

STUDENT - TEACHERS' SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THEIR AUTONOMY

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ABSTRACT

The pilot study presented aims at investigating how student- teachers self-assessed the influence of the portfolio on their autonomy. About 120 student-teachers participated in the portfolio, but only 94 took part in self-assessing their autonomy at the end of the testing and assessment approaches/methods course. The questionnaire of 30 items covering five subthemes like self-awareness, subject matter awareness, testing process awareness, independence of learning and study habits was used as a tool for self-assessment and instrument to collect data. The data were collected after the students submitted their portfolio. The findings indicate that although student-teachers did not highly evaluate the ways the portfolio helped them to become autonomous and their independence of learning, they were very positive in the portfolio process (the mean scores are ranged from 2.8 to 3.8 out of 5). Some suggestions for further research and the application of the portfolio are recommended at the end of this article.

Keywords: *autonomous, autonomy, independent learning, self-assess (ment), portfolio.*

1. Introduction

The issue ‘*autonomy*’ or ‘*independent learning*’ is not new in the field of language education in all over the world. In Vietnam, this matter has greatly been paid attention since 2007 when the Ministry of Education and Training issued Decree 43, which requested the application of the credit-based training system in all universities. One of the most important requirements of this training system is encouraging students to study independently after class, which means that the time for official class meeting in comparison with that of the term- based training system is reduced and the students’ study time out of class is increased. According to Lâm Quang Thiệp (2011), in the classroom, the instructor only teaches them basic knowledge and for relevant advanced knowledge, students should work on their own. In addition, their learning outcome should be assessed by different methods such as midterm assessment, continuous

assessment, and final term assessment by a formal test which includes both basic and advanced knowledge.

This training system has been applied in Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMCOU) since the academic year 2009-2010. Some lecturers already conducted studies on students’ *autonomy*; however, there have not been many studies on how to assess students’ *autonomy*. In the conference held by Saigon University in 2010, many researchers pointed out a lot of problems of the credit-based training system, especially the ineffectiveness of students’ *independent learning* after class, and several difficulties such as how to manage students’ learning time, how to manage what students learn and how to assess their self-studying were mentioned. At the faculty of foreign languages of HCMCOU, there have been two relevant studies on learner *autonomy* since 2009. The findings of Nguyen Thanh Tung (2010) indicated that in comparison with students in

the term - based training system, those in the credit-based training system were *independent* in their learning in four out of five research contents, but this difference was only significant in one third of five subjects in the first academic year. The results of the study conducted by Phan Thi Thu Nga (2014) revealed that 90% of the participants did not spend enough time on *autonomous* learning activities such as finding materials to design a lesson, carrying out the lesson and reading books for advanced knowledge. Students did not highly *self-assess* their responsibility in their learning, which is in line with the instructor's observation in class. From these findings, it can be seen that there have not been many studies on how to enhance student-teachers' autonomy and how to assess it. In the world, there have been many research studies on using portfolios to encourage student-teachers' autonomy conducted by different authors such as Cakir and Balcikanli (2012), Yildirim (2013), and Hakki Mirici and Herguner (2015). However, all of these studies were conducted in the English Language Teaching Methodology course; as a result, the researcher wished to examine if the use of the portfolio could help student- teachers to develop their autonomy in English Language Testing and Assessment Approaches course. The main objective of this pilot study is to encourage student-teachers' autonomy by using the portfolio and to let them *self-assess* their *autonomy* at the level of awareness, and the presented study investigates the answers to the following research questions:

- *How does the use of the portfolio help student- teachers become autonomous?*

- *How do student- teachers self-assess their autonomy?*

2. Review of Related Literature

Autonomy and Self-directed learning

Autonomy is "your capacity to take responsibility for, and control of your own learning, either in an institutional context, or completely independent of a teacher or institution; and it is also called *self-directed learning* (Thornbury, 2006:22)." As cited by Cavana and Luisa (2012), "in its broadest meaning, *self- directed learning* describes a

process in which individuals take initiative, with or without the help of the others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes, (Knowles, 1975:18)".

There are many well-known definitions of *autonomy* according to different authors. Benson (2006) cited different definitions such as Holec (1981), "the ability to take charge of one's own learning"; Dickinson (1987), "a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his [or her] learning and the implementation of those decisions" and Little (1991), "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning." In the state-of -the-art article, Benson (2006) argues that *autonomy* is a recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems. Among these definitions, Holec's remains the most widely cited in the field of language education. Although there are variations on Holec's definition, the key element in his definitions is that *autonomy* is an attribute of learners rather than learning situations; this view is based on the assumption that learners do not develop the ability to self-direct their learning simply by being placed in situations where they have no option, which is one of the most significant developments in the definition of *learner autonomy* over the past 30 years (Benson, 2006).

In spite of being popularly cited, the above definitions have not been supported by many experts in language education and their question is: "What exactly are the most important components of *autonomy* in language learning?" As cited by Benson (2006), the answer to this question is still inconclusive, and according to many authors, the difficulty in defining *learner autonomy* in terms of its most important components has been expressed in two assumptions have achieved widespread consensus. One of the assumptions is that there are 'five degrees of autonomy' according to Nunan (1997: 192); and the other is that *autonomous learners* 'can

take numerous different forms, depending their age, how far they have progressed with their learning, what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, and so on' (Benson, 2006:23).

Nunan (1997) proposes five levels including *awareness*, *involvement*, *intervention*, *creation* and *transcendence* for encouraging *learner autonomy*. At the *awareness* level, learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using, and they identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies. At the *involvement* level, learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer. Particularly, they make choice among a range of options. At the *intervention* level, learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning programme; that is, they modify and/or adapt tasks. At the *creation* level, learners create their own goals and objectives, which means that they create their own tasks. At the *transcendence* level, learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of the classroom learning and the world beyond so that they can become teachers and researchers (Nunan, 1997: 195).

According to Littlewood (1997), *autonomous* learners possess both *willingness* and *ability* to act independently. More specifically, learners' *willingness* to work independently depends on the level of their motivation and confidence; also their level of knowledge and skills positively affect their *ability* to act independently (Littlewood, 1997: 82). Ivan Moore¹ suggests that conceptualizing *learner autonomy* involves two factors: (1) an *autonomous learner* has developed the capacity to take at least some control over their learning; and (2) the learning environment provides opportunities for the learner to take control of their learning. In order to develop

this capacity, *autonomous learners* are required to have a set of personal qualities like confidence, motivation, taking and accepting responsibility, and ability to take initiative; and this capacity also involves a set of skills including academic, intellectual, personal and interpersonal. According to Mascaskill and Taylor (2010), elements of responsibility for learning, openness to experience, intrinsic motivation with an element of self-confidence in tackling new activities are core components of *autonomous learning* or *independence of learning*.

Reinders and Balcikanli (2011) recommended that in order to study successfully, *autonomous* learners should spend eight stages, all of which form a cycle and they always impact learners' reflection, motivation and interaction with the language and other learners. One of the stages of the *autonomous* learning cycle (in Figure 1) is planning learning, and it can be supposed that effective learners should know how to organize their learning, which is line with Ivan Moore's suggestion. That is, *autonomous* learners can organize their learning to prove their responsibility for their own learning. In addition, Mascaskill and Taylor (2010) argue that *autonomous* learners should own good learning habits such as effective time management and positive attitudes towards lone working. Also, *autonomous* learners must be able to self-assess their learning outcome; however, it is wondered whether or not learners' *self-assessment* is reliable. In the following part of this article, the matter *self-assessment of learner autonomy* will deeply be examined.

Self-assessment

According to Spratt and others (2011), the process during which learners decide themselves how good they think their progress or language use is called *self-assessment* or *informal assessment*. Brown (2004) classified five categories of self-assessment: (1) *assessment of [a specific] performance*, (2) *indirect assessment of [general] competence*, (3) *metacognitive assessment [for setting goals]*, (4) *socioaffective assessment*, and (5) *students' generated tests*.

¹ Ivan Moore is the Director of Center for promoting Learner Autonomy at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK. The cited information is available at http://extra.shu.ac.uk/cetl/cpla/whatislearnerautonomy_print.html

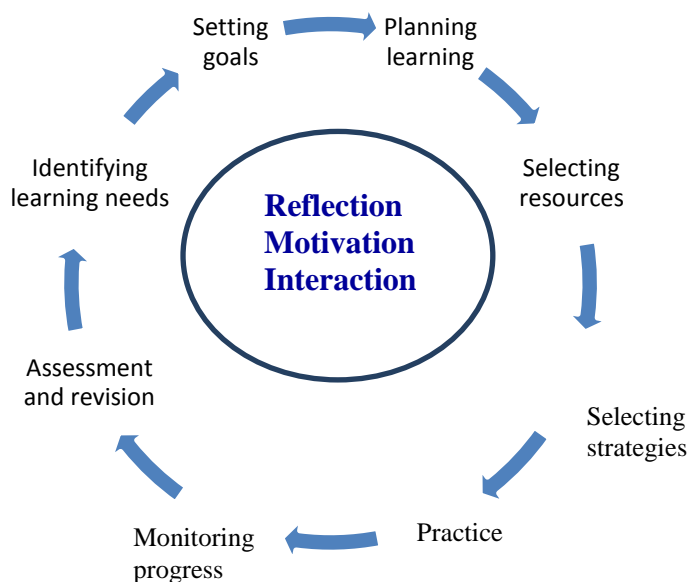


Figure 1. The cycle of the interactive self-directed learning process

Reinders and Balcikanli (2011:20)

In the first category of self-assessment, a student typically monitors him or herself- in either oral or written production- and renders some kind of evaluation of performance. The evaluation takes place immediately or very soon after the performance, and peer editing is an excellent example of direct assessment of specific performance (Brown, 2004: 271). The objective of the second category of self- or peer assessment is to evaluate general competence and ignore minor, nonrepeating performance flaws, and this form of assessment may encompass a lesson over several days, a module, or even a whole term of course work (Brown, 2004: 271). The third category, metacognitive assessment [for goal setting], is more strategic in nature. The purpose of this kind of assessment is setting goal as personal goal- setting has the advantage of fostering intrinsic motivation (Brown, 2004: 272). Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to have short, medium and long term goal to learn any skill. Another type of self- and peer- assessment comes in the form of methods examining affective factors in learning. Such assessment requires looking at oneself through a psychological lens and may not differ greatly from *self-assessment* across a number of subject - matter areas or for any set

of personal skills (Brown, 2004: 274). The final type of assessment that is not usually classified strictly as self- or peer-assessment is the technique of engaging students in the process of constructing tests themselves. According to Brown (2004: 276), the traditional view of what a test is would never allow students to engage in test construction, but student –generated tests can be productive and foster intrinsic motivation, which helps learners become *autonomous*.

Reasons for self-assessment of autonomy

According to Little (1991), Nunan (1997) and Benson (2001) (cited by O’Leary, 2007), the assessment of learner autonomy is problematic because autonomy is a multidimensional construct; in spite of the difficulty in measuring autonomy, Benson (2001) suggests that the measurement of autonomy should be attempted (cited by O’Leary, 2007). As cited by Tassinari (2012), “in the literature there is no consensus on the question of whether or not learner autonomy should be assessed, Benson, 2010).” Tassinari (2012) suggests that *self-assessment* should be integrated in a more general approach to the evaluation of learner *autonomy*, and his suggestion was supported by many authors.

In Holec (1981)’s popular definition,

autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning" (cited by Gardner, 2000), so *self-assessment* is a tool which supports those with that ability. Also, as cited by Gardner (2000), several authors such as Dickinson (1987), Oxford (1990) Thomson (1996) support self-assessment because of its benefits. First, *autonomous* learning is about individualization of learning and *self-assessment* helps learners monitor their individualized progress. Second, *self-assessment* provides learners with personalized feedback on the effectiveness of their learning strategies, specific learning methods and learning materials, and learners can use this feedback to evaluate their approach to language learning. Third, through *self-assessment*, learners can identify specific areas where they need more support and can seek help from teachers. Next, if managed correctly, *self-assessment* can contribute to formal assessment requirements. Finally, a further benefit to institutions is the evidence which *self-assessment* provides of the appropriate use of resources (Gardner, 2000).

Harris (2007), *self-assessment* is seen as one of the pillars of *autonomous* learning. One of the fundamental elements of *self-directed* language learning is the opportunity for learners to *self-assess* their own progress, so *self-assessment* can help them to focus on their learning, to monitor their progress and relate learning to individual needs. Another author supporting *self-assessment* is Cardoso (2010), who stated that the purpose of having learners assess themselves through the course is to give them more control over their learning, to make them think for themselves whether the effort they are putting in is paying off in order that they can clearly see the consequences with their own eyes, and based on that to set realistic goals for learning. In addition, *self-assessment* encourages an enhancement of one's self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-consciousness, which play important roles in the *autonomous* learning process (Cardoso, 2010: 24-26). Munoz and Alvarez (2007) suggested four implications of *self-assessment* for the classroom. First, *self-assessment* needs to be done on a continuous basis with constant guidance from the teacher. Second, cultural

acceptance of *self-assessment* needs to be raised. Third, students need to be provided with help on the use of *self-assessment* as a means to identify cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. Finally, teachers need to be trained for student autonomy (Munoz and Alvarez, 2007: 1-25).

Portfolio

Besides *self-assessment*, there is another way of assessing learners' work through the term called **portfolio**, a collection of learners' work done over a course or a year which shows evidence of development of their language skills. Usually, *portfolios* let learners produce work on an area just after it has been taught (Spratt and others, 2011: 104-105). Portfolio is a type of formative and continuous assessment with a number of advantages as it is inclusive, informative, developmental, reflective and easy to integrate into teaching and learning (Spratt and others, 2011: 147-148).

According to Zhenhui Rao², in comparison with traditional assessment, there are some advantages of using *portfolios* as a tool in developing *learner autonomy*. One of the most remarkable advantages is that *portfolios* offer students opportunities to evaluate their work; in other words, this kind of assessment emphasizes students' participation in the evaluation process; and students are responsible for their learning and evaluation. This is exactly in line with the requirements of training students to become *autonomous* learners. Another important feature of using portfolios is that students can take active control of their learning process by using metacognitive strategies such as planning, organizing, monitoring, observing and reflecting, and the use of these strategies can enhance their learning *autonomy*. Finally, *portfolios* emphasize students' participation, so they have opportunities to reflect on their performance, show their learning process and progress, to present the results of their learning; therefore, they will have a sense of achievement, which motivates them to

² The cited source is from "Reflection on Language Teaching", Vol 5 (2), pp.113-122. Available at www.nus.edu.sg

continue their *autonomous* learning.

Previous relevant studies

According to Gardner (2000), many different authors support *self-assessment* thanks to its positive and reliable results. For example, for Jansen-van Dielen (1989) the value of *self-assessment* is its positive influence on the learning process when she examined her adult learners of Dutch as a second language. In studying learners of Japanese as a foreign language in Australia, Thomson felt very positive about using *self-assessment* despite finding considerable diversity in the accuracy of self-marking. In the study of Bachman and Palmer (1989), they revealed that members of a multilingual, multiracial group of adult learners of English as a foreign language in the US were able to reliably self-rate themselves for their communicative competence. In addition, the result of Blanche's study (1990) on adult learners of French in the US reveals that the overall accuracy of *self-assessment* is impressive (cited by Gardner, 2000). Moreover, results of the study on 94 students from a private university in Colombia conducted by Munoz and Alvarer (2007) showed from moderate to high correlations between teachers' and students' self evaluations and positive attitudes toward *self-assessment*.

There are many research findings from different authors who support the use of portfolios as an assessment tool encouraging students become *autonomous*. The first evidence can be found in the study on the development of *autonomy* in final year languages' students at the Sheffield Hallam University in the UK by O'Leary (2007), who concluded that some approaches to assessment such as portfolio work may have potential to act as a vehicle for learner *autonomy* development. The second finding can be seen in Cakir and Balcikanli (2012)'s pilot study in a Turkish state university. These two authors concluded that both teacher trainers and student teachers found the use of European *portfolio* for student teachers of languages (EPOSTL) beneficial in terms of reflections, *self-assessment* and awareness; therefore, these authors suggested that EPOSTL should be converted into an online format to make it

more convenient for the student-teachers (Cakir & Balcikanli, 2012). In addition, the findings of Yildirim's study (2013) revealed that the use of *portfolios* assisted the student-teachers in the English Language Teaching Department of Cukurova University, Adana, Turkey in becoming *autonomous* in regard to their personal and professional development and that they perceived the *portfolio* process they went through positively (Yildirim, 2013: 93-110). Finally, the results of the study conducted by Hakki Mirici and Herguner (2015) indicate that the use of European *Portfolio* for student-teachers of languages (EPOSTL) is helpful in developing student teachers' metacognitive strategies as *autonomous* learners.

In brief, the literature on autonomy, autonomous learner/learning, self-directed learning, independence of learning, self-assessment and portfolio has critically been examined. Especially, encouraging learner's *self-assessment* and using portfolios to develop learner *autonomy* are supported by many authors such as Gardner (2000), Brown (2004), Harris (2007), Munoz and Alvarez (2007), Cardoso (2010) and Tassinari (2012). In addition, there are many relevant research findings of several authors like O'Leary (2007), Cakir and Balcikanli (2012), Yildirim (2013) and Hakki Mirici and Herguner (2015). All of these form theoretical framework for the pilot study on student-teachers' *self-assessment* of their *autonomy* presented in the following part of this article.

3. Methodology

Learning context and participants

The pilot study was conducted from the beginning of the course "English Language Testing and Assessment Approaches," which lasted in 11 weeks (once a week) in the summer term of the academic year 2013-2014. Each class meeting was from 7:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The instructor was in charge of three classes consisting of totally 120 students. These student teachers were in their third year, and all of them completed major courses such as (i) *The history of language teaching methods/approaches*, (ii) *How to teach English language* (grammar, vocabulary and

pronunciation) and language skills, (iii) Classroom management, (iv) Teaching English through story telling, and (v) Teaching English through music. However, only 94 students (78%) participated in answering the questionnaire in the final class meeting. On the first school day, students were given important information of the course such as the textbook, required reading materials, what to do in class, what to do at home and how to evaluate their learning outcome according to the credit based training system. This testing course consists of three credits and covers 10 topics: (1) *Introduction to language testing and assessment*; (2) *Approaches to language testing*, (3) *Objective testing*, (4) *Vocabulary Testing*, (5) *Tests of grammar usage*, (6) *Listening comprehension tests*, (7) *Testing oral production skills*, (8) *Testing reading comprehension*, (9) *Testing the writing skills*, and (10) *Test types and criteria to evaluate a test of English*.

Besides the midterm test and final term test, students had to complete their *portfolio*, a collection of five English tests based on an English textbook and a summary of this book. For these six *autonomous* learning tasks, students were awarded 20% of their total mark for the whole course. After the first week, students (in groups of five) chose an English textbook available in Viet Nam and summarized its content. For example, these student teachers had to read through the textbook carefully in order to know exactly what learners would obtain after fulfilling this textbook (or objective/aim) or learners' expected achievement in terms of English language knowledge (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation), language skills as well as general level and teaching methods/approaches recommended by the author of the textbook so that they could design relevant and valid achievement tests for learners. In the second class meeting the students submitted their homework assignment and got feedback from the instructor. Students had to improve or revise their assignment and put it in their folder. The same procedure was carried out in the following weeks. After studying main topics (i.e. testing grammar, testing

vocabulary, objective testing and testing four language skills) in class, students had to write five relevant tests at home and make some revision after getting feedback from the instructor or their peers, and put it in their collection of tasks. In the final class meeting, students had to submit their *portfolio*. During the *portfolio* process, students got peer feedback and instructor's feedback in order to improve/revise their tests. Therefore, the final result of students' *portfolio* is considered an informal or/and continuous assessment which contributes a part of the evaluation of students' learning outcome at the end of the course. However, the portfolio data were not interpreted in this article.

Instrument

The questionnaire was used as a tool that encouraged students to self-assess how the portfolio helped them in becoming *autonomous* and their *independence* of learning as well as study habits after they fulfilled the course of language testing and assessment approaches. This questionnaire including 30 items in two main parts presented on two A4 pages was used to collect the data. The first part (including 18 items) covers three different subthemes like *Self-awareness* (Items 1-11), *Subject Matter Awareness* (Items 12-15), and *Testing Process Awareness* (Items 16-18). In this part, students had to *self-assess* how the use of the portfolio helped them in becoming *autonomous*. Students' responses were recorded on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating more effective in helping them becoming *autonomous*. This part of the questionnaire was adapted from Yildirim (2013). The second part of the questionnaire (consisting 12 items, from items 19- 30) was used to encourage students to *self-assess* their ability to study independently and their study habits. Seven items (from items 19 to 25) have been labeled as *Independence of learning* as they reflect elements of responsibility for learning (Item 24), openness to experience (Items 20 & 22), self-confidence in tackling new activities (Items 21 & 23), and intrinsic motivation (Items 19 & 25). The rest items (from items 26 to 30) have been labeled *Study habits* as they reflect issues of time management (Items 26, 27 & 28),

procrastination (Item 29) and attitudes to working alone (item 30). Students' responses were also recorded on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating greater levels of *autonomy*, more independence and more positive attitudes to learning. This part of the questionnaire is considered a reliable scale used to measure learners' independence, and it was adopted from Macaskill, A. and Taylor, E. (2010).

Data Collection and Analysis of Findings

The presented data was collected on the final day of the course after students submitted their *portfolio*. The findings below prove the results of student teachers' *self-assessment* of how the use of the *portfolio* helped them become autonomous learners at the level of *awareness* including *self-awareness*, *subject matter awareness* and *testing process awareness* and their *independence* of learning as well as study habits during the *portfolio* process.

The data presented in chart 1 shows how the use of the *portfolio* helped student teachers to become *autonomous* learners at the level of *self-awareness*. The highest score (the first rank) is 3.7 out of 5 (in column 2). That is, students believed the *portfolio* helped them raise their awareness of *responsibility*, which is one of the most vital personal qualities of an *autonomous* learner (as presented in the literature review). The second rank 3.6 out of 5 can be seen in columns 10 and 11; i.e. the *portfolio* offered students opportunities to develop a sense of respect to others and ownership of learning. The third rank of score

is 3.5 out of 5, and this can be found in columns 1 and 9. That means the use of the *portfolio* also encouraged students to raise their awareness of strengths and weaknesses and to enhance objectivity in *self-assessment*. The fourth score rank is 3.4 out of 5 for motivation (column 6), which is another important personal quality that an *autonomous* learner should have. The next score rank is 3.3 out of 5, which can be seen in columns 4 and 8, which can be understood that the *portfolio* process encouraged students to develop themselves a future teachers and to take active roles in the assessment of peers. Another score rank is 3.2 out of 5 (in column 6) belongs to self-confidence. That is the use of portfolio could help students to improve their self-confidence, which is considered another important personal quality of an *autonomous* learner. In addition, the *portfolio* assisted students in developing their metacognitive skills such as critical thinking, reflecting and judging, which can be seen in column 3 (3.1 out of 5). The final as well as the lowest score rank is 2.8 out of 5 (near average) that can be found in column 5, which can be stated that students did not highly believe that the *portfolio* could help them enhance their creativity. Therefore, from the numbers in the charts below, it can be inferred that students had very positive attitudes towards using the *portfolio* in the assessment of the learning outcome, and this assessment method also encouraged them to become less *dependent* on the instructor.

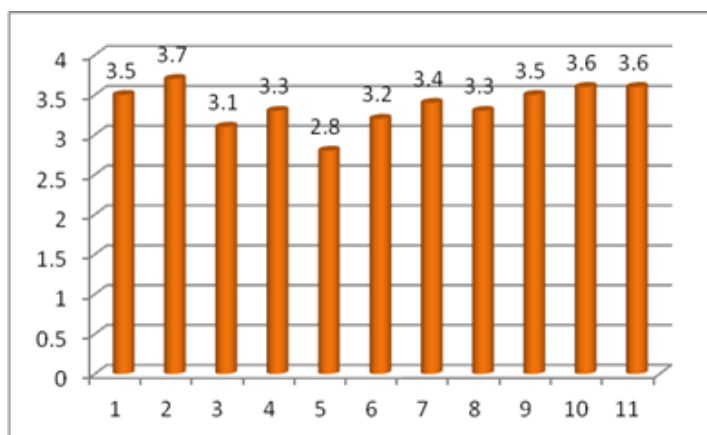


Chart 1. Student-teachers' self-awareness

Self-Awareness

1. Raising awareness of strengths & weaknesses
2. Raising awareness of responsibility
3. Developing metacognitive strategies (e.g. critical thinking, reflecting & judging)
4. Developing oneself as a future teacher
5. Enhancing creativity
6. Improving self-confidence
7. Enhancing motivation

8. *Taking active roles in the assessment of peers*
9. *Enhancing objectivity in self-assessment*
10. *Developing a sense of respect to others*
11. *Developing ownership of learning*

Subject matter awareness

1. *Raising awareness of the theory of how to test language & language skills*
2. *Connecting theory with practice*
3. *Connecting previous knowledge to new knowledge*
4. *Developing content knowledge in preparing activities*

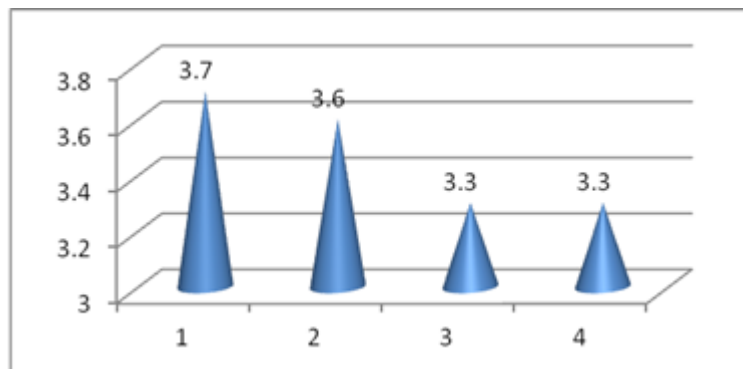


Chart 2. Student-teachers' subject matter awareness

The data in chart 2 illustrates how the use of the *portfolio* affected student-teachers' *subject matter awareness*. According to these students' responses, the *portfolio* helped them raise awareness of the theory of how to test language (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The mean score of this item is highest among four items (3.7 out of 5 in column 1). Also when working independently out of the official class meetings, students had opportunities to connect theory with practice, and this item was awarded 3.6 out of 5. The other two items, i.e. the *portfolio* assessment helped students to connect their previous knowledge with new knowledge and develop knowledge about language testing and assessment were similarly scored 3.3 out of 5. As a result, it can be concluded that the *portfolio* positively affected student-teachers' subject matter awareness, which is one of important conditions of becoming *autonomous* in the learning process.

The last type of *awareness* which a future language teacher needs is the *testing process awareness*, and students' responses to

this subtheme can be seen in chart 3. As presented, students strongly believed that the *portfolio* could help them raise awareness of the teacher roles and behavior, and the mean score of this item is 3.8 out of 5, the highest score among the other three items. Moreover, when judging how the *portfolio* helped them become familiar with the testing process, these student-teachers' mean score was 3.6 out of 5. The lowest mean score in this chart is 3.3 out of 5, or the *portfolio* encouraged these student-teachers to develop their own approach to language testing. Therefore, it can be said that these student teachers have become aware of how and what to test their learners after they fulfilled this testing and assessment course in which the *portfolio* was used as one of the major tools to assess their learning outcome.

Besides being encouraged to *self-assess* how the *portfolio* helped them become *autonomous*, these student-teachers had a chance to *self-assess* their *independence* of learning and study habits. As presented in chart 4, all of the results of students' *self-assessment* of their independence are not very high but above average (ranged from 3 to 3.6 out of 5). For example, the highest mean score

can be seen is 3.6 out of 5 in columns 2 and 6. That means students' responses to items about their responsibility for learning and openness to experience were very positive. Columns 3, 4 and 7 which stand for self-confidence,

openness and motivation show the same score 3.4 out of 5. Another column standing for self-confidence is 3.1 out of 5. The lowest score in this chart is 3 out of 5 presented in column 1 representing for motivation.

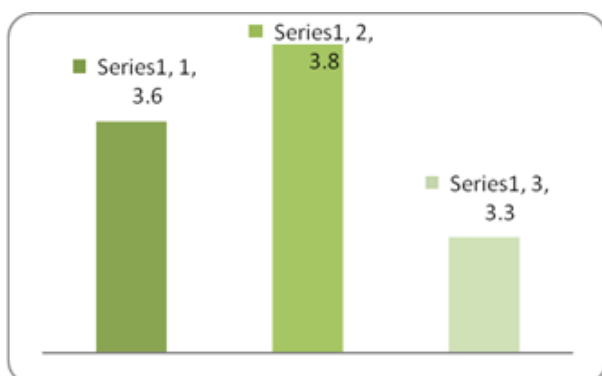


Chart 3. Student-teacher's testing process awareness

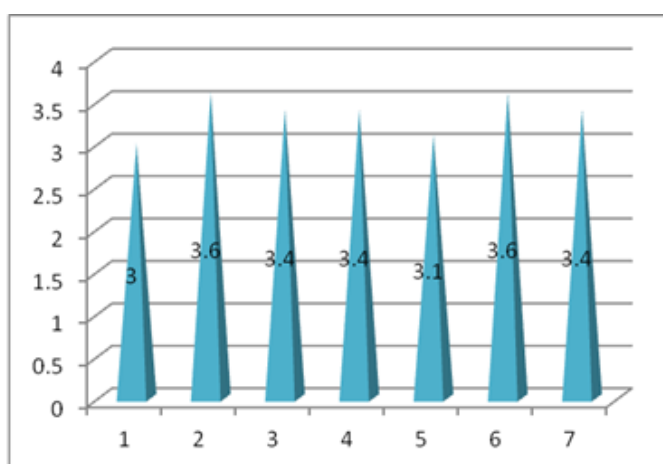


Chart 4. Students' independence of learning

As presented in the literature review, for self-directed learning successfully, students should have study habits including effective time management and positive attitudes towards working independently, so the data presented in chart 5 reveals these habits. The score for effective planning is 3.5 out of 5 and time management is 3 out of 5. However,

students did not highly evaluate their ability to meet deadlines (only 2.9 out of 5). Students' attitude towards independent learning is 3.3 out of 5. Especially in column 4, the mean score of procrastination is 2.2 out of 5 (below average), which is positive because the lower the score is, the better habit students have in learning.

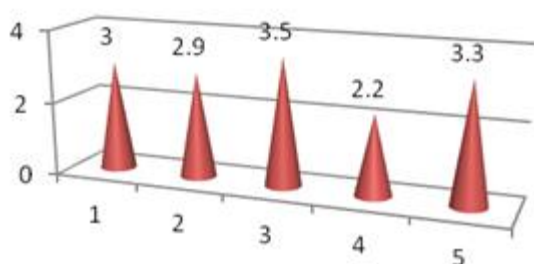


Chart 5. Students' study habits

Testing Process Awareness

1. *Becoming familiar with the testing process*
2. *Raising awareness of the teacher roles and behavior*
3. *Developing of one's approach to testing*

Independence of learning

1. *I enjoy finding information about new topics of my own.*
2. *I am open to new ways of doing familiar things.*
3. *Even when tasks are difficult I try to stick with them.*
4. *I enjoy new learning experiences.*
5. *I enjoy being set a challenge.*
6. *I take responsibility for my learning experiences.*
7. *I tend to be motivated to work by assessment deadlines.*

Study habits

1. *My time management is good.*
2. *I am good at meeting deadlines.*
3. *I plan my time for study effectively.*
4. *I frequently find excuses for not getting down to work.*
5. *I am happy working on my own.*

4. Discussion, conclusion and recommendation

Research question 1: How does the use of portfolio help student teachers become autonomous?

The findings presented in charts 1, 2 and 3 reveal the answer to this research question. In fact, an autonomous learner should have important personal qualities such as responsibility, motivation and self-confidence, and the findings in chart 1 can prove this. That means the use of the portfolio as a tool to assess student- teachers' learning outcome could increase their responsibility (3.7/5), self-confidence (3.2/5) and motivation (3.4/5) which helped them become autonomous learners. Therefore, it can be concluded that although the results of students' self-assessment were not very high, these student-teachers had very positive attitudes towards the portfolio process that they went through. This finding is in line with Cakir and Balcikanli's (2012) Yildirim's (2013).

Research question 2: How do student teachers self-assess their autonomy ?

The answer to this question can be seen in charts 4 and 5. As presented in literature, autonomous learners should own two factors: independence of learning and study habits (Macaskill and Taylor 2010). Although students did not give very high scores for their independence of learning (ranged from 3 to 3.6 out of 5; above average) and study habits (ranged from 2.9 to 3.5), these scores have revealed a positive indication of students' ability to work independently out of the classroom. In column 4 (in chart 5), the mean score is below average (2.2 out of 5). Because this item was negatively worded to help prevent response bias in the participants, the lower the score is, the more reliable other scores are, and the better habit participants have. As a result, it can be said that when examining the students' self-measurement of their independence of learning, the results are nearly similar to those of the effectiveness of the portfolio in helping them to study independently.

By contrasting the findings in chart 1 and those in chart 4, some more interesting findings can be figured out. First, as presented

in chart 1, the portfolio process helped students to raise their awareness of responsibility with the mean score is 3.7 out of 5 (the highest score), which is nearly the same as the score given by the students for their independence of learning in term of responsibility in chart 4 (3.6 out of 5). Second, students' mean score for self-confidence in chart 1 is 3.2 (in column 6) whereas students' mean scores for self-confidence in dealing with difficult tasks and being challenged are 3.4 and 3.1 out of 5 (in column 3 and 5 in chart 4), and these scores seem nearly similar. Third, the scores of students' motivation in chart 1 (column 7) and in chart 4 (column 7) are the same (3.4 out of 5).

From these numbers, it can be concluded that the use of the portfolio was very effective in developing student-teachers willingness to act independently because according to many authors (as presented in the literature), responsibility, self-confidence and motivation are very important personal qualities of an autonomous learner. In other words, the use of the portfolio is very effective in helping student teachers becoming autonomous learners, and being able to study independently is one of the requirements for students in the credit - based training system. Therefore, it can be stated that the conclusion of this pilot study, despite being conducted on a small scale, is considered a new finding and a very significant one in the field of English language teacher education. The result of this study can encourage teacher trainers in the faculty of foreign languages of HCMCOU to continue using the portfolio not only as a tool for continuous assessment of students' learning outcome but also as a way to develop students' willingness to work independently while they are still studying at university and when they work as teachers in the future.

In spite of many interesting findings, several limitations existed in this pilot study during the portfolio process. One of the most remarkable problems is that students' self-assessment was only investigated at the level of awareness, and they did not have a chance to self-assess their ability to work independently in writing tests of English. Also,

they only based on the instructor's feedback and peer feedback to revised or/and improve their tests. Another disadvantage is that the results of students' self-assessment and the instructor's assessment were not compared in order to increase the reliability of the students' self-assessment. The last limitation is the difficulty of the instructor during the course because of being overworked.

To overcome the above problems, there are two suggested solutions: one for further research on this issue and the other for the application of the portfolio. First, further studies on this topic should be conducted in the coming days. In order to increase the

reliability of students' self-assessment, the results of their self-assessment should be contrasted with those of the instructor. Second, this solution can be for both researchers and instructors. That means a checklist with clear criteria should be established in order to help students to self-evaluate their products or their tests in the portfolio and to self-assess their ability to write tests of English. This way can help the instructors to reduce work, e.g. giving feedback after each task and the researchers to have an opportunity to evaluate student-teachers 'autonomy at more advanced levels and/or different stages.

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