy in English learning. In addition, this study will also suggest various solutions to assist students to develop their autonomous learning ability, which includes teachers' role in supporting students' autonomy as well as students' role in promoting their autonomous learning ability.

The findings of this research will hopefully raise students' awareness of the importance of learner autonomy in English language learning and encourage them to practice autonomy so as to boost up their confidence and learning aptitude.

1.1. The concept of learner autonomy (LA)

The term learner autonomy was first coined in 1981 by Henri Holec, the father of the concept. Holec defined LA as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p.3). Holec also noted “this ability is not inherited but must be acquired either by natural means or formal learning”.

LA is an approach that leads students to take control and accountability for their learning, both in terms of what they learn and how they learn it (Oxford University Press ELT, 2013). According to Littlewood (1999, p.71), LA entails “learners should be fully in charge of their learning because all learning can in any case only be carried out by the students themselves and also because they need to develop the ability to continue learning after the end of formal education”. Taking responsibility involves students taking ownership of many processes which have traditionally belonged to the teacher, such as making a decision on learning goals, choosing learning methods, and evaluating processes (Littlewood, 1999, p.71).

LA is the shift of responsibility and force from educators to students by changing the traditional positions of both (Banerjee, 2011). Supporting Banerjee’s view, Hedge (2000, p. 410) claims “LA is the capacity of the learner to take responsibility for their learning and plan, organize, and monitor the learning process independently of the educator”. LA considers teaching as a redeployment of power among educators and learners, and learning is adopted as an individualistic approach instead of a social process (Paudel, 2019). Thanasoulas writes “autonomy is a departure from education as a social process, as well as in terms of redistribution of power attending the construction of knowledge and the roles of the participants in the learning process” (2000, p.223). LA gives force and freedom to learners, allows them to build knowledge, and makes learners independent and critical in their learning (Paudel, 2019). Little (1991) asserts that “LA is a matter of the learner’s mental relation to the process and content of learning - a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent activity” (p.4).

LA invokes the learners to take on duties driving them to decide learning objectives, choose learning processes and strategies, and identify their own learning needs (Paudel, 2019). For Pennycook (1997), LA is “the struggle to turn into the author of one’s world, to be able to create meaning, to pursue cultural alternatives in the midst of the cultural politics of daily life” (p.39). Similarly, Young (1986) asserts “the fundamental idea in LA is that of authoring one’s own world without being dependent upon the others” (p.19). Both Pennycook and Young have argued for the freedom of learners in adopting preferential styles, techniques, and activities in their learning. LA is a kind of autonomous learning where students get an opportunity to learn in individualized, self-chosen styles without relying upon the educator. In addition, Macdougall (2008) states “it is a type of learning which is described by personalization, self-directedness, and less reliance on the teacher for affirmation, and which as a result develops rather than hinders the capacity for constructive and collaborative participation in the workplace” (p.224). From the above definitions and references, it can be concluded that LA is related to learners’ freedom, and it is directed to make students autonomous in their study. Moreover, it drives the learners to be free in their learning by transferring duties, giving ideas, and showing approaches to learn autonomously.

1.2. Learner autonomy in language learning

Language learning is a lifelong process that does not begin and end in a language classroom. Since language learning takes a long time, students must study both within and outside of the classroom to improve their language skills (Najeeb, 2013). Therefore, independent learning outside of the classroom is important for language learners.

Learning a new language is not the same as learning other subjects such as maths and science. In other subjects, a student’s academic abilities are never fully separated from the content of their studies. Meanwhile, being exposed to a language rather than learning patterns in various tenses is a much better way to learn a language. Therefore,

language learners must be able to explore the language for themselves in order to comprehend it fully.

Autonomous language learning emphasizes student choice, focusing on the needs of individual learners rather than the wishes of a teacher or an organization, and allowing students to make their own decisions (Najeeb, 2012). Autonomous learning is also learner-centered, in the sense that it views students as individuals with needs and rights who can cultivate and exercise learning responsibility. Autonomous learners are supposed to foster the ability to communicate with, connect with, and benefit from learning experiences that are not mediated by an instructor directly. Therefore, independent language learning may refer to an environment or setting for language learning (Benson & Voller, 1997; Wright, 2005) in which students often, but not always, acquire skills in the target language on their own.

1.3. Students' perceptions of responsibilities in autonomous English learning

Healey (1999, p. 391) claims that student self-direction and independent learning are Western concepts that are well-suited to American culture. Therefore, learner autonomy is often defined as a Western term that does not work in an Asian context. Littlewood (1999) argues, however, that with proper learner instruction, Asian students can achieve the same level of autonomy as their Western counterparts. According to Holden and Usuki (1999), Japanese students do not have enough opportunities to develop their autonomy since they usually attend teacher-centered classes. The results of Holden and Usuki's study also revealed that students prefer teachers who take on non-traditional positions rather than lecturing or transmitting their expertise.

Chan's (2001) analysis of Hong Kong University students' readiness, ability, and capacity to learn autonomously demonstrates how educational and behavioral norms stifle learners' autonomy growth. Therefore, it is educational and behavioral norms in Asian countries that actively discourage students' independence. Chan also suggests that teachers

should help students become autonomous learners by raising their knowledge and changing the learning approaches that have prevented them from learning independently.

Dam (1995) outlines, in order to increase learner autonomy in the classroom, a gradual shift from teacher-centered teaching to learner-centered teaching is needed. Learners have beliefs about teachers and their roles, as well as beliefs about themselves and their roles, and these beliefs influence learners' receptivity to ideas and activities in language classes, particularly when the students have never encountered the approach before (Cotterall, 1995). Sakai, Takagi, and Chu (n.d.) claim that students are unable to achieve learner autonomy and struggle to practice their ownership of learning processes if their teachers continue to assume full responsibility in a teacher-centered manner. Sakai et al. continue that students may find it difficult to adapt to their new position as autonomous learners in a learner-centered class. Therefore, to gradually increase their autonomy, educators must first fully consider both students' current desires for learner autonomy and teachers' implementation practices to match their needs (Sakai et al., n.d.).

1.4. Major factors affecting students' autonomy in English learning

Autonomy is a process, not a product. It is accomplished by fulfilling criteria such as cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, self-esteem, motivation, and attitudes (Begum & Chowdhury, 2016).

1.4.1. Learning strategies

Students engage in LA by using a variety of learning techniques that they can implement in a variety of situations. The measures taken by the learner to make language learning more effective, self-directed, and enjoyable are referred to as learning strategies (Oxford, 1990 cited in Cook, 2008). Based on the concept of learner autonomy, this research discusses two main learning strategies, which are cognitive and metacognitive learning techniques.

a) Cognitive strategies

The term "cognitive strategies" applies to

the use of one's mind (cognition) in language learning, i.e., using all of one's mental processes (Cook, 2008, p.116). Cognitive techniques, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990, cited in Cook, 2008), are deliberate forms of approaching learning, such as note-taking, resourcing (using dictionaries and other resources), and elaboration (relating new information to old). O'Malley and Chamot go on to say that strategies aid learners' learning by running and manipulating incoming data directly. Therefore, cognitive techniques improve a learner's ability to learn a task quickly. According to Cook (1993, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000), learners may use the following cognitive strategies:

- Use of repetition to imitate speech.
- Practice resourcing such as dictionaries for knowledge.
- Using one's mother tongue for translation to be able to understand and create a second language (L2).
- Taking notes on lectures given in L2.
- Deduction, or the ability to apply L2 rules.
- Using contextualization for inserting a word or expression into a coherent sequence.
- Transfer, or remembering facts and sequences in L2 using knowledge learned in the mother tongue.
- Use of inference to match an unfamiliar word with a familiar word.

b) Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies are indirect techniques that entail organizing and assessing one's knowledge, such as by anticipating what will be discussed in the next lecture (Cook, 2008, p.116). Planning, thinking, and controlling one's learning are all examples of metacognitive techniques. Metacognitive strategies also entail assessing one's performance (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, cited in Cook, 2008). The planning strategy involves setting targets and choosing suitable cognitive methods to meet those goals (Wenden, 1998, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000).

1.4.2. Social and psychological factors: Self-esteem, motivation, and attitudes

If language is a means of communication,

then effective independent English learning is dependent on a number of social and psychological factors (Begum & Chowdhury, 2016). Social and psychological factors, according to Shumann (1978, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000) and Larsen – Freeman and Long (1991, cited in Thanasoulas), explain how students respond to learning processes. Social and psychological factors include learners' self-esteem, motivation, and attitudes.

Learners have a good understanding of the intent of learning the language, their areas of difficulty, and how to develop their language skills. Learners are also capable of evaluating their own strengths and weaknesses. Self-esteem, according to Coppersmith (1967), is a personal judgment of worthiness expressed in attitudes that the individual holds toward himself. Coppersmith believes that students who have positive feelings towards themselves are more likely to succeed.

Motivation is the primary stimulating factor in second language learning, according to Dornyei (1998, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000). Motivation is essential because it increases a student's desire to learn in a language classroom. Moreover, a learner's motivation boosts his or her trust in their ability to succeed in English learning.

Wenden (1998, p.52) describes attitude as learned motives, valued beliefs, evaluations, what one thinks is appropriate, or responses directed toward approaching or avoiding. According to Wenden, learners' attitudes and beliefs about themselves in the learning process, as well as their capacity to learn, are important. According to Begum and Chowdhury (2016), in English classrooms, students' self-perceptions have an effect on their success. For example, if students believe they lack the necessary aptitude for language learning, they are unlikely to make any effort to learn the language. In other words, beliefs can disrupt the development of learner autonomy. Teachers are responsible to determine whether a student's beliefs are detrimental to their learning.

1.5. Roles of autonomy in English language learning

To begin with, since the opportunities and conditions for practicing English in class are restricted, autonomous English learning provides more opportunities for the skills gained in class to be practiced further (Hu, 2016). As a result, students become more engaged in their learning and become successful students. Moreover, out-of-class environments are usually linked with real-world applications. Language studying becomes more relevant when learners have several opportunities to practice in a realistic context (Ferdous, 2013). Students could use whatever resources are available to them, such as listening to native speaker conversations downloaded from the Internet or speaking with native speakers, they meet in coffee shops or other locations where native speakers gather in towns. When students actively seek out out-of-class learning opportunities and are able to fully use out-of-class learning resources, they are more likely to succeed in learning and become more interested in learning as learning becomes more relevant in this way.

Secondly, autonomy helps learners to become more confident and motivated in their English studies. According to Balçikanlı (2010), autonomy provides students with a sense of confidence and encourages them to make independent decisions. Furthermore, as students study independently during out-of-class language learning activities, they are more likely to have positive attitudes toward English learning, both in terms of the perceived importance of learning spoken English and their expectations for learning English (Wu, 2012). As a result, when students develop a positive attitude toward language learning, they are encouraged to continue to learn more independently (Cotterall, 1999). To be specific, out-of-class language learning experiences enable students to practice and use English in a practical environment, which boosts students' trust that what they've learned will be useful in real life. During learning processes, with appropriate guidance from teachers, students are able to use effective learning strategies including making learning decisions and plans for themselves. Once learners achieve some progress with autonomous learning, they will be more confident and be motivated to continue

autonomous learning as they are taking control of their learning. When they begin to hold positive attitudes about their autonomous learning during this process, they will be more motivated to learn independently.

Finally, LA aids learners in catching up with new sources of knowledge. Information is becoming redundant at a faster rate than ever before. Conversations in English among modern native speakers are vastly different from those published in textbooks. As a result, autonomy is becoming increasingly important to respond to changes in the social environment in the context of globalization, which presents many complex opportunities and challenges ("Tiếng Anh - Cần lắm tinh thần tự học", n.d.). In conclusion, it is undeniable that LA plays a significant role in English language learning.

2. Method

This research targeted the population of non-English majors at The Saigon International University in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The reason for choosing non-English majors was that this study desired to focus on students' perceptions of learner autonomy in learning English skills rather than courses specialized for English majors.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilized in this research. In the quantitative process, this study conducted a survey to answer the first two research questions, which are "How do non-English majors perceive their responsibilities towards autonomous English learning?" and "What are the major factors affecting non-English majors' autonomy in English learning?". In the qualitative method, this research conducted a face-to-face interview to answer the third research question, which is "What are the important roles of autonomous English learning?". The questionnaire items and the research questions were validated by an expert before being given to the participants.

At the start of the survey, participants were asked for personal information involving their school year and major. The survey involves three questions. The first question, which includes four attributes, was designed to reveal participants'

perceptions of their responsibilities towards autonomous learning in English classes. The second question, consisting of five attributes, aimed to show how the participants perceive their duties on out-of-class English learning. The final multiple-choice question aimed at discovering the major factors influencing participants' learner autonomy in English learning. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was distributed to one hundred non-English majors chosen from the population using snowball sampling techniques. Since the respondents were students studying English as a second language, the questionnaire items were written in their native tongue to avoid confusion. The data collected from the survey was then analyzed quantitatively using Microsoft Excel software. Besides, to analyze the data of participants' perceptions of their responsibilities in autonomous learning inside and outside the classroom, each attribute was scored based on the Likert scale (score 1 for never, score 2 for seldom, score 3 for sometimes, score 4 for often, and score 5 for usually).

Five students were chosen randomly from among the one hundred students who took part in the survey for the face-to-face interview. They were all asked to respond to three questions. The objective of the first two questions was to find out how the participants viewed the role of learner autonomy in English learning. The final question was intended to elicit suggestions from participants for promoting learner autonomy in English language learning. These are open-ended questions that do not ask for personal information. The participants' names were encoded anonymously by abbreviating (student 1: BT, student 2: VK, student 3: AT, student 4: TL, student 5: TN). The interviewees' conversations were recorded and then transcribed to ensure the most reliable outcomes. The data collected during the interview was analyzed qualitatively.

3. Results

3.1. Survey

3.1.1. Students' perceptions of responsibility in autonomous English learning

a) Inside the classroom

The students' perceptions of responsibilities

toward autonomous learning within the English classroom were indicated by the frequency in which students participated in the following in-class autonomous activities: "To voluntarily solve exercises when your teacher asks", "to proactively share your opinion about a topic", "to have a discussion with your teacher when your opinion differs from him or her", and "to ask your teacher about a problem that is unclear to you".

In terms of the first activity, table 1 shows that 2% of participants never willingly solve exercises when their instructor asks, 27% seldom do so, 45% sometimes, 19% often, and only 7% are usually willing to lift their hands to solve exercises. For some students, this activity appears to be a high-risk venture. They are reluctant to participate in voluntary exercises because they are afraid of making a mistake. Nonetheless, it is a risk worth taking because it allows students to obtain a greater understanding of the subject matter regardless of whether or not their response is correct.

Regarding the second attribute, statistics indicate that 4% of students never voluntarily express their opinion on a subject, 24% seldom do so, 48% sometimes, 18% often, and only 6% usually do so. In reality, this is a common occurrence in many Vietnamese English classrooms today. Many Vietnamese students are still too shy or even afraid to speak up during class discussions. The possible reason for this problem is their fear of being ridiculed in front of the class if they did something wrong. Another reason may be a lack of preparation before the course, resulting in students lacking sufficient knowledge to discuss the subject. As a result, they always remain quiet and only speak when the instructor requests it. This one-way contact not only affects the learning atmosphere but also discourages teachers, making it impossible to ensure teaching efficiency.

As for the third activity, table 1 shows that only 4% of students usually discuss with their instructor when their opinions vary from his or hers, while 12% of students never do so (29% seldom, 37% sometimes, 18% often). It can be inferred from the data that today's students

still struggle with debating with their teachers, indicating a lack of autonomy in the learning process. The behavioral norms in Vietnam are one of the key reasons leading to this problem. Since our country has been ruled by feudalism and patriarchy for thousands of years, Vietnamese people in general, and students in particular, are often hesitant to debate, especially with teachers. Debating with teachers is often considered rude in Vietnamese culture. Besides, the popularity of the teacher-centered approach in Vietnam also contributes to the issue. Students are used to listening attentively and taking notes when teachers have complete control of the classroom. As a result, students are unable to think autonomously or express their opinions. Students must be encouraged to debate with their teachers as debating skills play an integral part in the learning process. It not only helps students further understand the subject but also improves their abilities to think critically, creatively, and independently.

Concerning the last attribute, the data reveals that 3% of participants never ask their teacher whenever they are having trouble interpreting a concept, 20% seldom do so, 38% sometimes, 29% often, and only 10% usually do so. According to the results, most Vietnamese students still have a habit of not asking their doubts from their teachers. Various reasons are leading to this situation. The first reason is that they are not paying attention in class (talking with friends or lost in thought), thus they are unaware of their suspicions. Secondly, students are afraid that their peers would think they are dumb or slow learners if they ask questions about their doubts. They believe that other students would make fun

of them because no one else has any questions about the concept and they are the only ones who cannot grasp the simple subject. Finally, students are unable to frame their questions and therefore refrain from asking them. Likewise, they may perceive a language barrier, in which case they believe they will fumble while speaking English and be mocked by their classmates. As a result, students who do not ask their doubts to teachers suffer from a lack of clarity on topics and hence, get fewer marks or flunk in exams.

b) Outside the classroom

The students' perceptions of responsibilities toward autonomous learning outside the English classroom were indicated by the frequency in which students participated in the following out-of-class activities: "To learn English vocabulary and grammar using the Internet or English learning apps", "to read English materials (books, newspapers, web pages, magazines...)", "to listen to English songs or watch English movies and TV shows", "to practice speaking English with your friends or foreigners", "to prepare for proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS".

Regarding the first activity, only 3% of participants usually learn English vocabulary and grammar on the Internet or English learning apps, 18% often do so, 54% sometimes, 19% seldom, and 6% never do so.

With regards to the second activity, the percentage of participants who usually read English materials is the same as the percentage of ones who never do so (5%), while the percentage of students who often do this activity is the same as the percentage of ones who seldom do so (25%).

Table 1: Students' perceptions of responsibilities towards autonomous English learning inside the classroom

No	Attributes	Responses (%)				
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Usually
1.	To voluntarily solve exercises when your teacher asks	2	27	45	19	7
2.	To proactively share your opinion on a topic	4	24	48	18	6
3.	To have a discussion with your teacher when your opinion differs from him or her	12	29	37	18	4
4.	To ask your teacher about a problem that is unclear to you	3	20	38	29	10

The third activity seems to be the most popular way for students to learn English autonomously as 44% of participants often listen to English songs or watch English movies and TV shows while only 1% never do so (4% seldom, 33% sometimes, and 18% usually).

Concerning the fourth activity, the percentage of participants who never practice speaking English with friends or foreigners (5%) is even higher than the percentage of ones who usually do so (4%). Besides, 33% seldom do so, 42% sometimes, and 16% often do so.

The fifth activity appears to be the most boring way to self-study English since 44% of students seldom prepare for English proficiency tests and 12% never do so (29% sometimes, 12% often, and 3% usually).

3.1.2. Major factors affecting students' autonomy in English learning

Students believe that there are a variety of factors affecting their learner autonomy in English learning. Students themselves are the biggest factor, with 40% of students agreeing that they are too lazy to self-study English. The cause of this issue is most likely that many students are studying away from home, with no relatives to motivate them, thereby reducing their desire to self-study. Besides, 35% of students reported that they have yet to discover successful learning strategies for self-directed English learning.

Even though many students have recognized

the importance of the English language in today's world and its position in future careers and communication, 18% said they lack the motivation to learn.

5% of students said that having too many credits made them too tired and preoccupied to devote time to self-studying English. Meanwhile, a small percentage of students (2%) said that there are insufficient learning materials for them to study English independently. This may indicate that they did not purchase textbooks and instead depended on materials provided by teachers or borrowed from the library to learn.

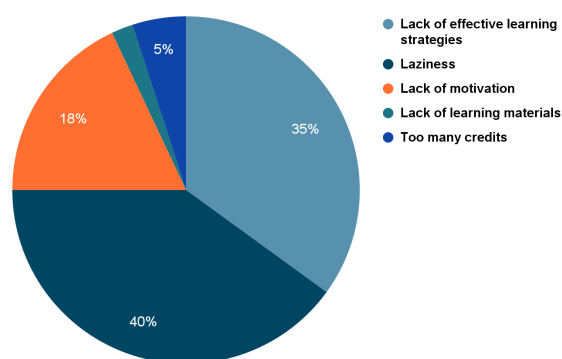


Figure 1: Major factors affecting students' autonomy in English learning

3.1.3. Interview

When asked the first question, "how does self-studying English assist you?", 3 out of 5 participants agreed that autonomous English learning helps students to develop English skills (BT, AT, and TN). In particular, 2 of

Table 2: Students' perceptions of responsibilities towards autonomous English learning outside the classroom

No	Attributes	Responses (%)				
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Usually
1.	To learn English vocabulary and grammar using the Internet or English learning apps	6	19	54	18	3
2.	To read English materials (books, newspapers, web pages, magazines...)	5	25	40	25	5
3.	To listen to English songs or watch English movies and TV shows	1	4	33	44	18
4.	To practice speaking English with your friends or foreigners	5	33	42	16	4
5.	To prepare for proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS	12	44	29	12	3

these 3 students said that self-studying English facilitates the development of listening and speaking skills (AT and BT). “Because students do not have much time at university to study English, so they primarily practice reading and writing skills” (AT). Besides, 2 participants agreed that autonomous English learning helps them in their studies at university (BT and TL). “Independent English learning will help me gain a better understanding of what I’ve learned in the classroom” (BT). It also “assists me in learning new vocabulary or grammatical structures that I skipped in class” (TL). “I can improve my learner autonomy thanks to independent English learning. When I try to figure out what learning methods would work best for me, I can also improve my thinking skills.” (TN). Autonomous English practice, according to VK, also aids students in terms of entertainment. “I can read comics online sooner since the English edition of online comics is normally released before the Vietnamese version. And when I watch movies or YouTube videos, I can understand the characters’ dialogues that are difficult to translate into Vietnamese.”

When asked the second question, “are there any disadvantages if you do not self-study English?”, the participants all agreed that English learning would not be effective if students do not self-study English. “Because English is a skill that needs to be improved frequently” (BT). “It would not be enough if students only study within the classroom, they need to practice more outside the classroom to remember the knowledge in the long term” (TL). “It is difficult to make progress in English speaking skills if students only rely on their studies at university. Instead of updating themselves with modern English, they follow the English conversations in the textbook, which is no longer used among modern native speakers” (VK). “Lack of learner autonomy will affect students’ school performance” (AT). “No matter how teachers teach, if students do not self-study, then teachers’ lessons would be like pouring water on a duck’s back.” (TN). “It is important to combine in-class studying with out-of-class practicing to make English learning effective” (BT).

When asked the final question, “do you have any recommendations to promote students’ autonomy in English learning?”, 3 out of 5 participants recommended that students should combine the process of learning English with their hobbies (BT, VK, and TL). “Instead of listening to Vietnamese music, we can learn new vocabulary by listening to English songs” (BT). “Watching movies with double subtitles is one of the easiest ways to learn English. Students can watch their favorite movies while still improving their English. They will be able to mimic the characters’ pronunciation, learn new vocabulary, and review words they have already learned” (TL). “Students may become more interested in learning English if they learn English through their hobbies” (VK). Furthermore, to encourage students’ autonomy, VK said that “they need to find motivation, which can be a source of stress, especially in the workplace. Almost all occupations and positions nowadays require workers to be able to communicate in English. When students are motivated, they will become more self-sufficient.”. “Instead of studying 20 words a day, students who are too tired to study English can spend 5 minutes per day learning 5 words. They must, though, remember and be able to communicate with others using certain words. They will learn 150 words in a month if they keep up this habit” (BT). “The most critical thing is for students to understand the value of independent English study. Then, for each stage of learning English, they must have a logical learning plan” (TN). “Teachers should also assign more activities and provide students with reinforcement in the form of pluses so that they can complete the tasks more actively. In addition, they could provide students with chances to learn about the lesson by assigning them to plan for it before class. Moreover, teachers should assist students who do not know how to study independently in determining their best learning strategies” (AT).

3.2. Discussion

The data shows that the majority of students do, sometimes, engage in autonomous learning activities both inside and outside the classroom.

This reveals that most of the students have already perceived themselves as autonomous learners who are capable of taking charge of their English learning. This seems to be in agreement with Holec (1981, cited in Bashir, 2014, p.172), who states that learners are able to take charge of their learning. The results also object to Healey's view, who claims that self-direction and independent learning are Western concepts that are only well-suited to American culture (1999, p.391).

It also can be inferred from the results that most of the students are willing to take initiatives in the English classroom. This seems to be consistent with the studies conducted by Holden and Usuki (1995), and Littlewood (2000), which found that Asian students want to be active and independent in class like European students although they perceive teachers as an authority figure. Besides, the data shows that most of the students are willing to engage in English learning activities out of the classroom. This agrees with Koestner and McClelland (1990), who noted that autonomous learners who are self-directed outside the classroom can decide for themselves what to learn out of regular classroom hours. Therefore, it can be seen that most students do prefer learner-centered to teacher-centered learning. This seems to be in agreement with Holden and Usuki (1999), who state that students prefer teachers who take on non-traditional roles rather than lecturing or passing on their knowledge.

According to the results, students engage in autonomous activities "sometimes" rather than "often" or "usually" due to various reasons. The majority of students chose laziness as the biggest factor influencing their autonomous English learning, which indicates the reality that laziness in self-studying is a common phenomenon among Vietnamese students. This seems to be in agreement with Do (2015), who said that today's students are much too lazy to study independently. Meanwhile, lack of learning strategies is also one of the main factors chosen by several students. This seems to be in agreement with Nguyen (2018), who pointed out that most students have yet to develop efficient

learning techniques, resulting in ineffective autonomous learning. Another common factor is lack of motivation. This strengthens the view of Dornyei (1998, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000), who states that the main stimulating factor in English learning is motivation.

The interview reveals that students are aware of the roles of autonomy in English language learning. They all agreed that autonomy is beneficial in various aspects of life. Firstly, autonomy helps students to facilitate the development of English skills. Secondly, LA assists students in their studies at university. This seems to be consistent with Nguyen (2016), who claims that self-study helps students to fully comprehend, expand, consolidate, and remember lessons. Finally, LA also assists students in terms of entertainment.

Students also realize that English learning would not be effective if they do not self-study English. This accords with Nguyen (2016), who states that a lack of student autonomy will result in inadequate learning regardless of how good the teachers and materials are.

According to the results, the most common way to promote autonomous English learning among students is combining learning English with their hobbies. This agrees with Lewis (n.d), who states that using hobbies to learn English is one of the best ways to make the learning process more interesting. Another effective method is finding motivation. This supports Dornyei (1998, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000), who states that students need to be motivated so as to get more interested in self-study. Furthermore, teachers should be responsible for developing students' autonomy by offering more opportunities for students to take responsibilities in the classroom. This agrees with Dam (1995), who claims that a gradual change from teacher-centered to learner-centered teaching is needed to increase learner autonomy in the classroom.

4. Conclusion

This study seeks to identify students' perceptions of autonomy in English language learning. According to the results, the majority of students have already been aware of their

responsibilities towards autonomous English learning. They are willing to take initiatives in the English classroom as well as engage in out-of-class English learning activities. Therefore, they do prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning. The data also reveals that there are various factors affecting students' autonomous English learning. Specifically, laziness is the most common factor chosen by students. Besides, a lack of learning techniques and a lack of motivation are other common factors that hinder learners from effective autonomous learning. In addition, though taking up a small percentage, factors including too many credits and insufficient learning materials make some students feel difficult to learn autonomously. Based on the interview, it can be concluded that students do perceive the important roles of autonomous learning in various aspects of life. Moreover, students can also provide suggestions for both students and teachers to encourage their autonomy.

4.1. Limitation

Due to the limitation of time, only students are taken as samples in this study. If this research could include teachers also as samples, then the result could have been more reliable, as larger sample sizes produce more accurate mean values, detect outliers that could bias data in a smaller sample, and have a lower margin of error.

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4.2. Recommendation

This study proposes a number of methods to promote students' autonomy in English learning based on the data collected from the final interview question.

Students

The most common way for students to gain autonomy is combining learning English with their hobbies. This method helps students to become more interested in learning English, thereby encouraging learner autonomy. Finding motivation is another choice. Students can become more self-sufficient when they are inspired. In addition, students should make it a habit to learn a small number of new words each day. They should also create a logical learning plan for each stage of their education. Above all, students should be fully aware of the importance of independent English study.

Teachers

Teachers should assign more activities and include positive feedback in the form of plus to encourage students to participate more effectively in the assignments. They may also give students opportunities to learn about the lesson by assigning them to prepare for it before class. Moreover, teachers can assist students who do not know how to study self-sufficiently in discovering their most effective learning strategies.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Survey

Rating Scale: 1: Never 2: Seldom 3: Sometimes 4: Often 5: Usually

Questions	Rating Scale				
I. When you are taking English classes, how often do you get involved in the following activities?					
1. To voluntarily solve exercises when your teacher asks	1	2	3	4	5
2. To proactively share your opinion about a topic	1	2	3	4	5
3. To have a discussion with your teacher when your opinion differs from him or her	1	2	3	4	5
4. To ask your teacher about a problem that is unclear to you	1	2	3	4	5
II. How often do you do the following English learning activities outside the English classroom?					
5. To learn English vocabulary and grammar using the Internet or English learning apps	1	2	3	4	5
6. To read English materials (books, newspapers, web pages, magazines...)	1	2	3	4	5
7. To listen to English songs or watch English movies and TV shows	1	2	3	4	5
8. To practice speaking English with your friends or foreigners	1	2	3	4	5
9. To prepare for proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS	1	2	3	4	5

10. Among the following factors, which do you think is the main factor affecting students' autonomy in English learning?

- Lack of effective learning strategies
- Laziness
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of learning materials
- Too many credits
- Lack of teacher assignment
- Other

Appendix 2: Interview

1.	How does self-studying English assist you?
2.	Are there any disadvantages if you do not self-study English?
3.	Do you have any recommendations to promote students' autonomy in English learning?