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English-majored Students' Perceptions of Their Autonomy in English Language Learning

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Abstract: Learner autonomy, a well-established concept in education, is a crucial goal in language curricula, especially within the credit-based systems of most Vietnamese universities that demand increased student responsibility. The ability to learn autonomously is considered to be an indispensable and important attribute of a successful language learner. This mixed-method study aimed to explore English-majored students' perceptions of their responsibilities and identify key factors influencing their autonomy in English learning. The analysis of the quantitative data revealed that the majority of students perceive themselves as autonomous learners, demonstrating a willingness to take responsibility for their English language learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the findings indicate that factors such as lack of motivation, insufficient learning strategies, and lack of engagement affect autonomous English learning. Some possible solutions suggested through the semi-structured interview involve improving self-regulating skills, strengthening student-student and student-teacher interactions, and getting more support from university officials and others in society. Finally, there were pedagogical implications for developing learner autonomy during the process of English teaching and learning.

Keywords: autonomy, language, learner, perceptions, skills, strategies.

1.   Introduction

English, beyond being a required subject, is essential for academic and professional success in non-English speaking countries like Vietnam. In Vietnam, English is taught to children at a younger age, and many individuals consider speaking the language well as a lifetime goal. Despite years of study and technological tools, Vietnamese university students continue to struggle with English proficiency, potentially missing employment opportunities and delaying graduation. This could potentially cause them to miss the opportunity for employment prospects and postpone their graduation.

Many strategies have been put forward to help students become more proficient in language, but one of the most popular ones has been to support learner autonomy, which is defined as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (Holec, 1981). This is because it "individually flourishes and enroots lifelong learning" (Winch, 2002).

Concerns about providing pupils with scaffolding to enhance their learner autonomy have been increasing in the Vietnamese educational system in recent years. At the policy level, national guidelines for higher education reform indicated that learners of all ages should be encouraged to exercise autonomy (Prime Minister, 2007). However, the range of requirements is quite broad, and it is simpler to say than implement. In

reality, Educational institutions often lack formal instruction on learner autonomy. Developing learner autonomy is challenging due to students' poor and reactive autonomy (Dang, 2012; Le, 2018) and teachers' struggles to define the concept (Nguyen et al., 2014). For students who are not majoring in English, the issue is even more difficult because their English coursework is viewed as unimportant to their primary major. They appear to believe that higher education is ineffective. It takes a lot of work, money, and time for them to discover learning resources to acquire the level B1 international certificate of English that they need to graduate. If they have greater learner autonomy, that would be very helpful.

They claimed, nevertheless, to be unaware of learner autonomy and to think that their English learning process was controlled by the lecturers (Nguyen, 2020). Therefore, to make pedagogical implications possible for developing learner autonomy for students, studies about the extent of learner autonomy, challenges, and solutions should be conducted.

To develop pedagogical implications for learner autonomy, this study explores English-majored students' perceptions of their autonomy, identifies key influencing factors, and proposes solutions for promoting autonomy in English language learning.

This study addresses the following research questions:
1) How autonomous are English-majored students in their English learning process?
2) What key factors affect their autonomy in English learning?
3) What solutions do English-majored students propose to foster learner autonomy?"

Today, mastering English has become more and more important. At Thai Nguyen University of Technology, English-majored students are exposed to the language extensively across various subjects and examinations, highlighting the significance of a strong English foundation for academic success. Apart from honing their listening, speaking, and reading skills, students are also required to build a rich vocabulary and a solid understanding of grammar to enhance their English proficiency.

However, the transition to traditional teaching methods of student-centred language instruction is a challenging task. Moreover, the evolving educational policies of Vietnam emphasize the importance of equipping students with essential twenty-first-century, including autonomous learning (Nguyen, 2016).

Despite this, many Vietnamese students, even at the tertiary level, still struggle with embracing learner autonomy. The primary objective of this study is to assess English majors' perceived autonomy in their language learning journey and identify the key factors that influence their level of autonomy. The research aims to uncover the extent to which students take ownership of their learning process and explore how they integrate autonomy into their English learning. Additionally, the study investigates potential solutions, as suggested by the students themselves, to foster a stronger sense of autonomy in their English learning endeavours.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is learner autonomy?

In language acquisition, learner autonomy is a complicated concept that has been described in several ways. The phrase "learner autonomy" was first used in 1981 by the concept's originator, Henri Holec. Holec defined learner autonomy (LA) as "the ability to direct one's learning." He proposed that students need to be responsible for all decisions about every aspect of their education and take ownership of their education. Holec made five primary points as follows:

Identifying the objectives;
1) Describing the contents and progressions;
2) Choosing methods and techniques to be used;
3) Observing the procedures of acquisition;
4) Assessing what has been acquired.

Littlewood (1999) states that because learning can only be accomplished by the students themselves in any event and because they must acquire the capacity to learn even after their official education ends, "learners should be fully in charge of their learning" (p.71). As part of the act of accepting responsibility, students take on numerous tasks that have historically been performed by teachers, such as selecting learning objectives,

learning strategies, and process evaluations (Littlewood, 1999). Three distinct sources are compiled by Littlewood into another concept of learner autonomy. The following are the pillars of learner autonomy:

1) learners' awareness of their responsibility for their education;
2) how learners take responsibility for their education and their efforts to better understand what, why, and how they are learning; and
3) the power of learner autonomy to help learners overcome the challenges posed by the differences between formal education and the larger environment in which they live and learn.

In a similar vein, Benson and Voller claim that the term "autonomy" can be used in five ways for a context in which students are fully engaged in their education; for a set of abilities that students could learn and apply in a self-directed learning process; for an innate talent that schools have stifled; for the application of students taking responsibility for their education; and for the consent of students to recognize appropriate learning instructions.

According to Banerjee (2011), learner autonomy (LA) calls for a fundamental change in the roles that educators and students typically play because it involves a transfer of power and responsibility from the former to the latter. Hedge (2000) asserts, from Banerjee's viewpoint, that LA is "the learner's ability to assume responsibility for their learning and independently plan, organize, and oversee the learning process without relying on the guidance of the educator" (p. 410). Teaching is redefined within the LA paradigm as a redistribution of power between teachers and students, and learning takes an individualistic stance instead of being primarily seen as a communal activity (Paudel, 2019).

As stated by Thanasoulas (2000), autonomy is a shift from the conventional understanding of education as essentially a social process and, at the same time, a reorganization of the power dynamics that are present in the creation of knowledge and the roles that participants play in the learning process. By giving students the autonomy and freedom to actively create their knowledge, LA empowers students and promotes critical thinking and independence throughout the learning process (Paudel, 2019).

According to Little (1991), LA is dependent on the learner's cognitive interaction with the learning process and its material, which includes the capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and autonomous activity (p. 4). In other words, LA encourages students to take on the responsibilities of learning by identifying learning objectives, choosing learning strategies and methodologies, and determining their unique learning needs (Paudel, 2019).

Pennycook (1997) describes as LA "The endeavour to become the author of one's world, to create meaning, and to pursue cultural alternatives amidst the cultural politics of daily life" (p. 39). Similarly, Young (1986) points out that "authoring one's world without dependency on external sources" (p. 19) is the fundamental concept of learner autonomy (LA). Both Pennycook and Young support allowing students to choose their learning activities, approaches, and styles. LA is the embodiment of self-directed learning, in which students are free to learn using customized, self-selected approaches without depending on traditional guidance from educators.

Furthermore, LA is defined by Macdougall (2008) as a type of learning that is less dependent on teacher approval, more personalized, and self-directed. As such, it facilitates the growth of a person's ability to participate constructively and cooperatively in an official professional setting (p. 224). During the study conducted by Baharom, Abd Aziz and Ismail (2022), the participants experienced the motivational, emotional, and metacognitive sub-aspects of this psychological component of autonomy while completing this type of portfolio-based assessment in a culturally diverse ESL classroom.

Based on the definitions and references provided above, it is clear that learner autonomy (LA) is about giving students the freedom to make their own decisions about their education. Additionally, it encourages learners to be independent in their learning by assigning tasks, providing ideas, and demonstrating methods for autonomous learning.

2.2 Learner autonomy in language learning

The process of learning a language is constant and goes far beyond the boundaries of a language school. Language acquisition requires active participation both inside and outside of official educational settings due to its time-consuming nature (Najeeb, 2013). Therefore, encouraging self-directed learning outside of the classroom is essential to language development.

It is important to understand that learning a new language is very different from learning subjects like physics and math. Holec's description falls short of capturing the active, social nature of learning a foreign language. This sociocultural factor highlights the significance of students' ability and readiness to interact both independently and cooperatively with others, emphasizing their responsibility as social beings (Dam et al., 1990). Language acquisition benefits greatly from exposure and immersion, in contrast to other academic topics where academic competencies are tightly linked to subject matter. Thus, for language learners to have a thorough comprehension, they need to be free to investigate the language on their own (Little, 2022).

According to Najeeb (2012), autonomous language learning empowers students to make well-informed decisions by placing a higher value on their choices and giving individual learner requirements precedence over institutional or teacher preferences. Additionally, autonomous learning takes a learner-centric stance, recognizing each student as an individual with specific needs and rights so they can develop and fulfil their learning tasks. The ability to interact, communicate, and gain from learning events without direct instructor assistance is anticipated by autonomous learners. Independent language acquisition can take place in a setting where students frequently, but not always, become proficient in the target language on their own (Benson & Voller, 1997; Wright, 2005).

Vygotsky (1991) claimed that learning is a cooperative process that emphasizes social and interactive elements. As per this theory, the duty of the teacher encompasses the creation and maintenance of a learning environment that encourages learner autonomy, hence aiding in their further development in this domain. This idea correlates with many findings from other recent research by Almusharraf & Martínez Agudo, 2020; Chang, 2020; Chitashvili, Doghonadze & Krajka, 2020 and Guan, 2021. In this setting, developing skills and learning content are still closely related.

Similarly, Thanasoulas (2000) defines an autonomous learner as someone who understands their learning strategies and styles, approaches the process actively, values taking risks as a way to communicate effectively in the target language, diligently completes assignments regardless of assessment, and appreciates self-editing in addition to accuracy and appropriateness. Unfortunately, a lot of students overlook how crucial practice is to learning the essential skills of study.

Learners are more likely to explore different learning tactics and not be reluctant to ask questions or request assistance when needed if the learning environment is welcoming and supportive. To help students become better at identifying what is and is not relevant, it is also necessary to provide them with the knowledge and ability to look for materials and resources outside the classroom (Cárcam&Pérez, 2022). Students must be able to see the value of these transferable essential research abilities and how they can be used to further their education.

2.3   Students' Attitudes Towards Autonomous English Learning

An important aspect of learner autonomy is attitude, which is the learner's sentiments on a certain subject. It is considered that students' attitudes influence their thoughts, comprehension, emotions, and actions. Three elements make up attitude: emotion, conduct, and cognition.

Benson (2001) further states that students can exercise autonomy in their learning process by looking for ways to learn officially or informally and get better at English both inside and outside of the classroom. Similarly, according to Swatevacharkul & Boonma (2020), the students realized that learner autonomy is the capacity for effective self-directed learning. Learner autonomy encompasses self-related, affective, and interaction components that align with technical, psychological, and political domains of competence. Additionally, they believed that learner autonomy was crucial for inspiring independent learning.

Benson & Voller (1997) noted that acquiring a language is more than just a cognitive process. Students think back on their education in many ways than just the language they are exposed to or the best ways to accomplish the objectives they have set for themselves. Rather, learners' attitudes toward the world and the learning task in particular, as well as their sense of self and motivation to learn, all have a role in how well a learning activity goes (T. M. Duong, 2021).

Wenden (1998) describes attitudes as taught motivations, valued ideas, evaluations, what one considers to be acceptable, or responses geared towards approaching or avoiding. This definition aligns with Benson & Voller's (1998) perspective. According to her, attitudes that students have about their place in the learning process and their potential as learners are two very important types of attitudes. Attitudes can be thought of

as a type of metacognitive knowledge. In any case, the ideas that learners have about themselves as learners will influence and sustain their views about their function and capacity as learners. For instance, learners may feel that they are losing the war on learning a foreign language if they assume that people with a particular personality type are incapable of learning the language and they fit that description.

More than that, students are likely to be resistant to learner-centred strategies aimed at autonomy if they operate under the false belief that learning can only take place in the traditional classroom, where the teacher guides, instructs and manages the learning activity and students must follow in the teacher's footsteps. This will undermine success.

The study conducted in a Vietnamese environment by Truong et al. (2019) is more recent. The importance of learner autonomy, learner autonomy's responsibilities, learner autonomy's skills, and learner autonomy's actions were the four elements of learner perspectives of autonomous learning that were examined in this study. The value of independent learning when learning English. They acknowledged that they had independent obligations to set learning objectives, choose learning activities and tactics, and assess their learning, but they also acknowledged that they had certain limitations on their autonomy. Regarding the students' autonomous learning habits, there was a difference in the activities they chose to do outside of class, and they favoured peer interaction over student-teacher engagement within the classroom.

As stated by Healey (1999), autonomous learning and student self-direction are Western ideas that fit in nicely with American society. As a result, the term "learner autonomy" is frequently characterized in Western terms that are inappropriate in Asian contexts. However, Littlewood (1999) contends that Asian students can attain the same amount of autonomy as their Western counterparts with the right learner instruction.

According to T.Q. Tran (2018), "the most essential characteristics that contribute to facilitating the process of becoming autonomous learners" are having "positive attitudes toward learner autonomy" and creating "a favourable learning environment" (p.141). Agustina, Gleeson & Hubbard (2022) confirmed that Indonesian teachers had favourable opinions of learner autonomy and believed in its psychological components. They strongly supported the social components of autonomy.

Holden and Usuki (1999) claim that because Japanese children typically attend teacher-centred classrooms, they do not have enough opportunities to develop their autonomy. According to the study's findings, students would rather learn from instructors who take on unconventional roles than from those who only offer instruction or give lectures. East Asian students possess the same opportunities as other learners; nonetheless, Japanese educational and behavioural traditions serve to limit their autonomy. Thus, Ngo (2019) emphasized how exercises in self-evaluation and reflection were used to encourage learner autonomy. With the ultimate goal of improving their speaking and listening abilities, the research attempts to assist students in discovering their inner power of working independently outside of the classroom and in self-evaluating their abilities.

Similarly, At Hong Kong University, Chan's (2001) study examined students' preparedness, willingness, and capacity to learn autonomously. It demonstrates how educational and behavioural standards inhibit students from growing their autonomy. She proposes that teachers should raise students' awareness and modify the teaching methods that have prevented them from becoming autonomous learners in light of the viewpoints of the students. Han (2021) also suggested by fostering autonomy-supporting interaction and a social and supportive environment, educators can help students develop into independent and autonomous learners. Students are more likely to feel excited and involved when they have the autonomy to make decisions about their education.

As stated by Dam (1995), increasing learner autonomy in the classroom requires a progressive shift from teacher-centered instruction to a learner-centered setting. According to Cotterall (1995), learners have views about both teachers and their responsibilities as well as beliefs about themselves and their duties. These beliefs have an impact on how open-minded students are to concepts and activities in language classes, particularly when they have never used the approach before.

It is also necessary to help both teachers and learners understand the concept of learner autonomy, as Khotimah, et al. (2019) stated. Findings from Khulaifiyah, Utami Widiati, and Mirjam Anugerahwati (2021) even revealed that the students think that autonomous learning is completely independent learning—that is, learning that occurs in a setting where they choose their own goals, adopt their learning styles, and employ their methods—without the help of teachers or outside influences. At the tertiary level, Win (2022) pointed out

that students exhibited remarkably little autonomy inside the classroom and seemed to believe that professors are more accountable for in-class learning than for outside or private study.

In the above-mentioned studies, the researchers contend that if teachers continue to bear the full burden in a teacher-centred manner and/or if students do not demonstrate their ownership of the learning processes, then it is unlikely that students would be able to achieve learner autonomy. The pupil's transition to their new position as independent learners in a learner-centred class might not be simple. Since teachers generally adopt positive attitudes toward students' participation in course decision-making, they do not demonstrate their confidence in their students' abilities to engage in autonomous learning. Consequently, we must first fully comprehend both students' current desires for learner autonomy and teachers' implementation activities to correspond to their needs to gradually enhance their autonomy.

2.4   Factors affecting autonomy in English learning

All independent learners, as stated by Kamala (2016), have a beneficial effect on their motivation, surroundings, task, teacher, and content. These elements unquestionably play a significant part in the autonomy of learners.

The first element is psychological. According to Yuen Pan (1997), psychological elements such as desire, need, and ability affect how autonomously students learn. From this vantage point, several factors are seen to be important to the development of learners' autonomy. They aspired to a better profession in the future. The learners will therefore require supervision to set greater goals or dreams for their English learning.

Environmental variables make up the second factor. Social factors had an impact on all of the autonomous learners like environmental factors (Basri, 2023). In this instance, the parents, siblings, and friends of the autonomous learners had a good influence. They encourage independent learners to study English as a resource. To grow in their autonomy, they require this assistance. This implies that the learners' autonomy had a substantial impact on social dynamics.

The task is the third factor. According to Dickinson (1987), independent learners would allot time to assignments. Because the teacher assigns tasks, some independent learners schedule their time for learning. They invested time in being fully knowledgeable about the assignment they were given. Engaging and difficult assignments will have a significant impact on the independent learner. Taking ownership of their work is encouraged, sometimes even required, by autonomous learners.

A teacher is the fourth factor. One of the things that might encourage and influence the independent learner to learn is the teacher. Because of their teacher, some self-directed learners are excited about learning English. Teachers played a vital role in their learning process by assisting and creating a helpful environment (Khulaifiyah, Yuliani & Fara, 2023). Moreover, Han (2020) confirmed there is a relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. Language instructors should adopt new roles that support and encourage the growth of learner autonomy, and teacher education and training programs incorporate courses and practica that strengthen and foster this relationship.

The final factor is material. This element determines the learner's decision to study English. According to Richard-Amato (2003), autonomous learners will successfully employ language materials to improve their skills. A comprehensive collection of second language materials would provide learners with the optimum learning potential (Benson, 2001). Good materials can assist learners in becoming more motivated to learn. As a result, it may help them improve their English (Chikovani& Pipia, 2022).

Overall, the findings from the analyses demonstrated that five factors—motivation, environment, task, teacher, and material—had a positive effect on the development of autonomous learners. These exposures can be influenced by their motivation, which may include their intended career, social factors like their parents, brother, siblings, and friends who help them gain more vocabulary, knowledge, and proficiency in English, and difficult assignments that either motivate or even require the self-motivated student to take ownership of their ability to spark students' interest.

3.   Research Methodology

3.1   Participants of the study

This study was conducted at Thai Nguyen University of Technology, with forty English-majored students from the Faculty of International Training selected as participants. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22. A significant

number of them had been studying English for seven years, with four years at secondary school and three years at high school. However, their English backgrounds were quite similar due to the influence of the high school English curriculum in Vietnam, which was heavily teacher-centred, with teachers taking an active role in the language learning process. As a result, when these students entered Thai Nguyen University of Technology, their English proficiency levels were limited, and they encountered numerous difficulties in their studies, particularly when it came to learning English autonomously. This is the problem for most students from the first to the last year at university, and then it affects their English proficiency a lot. Thus, the researcher invited forty English-majored students to participate in the study so that they could express their viewpoints towards language learning autonomy as well as learn from different perspectives, which would then help them study English more actively and effectively.

3.2   Research Method

The study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study included a survey questionnaire and an interview questionnaire for English-majored students at the Thai Nguyen University of Technology. To help readers understand a situation more thoroughly, Knupfer and McLellan (2001) determine that descriptive research can involve the collecting of both qualitative and quantitative information.

In the learning strategy research, survey questionnaires were administered to English-majoring students. The results were presented using tables and charts to facilitate data analysis. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students to gain valuable insights into factors influencing potential solutions to enhance learner autonomy in English learning.

In this study, survey and interview questionnaires were used to discover what their autonomy is and some autonomy factors influencing the students' autonomous English learning. Subsequently, various suggestions are offered as potential solutions to foster learner autonomy in English learning.

3.3   Data Collection

The questionnaire was carefully crafted after conducting an extensive literature review of learning strategies and research methods related to autonomous language learning. Notably, the researcher incorporated autonomy learning strategies proposed by prominent researchers like Nguyen. H (2021) and Anwar. H (2014) into the survey to effectively measure autonomy in language learning.

To gather data, the survey was administered through Google Forms on the Internet. Participants were asked to provide personal information such as their school year and major at the beginning of the survey. The questionnaires were distributed online among 40 English-majored students, who were given 20 minutes to complete the 13-question survey. The first 12 questions aimed to understand participants' perceptions of their responsibilities for autonomous learning in English, both inside and outside the classroom. The final multiple-choice question sought to identify the primary factors influencing participants' learner autonomy in English learning. The questions were adapted from Nguyen, H (2021) and Anwar, H (2014). All quantitative data were shown on the Google form dataset and then some were analyzed with Microsoft Excel to get the percentages of choices.

Furthermore, to gain more insights, five students were randomly selected from each class to participate in interviews. Before the interviews, the researcher provided an explanation of the interview's purpose and the expected duration of the conversation. The interviews were structured with three open-ended questions in a predetermined sequence, and each interview lasted between 20 to 25 minutes. The data from the interviews were recorded, and then carefully reviewed and transcribed in written English.

4.   Findings and Discussion

4.1   Findings

4.1.1   Students' awareness of autonomy in English language learning

The survey utilized for data collection, Google Form 1, was composed of 8 distinct items and was distributed among the participants. A comprehensive analysis of the data collected is presented in this section of the study, with graphical representations effectively portraying the participants' responses to the survey questions.

It is worth mentioning that the survey's initial inquiry provides valuable insights into the perspectives of the students.

It is worth noting that a significant majority of the students who participated in the survey (55%) have been studying English for more than a decade, whereas an additional segment (22.5%) has pursued English education for a period of five to ten years. A smaller fraction (15%) of the respondents reported a length of one to five years of English learning. This extensive exposure to English, which frequently commences in primary school, highlights the students' profound familiarity with the language across academic, personal, and professional domains.

Furthermore, the survey results illuminate the wide-ranging English proficiency levels of students majoring in English, spanning from A1 to C2. Noteworthy is the fact that approximately 32.5% of the respondents indicated their English proficiency to be at the A2 and B1 levels. In contrast, 15% of the learners reported possessing a B2 proficiency level. About 12.5% of the student respondents evaluated their understanding of English grammar to be at a basic level, corresponding to A1. Conversely, only 5% of the participants expressed confidence in their superior proficiency, categorized as C1. Similarly, a proportion of 2.5% of the students placed themselves at the C2 proficiency level. Collectively, these findings emphasize the spectrum of English proficiency levels among students, revealing a significant foundational grasp, predominantly within the intermediate range, and a relatively small number of individuals with advanced proficiency.

Moreover, the results of the survey emphasize the adaptable nature of schedules among students majoring in English about English language acquisition, particularly in terms of promoting autonomy. It is noteworthy that 35% of the participants dedicate a daily timeframe of 30 minutes to an hour for English learning, while 30% allocate 10 to 30 minutes per day to this endeavour. Conversely, a significant 22.5% of the learners invest 1 to 2 hours each day in practising English, whereas a smaller contingent, accounting for 12.5% of the students, extend their daily commitment to more than 2 hours for English study. However, it is important to note that the data reveals a relatively modest amount of time devoted by English-majoring students to practising and improving their English skills. If their current approach persists, their rate of progress in English proficiency may be impeded. Thus, it is recommended that these students reconsider and enhance their time management strategies for English language learning to facilitate more rapid advancement in their language abilities.

4.1.2 The importance of autonomous English learning

Recognizing the pivotal role of autonomous English language learning is of utmost importance for every student. The diagram provided below illustrates the pertinent information concerning this matter:
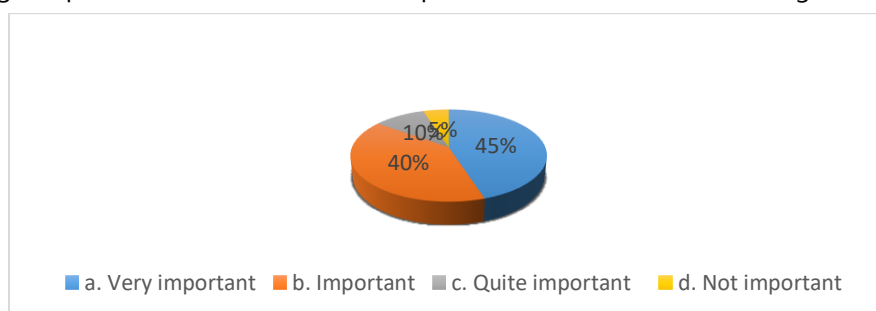

Fig. 1 - Students' awareness of the significance of autonomous English learning

As depicted in Figure 1, demonstrates that a significant majority of students accounting for 45% strongly advocate the importance of autonomy in learning the English language, underscoring its paramount significance. Moreover, around 40% of the students also recognize its significance. In contrast, a minor proportion of 10% considers it to be moderately important. Only a mere 5% of the students perceive it to lack importance.

This visual representation emphasizes the prevailing viewpoint among English-majoring students at the Faculty of International Training, Thai Nguyen University of Technology. Their collective stance not only underscores the pivotal role of autonomy in learning English within their language education but also aligns

with the broader acknowledgement that such autonomy actively contributes to enhancing their English proficiency.

4.1.3 Students' Perceptions of Their Responsibility in Autonomous English Learning Inside and Outside Classroom

a) Inside the classroom

The frequency with which students engaged in the following in-class autonomous activities—"Do assignments in English which are not compulsory," "To proactively share your opinion about a topic," and "To complete group studies in English lessons", "To ask the teacher questions when you didn't understand", "To take opportunities to speak in English inside the classroom", and "To make inferences about your lesson"—indicates how they perceive their responsibilities toward autonomous learning in the English classroom.

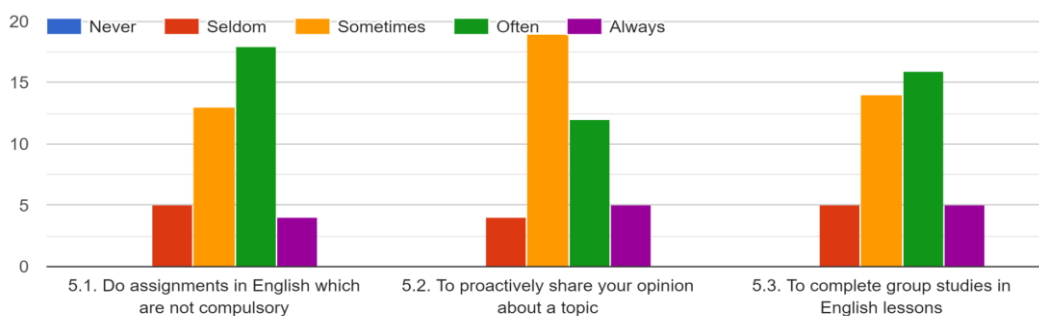5.1-5.3. When you are taking English classes, how often do you get involved in the following activities?

Fig. 2 - The frequency of student engagement in English learning activities during class hours

In terms of the first activity, Figure 2 illustrates that students' engagement with non-compulsory English assignments is limited. Specifically, no students opt for these assignments, while 12% rarely engage, 45% consistently complete them, 32% occasionally do so, and 10% frequently participate. For some students, this activity seems to be accompanied by a sense of risk. Within this context, it appears that a certain group of students perceives this endeavour as precarious. They display hesitance toward voluntary assignments due to the fear of making mistakes. However, it is worth noting that despite the associated risk, this engagement warrants consideration as it offers students the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the subject matter, regardless of the accuracy of their responses.

About the second aspect, statistical data unveils a substantial number of students who hesitate to share their opinions actively on a given topic. Precisely, the data indicates that none of the students consistently offer their viewpoint, 10% seldom do, while 47.5% engage occasionally, 30% do so frequently, and a modest 12.5% regularly participate in class discussions. This trend is prevalent in Vietnamese English classrooms, where a considerable number of students exhibit shyness or reluctance to voice their thoughts during class discussions. This phenomenon may arise from their concerns about potential ridicule from peers in the event of errors. Alternatively, it could be attributed to insufficient pre-class preparation, resulting in inadequate familiarity with the subject matter and thus, a hesitancy to contribute. Such one-sided communication not only dampens the learning environment but also demotivates educators, ultimately undermining the efficacy of teaching.

As for the third activity, Figure 2 underscores that the practice of group study within English lessons is not widely embraced. To be precise, merely a minority of students engage in such collaborative learning, while 12.5% do so infrequently, 35% participate on occasion, and a substantial 40% actively join. Embracing group studies in English lessons offers a spectrum of advantages for students. Notably, it presents an opportunity for honing their speaking and listening skills. Beyond that, this approach cultivates adeptness in group discussions, a skill of paramount importance in everyday life, as social interactions frequently entail exchanges with friends, family, and colleagues. The benefits of this practice extend beyond language proficiency, encompassing crucial life skills that foster effective communication and collaboration.

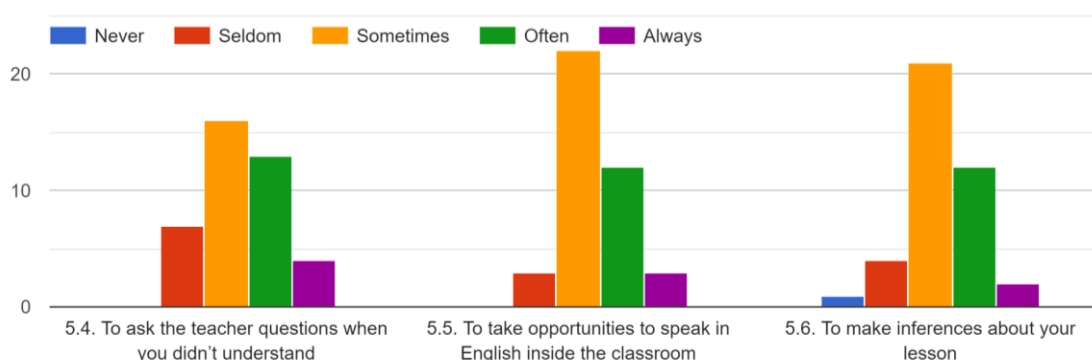5.4-5.6. When you are taking English classes, how often do you get involved in the following activities?

Fig. 3 - The frequency of student engagement in English learning activities during class hours

Figure 3 presents data that highlights an involving the fourth activity. Only 10% of the participants consistently approached their instructors with inquiries when they did not understand, in contrast to 17.5% who seldom do so, 40% who occasionally seek clarification, and 32.5% who frequently inquire. These findings emphasize a significant inclination among Vietnamese students to avoid seeking clarification from their teachers. Several factors can account for this phenomenon. Firstly, a lack of engagement or distractions during class, such as socializing with peers or becoming lost in personal thoughts, can cause students to overlook their uncertainties. Secondly, students are often concerned about the perception that questioning may indicate lower intelligence or slower learning, leading to reluctance to seek clarification. This apprehension frequently arises from the belief that if no one else appears to be questioning, they may stand out as struggling with seemingly simple concepts. Furthermore, students may have difficulty articulating their inquiries effectively, which causes them to refrain from asking. Language barriers also play a role, as students may hesitate due to concerns about their English proficiency and fear of potential ridicule from peers. As a result, students who abstain from seeking clarifications often struggle with ambiguous understanding of topics, which may ultimately impact their academic performance, potentially resulting in lower grades or exam failures.

Regarding the fifth activity, the data in Table 2.2 presents a significant trend. More than half of the student of the students occasionally avail themselves of opportunities to engage in English conversations within the classroom environment. Specifically, none of the students consistently participate, with 7.5% seldom doing so, 30% frequently joining, and 10% always engaging in English interactions. These statistics provide valuable insights into the behaviour of students. The relatively low proportion of students seizing chances to speak English within the classroom setting might reflect the current challenges faced by learners. Factors such as a lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, or discomfort with spoken English could be influencing this behaviour. Additionally, societal and cultural influences might contribute to a hesitance to practice English openly, further affecting their willingness to actively engage in conversations. This data underscores the need for strategies and initiatives aimed at fostering a more supportive and encouraging classroom environment that nurtures students' confidence and motivation to use English as a means of communication.

Concerning the sixth attribute, the data indicates that a minor percentage of the students, namely 2.5% refrain from making inferences about their lessons. Additionally, 10% seldom participate in this practice, while a significant 52.5% do so occasionally. In comparison, 30% frequently make inferences, and a meagre 5% consistently engage in this activity. This trend is reflective of a prevailing pattern in many English classrooms in Vietnam today. The data reveals a widespread phenomenon where students demonstrate varying levels of involvement in making inferences about their lessons. Such diverse levels of engagement indicate that fostering a culture of critical thinking and proactive learning within classrooms is an essential aspect for further consideration and development. Encouraging students to delve deeper into the content of the lessons and draw meaningful conclusions has the potential to amplify their comprehension and retention of the subject matter.

b) Outside the classroom

4.1.4 Students' perceptions of responsibility in autonomous English learning since the university entrance

Students' perceptions of their responsibilities in autonomous learning since entering the university were assessed based on their engagement frequency in various out-of-class activities:

Table 1 - The frequency of autonomous English learning activities since the university entrance

Attributes	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
To learn English vocabulary and grammar using the Internet or English learning apps	0%	10%	40%	35%	15%
To actively practice English speaking with friends or foreigners	2.5%	25%	30%	27.5%	15%
To join collective activities and programs such as English clubs, English festivals...	7.5%	2.5%	55%	22.5%	12.5%
To prepare for proficiency tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, and VSTEP	0%	22.5%	47.5%	25%	5%
To read English materials (books, newspapers, web pages, magazines...)	0%	7.5%	50%	35%	7.5%
To attend a course and seminar in English provided by a university	5%	7.5%	55%	30%	2.5%
To have a self-assessment after some time to improve skills	0%	10%	50%	35%	5%

Regarding the initial activity, the data indicates a clear inclination towards digital tools such as the Internet and English learning apps. Notably, 40% of the participants use these resources occasionally, while a significant 35% make frequent use of them. Impressively, 15% of the participants are dedicated learners, consistently utilizing these tools. This preference aligns with the convenience and versatility of digital resources, which enables students to access a broad range of materials at their own pace. Consequently, this practice leads to a well-rounded language skillset and enhanced communication abilities.

In the second activity, the data highlights a keen dedication to improving spoken English. 30% of participants engage in periodic spoken practice with friends or foreigners, while 27.5% practice this skill often. Impressively, 15% showcase a commendable commitment to practising always. This fervour can be attributed to the recognition that interacting with proficient speakers aids in fluency and pronunciation refinement, which are crucial for real-world language usage. Notably, only a small fraction (2.5%) shies away from such practice, which then emphasizes its importance in effective communication.

The third activity that emerges as the most popular avenue for autonomous language learning appears to be participation in collective activities like English clubs and festivals. Over half (55%) of the participants joined such events occasionally, signifying their eagerness for immersive learning experiences and cultural exchange. Impressively, only 7.5% abstain from these enriching opportunities, highlighting the attraction of these events in nurturing language understanding and practical skills. Additionally, these activities foster a sense of camaraderie and belonging among language learners.

Upon examination of the fourth activity, the preparation for proficiency tests shows intriguing patterns. While 5% exhibit commendable dedication by always preparing, a significant 47.5% engage in this activity occasionally. A quarter of the participants (25%) consistently prepare often. Notably, none disregard this aspect, raising awareness of the pivotal role these tests play in assessing language proficiency. Impressively, the commitment to this preparation showcases an understanding of its importance in tracking progress.

The fifth activity, reading English materials, emerges as a potentially less engaging method of learning, yet it remains acknowledged. About half (50%) of the students read these materials occasionally, indicating a recognition of their value. Encouragingly, none entirely dismiss this practice. Interestingly, 35% engage often

in this activity, showcasing a recognition of its significance despite potential challenges. A smaller proportion (7.5%) reads always, indicating a consistent commitment to this form of learning.

Moving on to the sixth activity, the approach toward Engagement with university-provided English courses and seminars is mixed. A significant proportion of 55% attends these sessions occasionally, indicating a balanced interest in structured learning. However, for a dedicated 30%, attendance is frequent, showcasing a keen appetite for formal education in language learning. Impressively, 25% always attend, indicating an unwavering commitment to these learning avenues. It is noteworthy that a small fraction of 5% abstains from these opportunities.

Finally, when focusing on the last attribute, the data reveals a proactive attitude towards self-improvement. Encouragingly, none neglect self-assessment entirely. Half of the respondents undertake this practice occasionally, showcasing a deep understanding of the importance of introspection in language growth. Particularly, 35% are committed to regular self-assessment, underlining their dedication to continuous progress. A smaller yet commendable 5% consistently engage in self-assessment to enhance their language prowess.

4.1.5 *Students' perceptions of responsibility in autonomous English learning*

Table 2 - The current frequency of autonomous English learning

Attributes	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
To learn English vocabulary and grammar using the Internet or English learning apps	0%	17%	45%	325%	5%
To actively practice English speaking with friends or foreigners	2.5%	7.5%	52.5%	30%	7.5%
To join collective activities and programs such as English clubs, English festivals...	2.5%	10%	55%	27.5%	5%
To prepare for proficiency tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS and VSTEP,	2.5%	10%	45%	37.5%	5%
To read English materials (books, newspapers, web pages, magazines...)	2.5%	10%	42.5%	42.5%	2.5%
To attend a course and seminar in English provided by a university	5%	7.5%	55%	30%	2.5%
To have a self-assessment after some time to improve skills	0%	10%	50%	35%	5%

Regarding the initial activity, it is evident that nearly half of the students engage in learning English vocabulary and grammar through online resources. This finding reflects their recognition of the importance of digital platforms in language acquisition. Additionally, 32.5% of students frequently utilize these resources, showcasing a consistent commitment to incorporating technology into their learning. Moreover, 5% of them always use these resources, demonstrating a dedicated approach to online learning tools.

In terms of the second activity, it is apparent that a substantial 52.5% of students practice English speaking with friends or foreigners. This emphasizes their understanding of the practical application of language skills. Furthermore, 30% of the students frequently practice speaking, indicating a proactive approach to enhancing conversational fluency. Interestingly, an additional 7.5% of the students always engage in this activity, which shows their dedication to continuous speaking practice.

The data about the third activity reveals that the third activity, the data reveals that 55% of the students sometimes join collective activities and programs such as English clubs and English festivals. This implies an acknowledgement of the value of collaborative learning experiences. The percentages of 27.5% who often engage in these activities, and 5% who always do so, indicate that these events are well-received, yet there is room for further integration into students' routines.

Upon examination of the fourth activity, preparing for proficiency tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL, and STEP, the data highlights that 45% of the students undertake this task on occasion. This underscores the significance of standardized assessments in evaluating language proficiency. Impressively, 37.5% of the students often

engage in exam preparation, which reveals their consistent dedication to readiness. Similarly, 5% of the students always prepare for exams, reflecting their unwavering commitment to refining their language skills for formal assessments.

Data from the fifth activity, analyzing the reading activity of English materials (books, newspapers, web pages, magazines...), that an equal 42.5% of the students sometimes and often read English materials. This emphasizes the widespread recognition of reading as a fundamental tool for language development. Specifically, 2.5% of students always engage in this activity, representing a smaller yet dedicated group of avid readers. As for the sixth activity, attending a course and seminar in English provided by a university, the result shows that more than half of the students attend English courses and seminars on occasion. Accordingly emphasizes, the role of structured learning opportunities. Additionally, 30% of the students often attend these events, while an additional 2.5% always attend, indicating a sustained interest in university-provided educational experiences.

Lastly, having a self-assessment after some time to improve skills is a practice that 50% of the students engage in, reflecting their awareness of the benefits of evaluating their language skills. Moreover, 35% of the students often conduct self-assessments, demonstrating a proactive approach to continuous improvement. Notably, 5% of the students always assess their skills, which reveals an unwavering commitment to enhancing their abilities.

4.1.6   Factors affecting autonomy in English learning

Identifying the primary factor influencing students' autonomy in English learning can be illuminated through the exploration of the factors represented in the following chart:
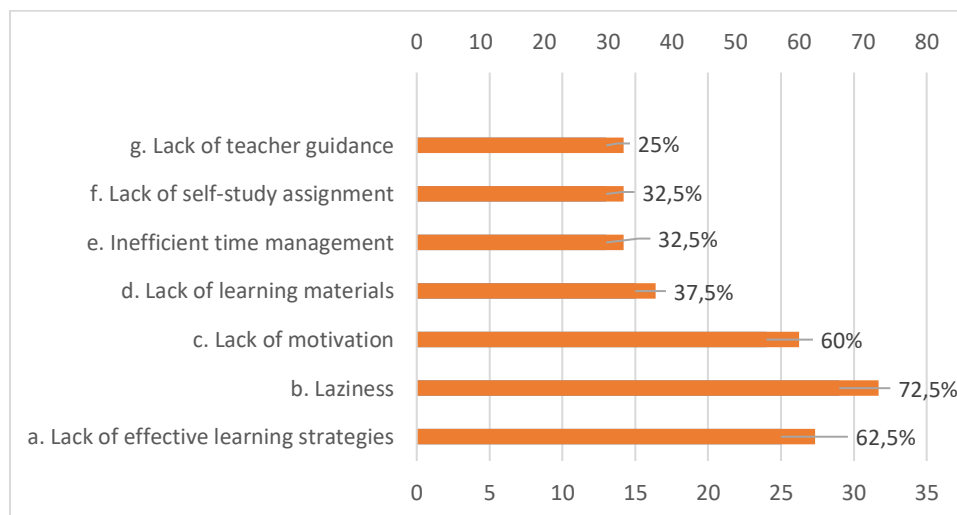

Fig. 4 - Major factors affecting students' autonomy in English learning

The examination of the given data unveils numerous pivotal elements that influence the autonomy of students in the acquisition of English. Among these, the prevalence of "laziness" (72.5%) is a standout challenge, indicating a lack of self-restraint and proactive engagement. Additionally, the emergence of "lack of motivation" (60%) as a significant obstacle highlights the importance of maintaining enthusiasm for learning. Equally significant is the salience of "lack of effective learning strategies" (62.5%), which emphasizes the necessity for students to possess proficient techniques for self-directed learning. The absence of such strategies can impede their autonomous language acquisition. The significance of resources is evident in the "lack of learning materials" (37.5%), highlighting the impact of diverse and accessible materials on students' autonomy. "Inefficient time management" (32.5%) underscores the necessity of honing time-management skills to maximize learning efficiency. Moreover, the "lack of self-study assignment" (32.5%) accentuates the value of structured tasks to foster self-motivation and proactive participation. Finally, "lack of teacher guidance" (25%) signifies the role of educators in complementing autonomous learning with necessary

mentorship. In brief, these factors collectively shape the landscape of students' autonomy in English learning, highlighting challenges and opportunities in their self-directed educational journey.

To gain precise insights into perceptions of autonomy within the realm of English language learning, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview involving five students selected from four distinct classes (K58-K55). The interview protocol encompassed three fundamental questions:

1. Do you think learner autonomy is important for your English learning?
   Why? or Why not?
2. 2. Who and What may affect your ability to learn English autonomously? (For example, your family, teachers, yourself,... other factors: ....). Give some reasons for that.
3. 3. Do you have any recommendations to promote students' autonomy in English learning?

During the interviews, the participants expressed great enthusiasm regarding the crucial role of learner autonomy and the consequential impact on their ability to learn English independently. The participants provided valuable recommendations for fostering autonomy in English learning, which included factors such as family, teachers, personal engagement, and so on. The interviews resulted in three main themes: the significance of learner autonomy in English learning, its influence on independent learning capabilities, and practical suggestions for enhancing students' autonomy in language acquisition.

4.1.7 Importance of autonomy in English learning

The participants in the interview expound upon their viewpoints regarding the importance of autonomy in English learning. Most students proffer their cogitations, highlighting that.

Of course, learner autonomy is generally considered important in language learning because it allows learners to take control of their learning process and tailor it to their individual needs and goals. This can lead to more effective and efficient learning.

a) *I believe learner autonomy is essential for English learning. Because Learner autonomy allows me to set my own pace and choose the learning methods that work best for me. Taking control of my learning empowers me to take ownership of my progress. It motivates me to be responsible for my development and encourages a proactive attitude toward learning. Being autonomous in my learning requires me to think critically and problem-solve. These skills are transferable to various areas of life and contribute to overall personal growth.*

b) *Of course. I think it's an important factor in learning English. If only the person who teaches every day imparts knowledge to you and you do not actively absorb it, of course learning English or anything is impossible. In addition, if you study English but do not actively practice by yourself, you will certainly not be able to improve your English.*

c) *I think learner autonomy is very important for English learners because it allows them to take responsibility for their learning process. When learners are allowed to take control of their learning, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in the process. This can lead to better outcomes and a more positive learning experience.*

From a variety of standpoints, the interviewees have conveyed a shared agreement on the fundamental importance of autonomy in the acquisition of the English language. The viewpoints put forth are clarified and they exemplify a profound comprehension of the matter at hand. Each one emphasizes that autonomy not only propels the learning process but also nurtures abilities and individual drive. In general, this section adeptly shows unanimity concerning the pivotal significance of autonomy in English language acquisition.

4.1.8 Factors affecting autonomy in English learning

Through a series of interviews with various individuals, it becomes evident that several influencing factors contribute to autonomy in English learning. In response to the second interview question, students candidly shared the key factors that impact their capacity to learn English autonomously. Some learners' opinions about this issue are presented below.

a) Several factors can affect a person's ability to learn English autonomously. In my opinion, autonomous learners were influenced by many factors: Social environment, task, teacher, and material. In addition, Motivation is also considered a significant factor affecting autonomous learners' eagerness to learn

English. Because the lack of motivation will make learners feel bored in the learning process and learners will not get their goal.

b) Many factors help me to have self-control in learning English. For example, a teacher: if I don't study on my own, I will get low grades, if I am autonomous in my studies, my parents are also very happy, and so am I. But the most important factor that affects my self-control in learning is myself, because self-control in learning will help me have a lot of success in the future, such as achieving high academic results getting an English certificate, getting a high-paying job, and so on.

c) I am the first thing that affects my studies because I have not found my motivation and love for English. So, learning English is difficult for me. Secondly, my teachers also have an impact on my learning. Finding a teacher who can convey interesting and engaging content is not easy. If I don't understand all of the content, then self-study becomes even more difficult.

d) Various factors can affect learner autonomy in English learning. These include internal factors such as motivation, learning strategies, attitude, self-esteem, and self-confidence, as well as external factors such as social environment, task, teacher, and material. For example, family members can provide support and encouragement for learners to take responsibility for their learning process. Teachers can promote learner autonomy by using autonomy-promotion strategies such as collaboration, and critical.

The interviews have illuminated that the capability of learners to take control of their English learning is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. The students have acknowledged the significance of factors such as social context, tasks, teachers, and materials. Motivation plays an integral role as it drives learners' commitment. Self-discipline and personal drive are critical, although challenges in finding intrinsic motivation and effective teaching methods do exist. The attitudes, strategies, and family support of the learners also contribute to their autonomy. Overall, these insights reveal a complex interplay between internal and external elements that shape learners' ability to take ownership of their English learning.

In summary, these findings not only elucidate the demotivating factors that hinder students' autonomy in learning English but also encompass a mix of positive and negative influences across various aspects of autonomy. As an English major and researcher, these insights prompt self-reflection and provide practical learning approaches to address autonomy challenges effectively in English learning.

4.1.9   Fostering student autonomy in English learning

Through a comprehensive analysis of discerning interviews, it has become abundantly evident that several factors play a significant role in fostering autonomy in the acquisition of the English language. Against this backdrop of insightful discussions, students have candidly divulged critical facets and suggestions to augment their independent acquisition of English, thereby enhancing their ability to learn the language autonomously. Some students made recommendations for teachers, students, and university officials as follows.

a) For teachers: To promote students' self-learning, teachers can create a friendly and positive environment that presents engaging topics and stimulates students' critical thinking and logical reasoning. They should help students develop self-awareness so that they can identify areas for improvement and take ownership of their learning journey. One-way to promote learner autonomy is to connect practical activities with theoretical concepts. This can help learners understand the relevance of what they are learning and how it can be applied in real-world situations. Another strategy is to use collaborative learning activities that encourage learners to work together and share their ideas and experiences.

b) For students: Students should find a friend who has the same hobby or goal of learning English that can promote autonomy in learning English. They should proactively seek opportunities to practice English beyond the classroom or engage in language exchange programs, join language clubs, or participate in language-related events that can significantly enhance language skills. Some ways to promote student autonomy include setting goals for their learning process, using technology and library resources to support their learning, and taking responsibility for their learning.

c) For university officials: Universities should establish English clubs and encourage students to get involved. Promoting learner autonomy can involve providing resources and support for teachers and students to develop the skills necessary for autonomous learning. This can include providing training for teachers on how to promote learner autonomy in the classroom and providing access to technology and other resources that can support autonomous learning.

Overall, the qualitative result has highlighted the crucial role played by various factors in the promotion of autonomy in English language learning. Collaborative learning, practical engagement, and personal initiative are recommended by students. Proactive learning, goal-setting, and effective resource utilization are emphasized by both students and teachers. Teachers emphasize real-world applications, whereas students stress self-directed goal-setting and resource selection. University officials need to provide supportive spaces and resources. To summarize, these perspectives converge on collaborative, goal-oriented, and resourceful strategies for fostering autonomy in English language learning, which then enables students to achieve independent language mastery.

4.2   Discussion

The questionnaires were devised to examine the viewpoints of pupils regarding the identification of their perceptions of autonomy in English learning. The outcomes obtained from the initial questionnaire divulge that scholars possess a distinct conceptualization of autonomous English-majoring learners throughout their English learning journey. Furthermore, the progression of learners' awareness of autonomy in English language acquisition, the significance of independent English learning, and student's perceptions of their responsibility in autonomous English learning inside the classroom and outside the classroom were also examined. As regards the findings, the majority of learners have already recognized their responsibilities towards self-governing English learning. This can be aligned with the result of the study by Haque, Jaashan & Hasan (2023).

They are ready to take part in both in-class and extracurricular English learning activities. This indicates that the majority of students already believe they are independent learners who can manage their English language studies. This seems to support the claim made by Holec (1981, as cited in Bashir, 2014, p. 172) that students are capable of taking control of their education and Kartal & Balcikanli (2019) in a Turkish context. The findings refute Healey's assertion that autonomy and self-directed learning are exclusively Western ideas appropriate for American society (1999, p. 391). The findings also suggest that most students are eager to play an active role in English classes. This appears to be in line with research by Littlewood (2000) and Holden and Usuki (1995), who discovered that although Asian students view instructors as authoritative figures, they still desire to be engaged and autonomous in the classroom, just like European students.

Some factors, according to the participants' responses, that influence the students' autonomy in English language learning include Lack of effective learning strategies, Laziness, Lack of motivation, Lack of learning materials, Inefficient time management, Lack of self-study assignments, and Lack of teacher guidance. The fact that most students identified laziness as the primary problem affecting their independent English learning reflects significantly the prevalence of laziness among Vietnamese students when it comes to self-study. This is by Dornyei's theories (2005), which demonstrated that today's youngsters are too lazy to learn on their own... This explains why the choice with the greatest percentage (72.5%) was made. Similarly, Le & Nguyen (2022) insisted that when studying outside of the classroom, students struggle greatly and lack confidence in their ability to be self-directed learners. According to them, increasing their capacity for self-control, fortifying their bonds with friends and teachers, and obtaining greater social support are the ways to foster learner autonomy.

Meanwhile, several students have selected the absence of effective learning practices as one of the primary contributing causes. This seems to support the findings of Nguyen (2021), who noted that inefficient autonomous learning results from most students' failure to acquire effective learning strategies. This confirms the theory presented by Dornyei (1998, quoted in Thanasoulas, 2000), according to which motivation is the primary motivating factor for learning English. While they make up a minor portion of the total, other variables that hinder certain students' ability to learn independently include the absence of tasks for independent study and inadequate instructions from teachers.

Based on the findings from the semi-structured interview, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the students' experience about how autonomy affects English learning as well as how some factors are suggested for enhancing students' autonomy in language acquisition. Moreover, students can also provide suggestions for teachers, students, and universities to encourage their autonomy. Hence, it is possible to propose some solutions to the autonomy of English-majored students English during class hours and in their daily lives. Based on the findings, the prevalent approach for fostering autonomous English learning among students is the integration of English learning with their hobbies. This finding aligns with the perspective of Lewis (n.d), who asserts that leveraging hobbies for English learning represents a compelling strategy to infuse

the learning journey with intrinsic interest. Another noteworthy strategy involves cultivating motivation, which emerges as another influential factor in fostering autonomy.

4.2.1 Implications for Autonomy in English Learning

Curriculum and Educational Policy: The study's findings can help curriculum designers and policymakers support learner autonomy as an essential English language acquisition skill, in line with 21st-century educational goals.
1) Teaching and Learning Strategies: Language teachers might modify their methods to empower students and create a more engaging and effective learning environment.
2) Student Empowerment: Students can take charge of their language learning process and create self-directed learning strategies by understanding the factors that influence learner autonomy.
3) English Language competence: Because self-regulated learning and higher motivation can result from enhanced learner autonomy, English language skills can be improved.
4) Research Contributions: The study provides useful insights into the existing research on learner autonomy in Vietnamese tertiary education, promoting further investigation in this area.
5) Institutional Support: The study highlights the need for resources and institutional support to foster learner autonomy, which has led to the development of workshops and programs to assist students' independent learning.

The results indicated that the English majoring students who participated in the study were very confident with learner autonomy. Yet, they also find themselves not very confident when making decisions about their learning. They have difficulties in self-regulating skills, particularly in setting learning goals. Making independent learning decisions also posed difficulties, as students felt societal expectations carried more weight than institutional or parental guidance.

Suggested solutions included targeted training in self-regulation, raising awareness about learner autonomy, and enhancing support from teachers, peers, and the university. To promote students' autonomous learning in English, some possible solutions are recommended for their challenges.

Firstly, in terms of solutions for self-regulating skills problems in learning English, there should be more emphasis on seeking autonomous learning skills, or students can actively take control of their learning (Benson, 2011). This explains why they have to take responsibility for their English learning in and outside of the classroom. It is suggested to find their interest in any specific areas such as vocabulary, grammar, every single skill, or even topics that they feel enjoyable in the belief that when they are motivated, they can build up their learning strategies easily. Furthermore, to enhance their self-study, strategy training courses should be conducted separately or integrated into the learning program (Zhang & He, 2015). Students ought to explore avenues to participate in seminars or discussions related to learner autonomy. Through the guidance of experts on autonomous English language learning, they are likely to identify previously unacknowledged strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, they will be better equipped for their forthcoming self-directed learning (Ozer & Yukselir, 2023).

Secondly, as for interactions, the students predominantly encountered challenges in seeking assistance from the institution and teachers with their learning beyond the classroom. Additionally, they did not have opportunities to engage in discussions with their teachers regarding their autonomous language learning. To initiate the process, instructors in English major classes are encouraged to provide more opportunities for the students to discuss their self-regulated learning. For example, teachers can prompt students to work in groups and deliberate on how they regulate their learning, thus fostering an enduring learning stimulus, which is essential for promoting learner autonomy (Muktawat, 2016; Tran, 2020). Furthermore, teachers should assist students in setting their learning goals, especially when students enact their self-regulating skills. According to Le & Le (2022), the teacher's small talk is an effective way to encourage students to learn, which will be the teacher-student relationship factor (Khulaifiyah, Yuliani &Fara, 2023). Once the students have achievable learning objectives, they can be more confident in initiating their learning. Subsequently, instructors can assign learning activities to the students with only the necessary instructions and a range of choices, thus scaffolding students' step-by-step learning process. Moreover, teachers can also establish social networking groups such as Facebook or Zalo to provide instant support to the students if they require it. It is essential to obtain feedback from students through teachers' activities, which can assist instructors in designing and modifying

the learning activities appropriately. Lastly, teachers can also employ IT tools to encourage both physical and virtual teacher-student interactions, which, in the long run, promotes learner autonomy.

Finally, to bolster students' confidence in their ability to make decisions regarding their education, it is imperative that opportunities to voice their opinions (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2020; Şener & Mede, 2023). It is the responsibility of university leaders to recognize the significance of learner autonomy and actively encourage students to exercise their agency in various aspects of the learning process. Policymakers involved in training initiatives should also facilitate student involvement in material selection and assessment approaches. Moreover, it is highly recommended that autonomous learning zones be expanded to provide students with adequate space for self-study. Additionally, the library and self-study areas must be stocked with up-to-date materials and references to ensure students have access to the latest ideas in the field. A virtual learning space such as a school meta-Learning Management System with well-designed activities can be a hub for nurturing learner autonomy (Le & Dang, 2021; Lamo, Dhuli & Larsari, 2023).

5. Conclusion

To summarize, this study sought to shed light on autonomy in English learning among English-m majoring students at the Thai Nguyen University of Technology. It not only offers valuable insights into the concept of autonomy within English learning but also identifies influential factors affecting students' autonomous language acquisition. This newfound knowledge holds the potential to not only enhance initial levels of autonomy in English learning but also contribute to the ultimate goal of improving students' English proficiency.

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