

# Learners' autonomy from Perspectives of Non-majored English Sophomores: An Investigation in a Private University in Mekong Delta

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Received: 14/11/2024; Accepted: 20/11/2024; Published:27/11/2024

**Abstract:** This study investigates learner autonomy from perspectives of non-majored English sophomores in a private university in the Mekong Delta. Both questionnaires and interviews were employed as the primary research instruments to analyze the collected data, utilizing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. The findings of this study reveal factors affecting participants' autonomy, including internal factors (learning motivation, learning attitudes, and learning strategies) and external factors (learning resources, learning environment, and the role of teacher).

**Keywords:** Learners' autonomy, factors, methods, Non-majored English. students.

## 1. Introduction

English is considered an essential tool in global communication. It is a recognized international language and is extensively used as an official language in all industries such as commerce, technology, etc. More than 1 billion websites are using English, so we only need to learn one language to be able to exploit most of that knowledge base easily.

Learning English depends only partly on teachers' teaching programs or technical quality, but the rest depends on the learner's autonomy in the learning process. However, non-major English sophomores at a private school in the Mekong Delta who had difficulty learning, some students still did not have access to learning materials and English practice environment, still depended on the teacher, they were passive and timid in communication. This can affect how they develop their language skills and the quality of their learning declines. Therefore, encouraging and creating conditions for students to have autonomy in learning is very important.

Based on that reality, the researcher decided to conduct a research project on "*Learners' autonomy from perspectives of Non-majored English Sophomores in a Private University in Mekong Delta*". This topic aims to understand how autonomy affects students' English learning process, thereby helping students have a more comprehensive view of self-study and come up with methods to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

## 2. Research content

The purpose of the research was to investigate the following question:

- What factors affect non-English major sophomores' autonomy in learning English?
- What methods help to increase non-English major sophomores' autonomy when learning English?

In this research, the questionnaire and interview paper are 2 main instruments. The questionnaire collected basic information, affecting factors, and methods to enhance students' autonomy while learning English. Furthermore, the interview will be used to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of autonomy in learning English. Two research instruments were conducted to provide a comprehensive view of factors affecting non-majored students' autonomy and methods to enhance their autonomy when learning English. The study was conducted on 77 second-year non-English major students of course 18 from the Veterinary and Aquaculture classes at Tay Do university in the Mekong Delta. In fact, there were 77 students in the second-year non-English major classes of course 18, however, only 75 students participated in answering the questionnaire because 2 students were absent. They were 35 males and 40 females from 18 to 22 years old. They all speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue, and English is considered a foreign language. Most of them have been studying

English for between 9 - 15 years. The main reason for choosing students in their second year is because they have had more time to experience the learning environment than in their first year and they can better evaluate their autonomy.

### 3. Result

**3.1. Students' backgrounds:** Basic information about students' learning process is greatly influenced by their living environment, especially those who are not majoring in English. Therefore, it is necessary to pay closer attention to students' living quarters. The pie chart below showed the proportion of the living environment of non-English major course 18 students.

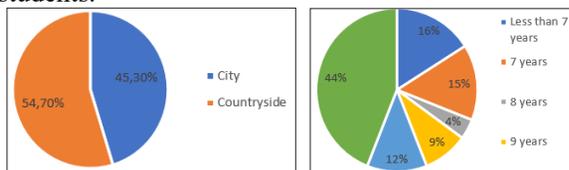


Figure 2.1 Students' living environment

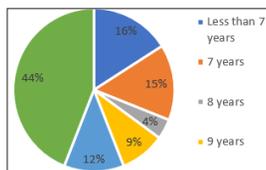


Figure 2.2 Proportion of students' English learning years

As can be seen from Chart 1, students majoring in Veterinary Medicine and Aquaculture at a private university in the Mekong Delta came from many different backgrounds with 54.70 % (41/75) were from the Countryside and 45.30 % (34/75) were from the City.

The largest portion represented 44% (33/75) of the participants who have studied English for more than 10 years. That means they have learned the language since 3rd grade and have spent 8 years studying the language before enrolling in university, however, this did not mean they are capable of mastering the skills of this language. A significant thing is that those who have studied English for less than 7 years account for 16% (12/75). Additionally, 15% (11/75) of participants had studied English for 7 years. Surprisingly, 12 % (9/75) came from 10 years. Furthermore, the proportion of non-English major students learning this language within 9 years was very small, only 9% (7/75). Finally, 4 % was the smallest part of the pie chart because only 3/75 participants have studied English for 8 years.

### 3.2. Participants' evaluation about their autonomy when learning English

Figure 2.3 showed that the response of students about the frequency of their autonomy when learning English. The majority of students insisted on "Sometimes" automatically learning English, accounting for 57.3% (43/75). Besides, 22 out of 75

(29.3%) students reported that they can "Regular" learn English automatically. In addition, only 13.3% (10/75) of students think that they rarely have autonomy when learning English for themselves. It is gratifying to see that not a single student lacks the ability to have self-control when learning English. Thereby, the above data provided insight into the attitudes of non-majored English Sophomores regarding their autonomy when learning English.

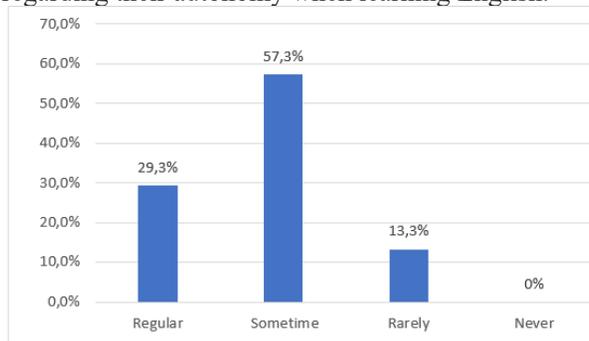


Figure 2.3 Participants' evaluation about their autonomy when learning English

### 3.3. Participants' self-evaluation the importance of learners' autonomy when learning English

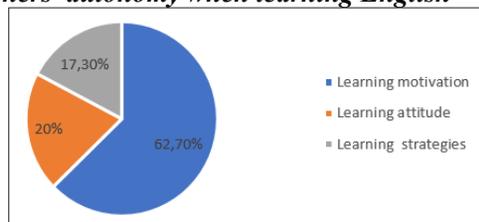


Figure 2.4. Participants' self-evaluation the importance of learners' autonomy when learning English

According to Figure 2.4, there is no room for doubt about the importance of learners' autonomy when learning English. It can be seen that the percentage of students declaring that focus on learning English is "Very important" is the highest, at 61.3% (46/75). Next is "Important" with 36% (27/75). Furthermore, only 2.7% (2/75) were confirmed as "Normal". Additionally, no one reported "Little important" and "Not important" for learners' autonomy when learning English. Essentially, it can be inferred that a large percentage of non-majored English Sophomores realize the benefits of automatically learning English. In fact, according to the chart, none of the students surveyed had negative views about autonomy when learning English.

### 3.4. Internal factors affect students' autonomy in learning English

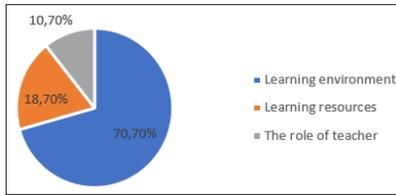


Figure 2.5. Internal factors affect students' autonomy in learning English

Figure 2.5 illustrated three internal factors that affect students' autonomy when learning English. Leading the way was "Learning motivation" which is the subject that students are most interested in when learning English, accounting for 62.7% (47/75). Next was "Learning attitude" with 20% (15/75) selected by students. Finally, "Learning strategies" account for 17.3% (13/75), which was also quite fair. Overall, the above data showed that when students have a clear and strong motivation to learn, they will be more proactive in learning and practicing English. Only then will they have a persistent learning attitude, overcome difficulties, and come up with learning strategies that were suitable for them.

### 3.5. External factors affect students' autonomy in learning English

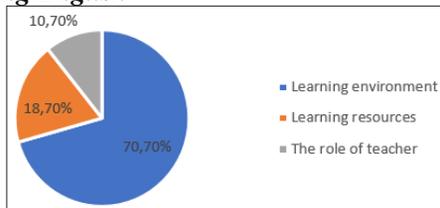


Figure 2.6. External factors affect students' autonomy in learning English

Figure 2.6 clearly showed that three external factors affect students' autonomy when learning English. Students who chose "learning environment" accounted for the highest percentage of 70.70% (53/75). Then, "learning resources" ranked second with 18.70% (14/75). Finally, "the role of teacher" with 10.70% (8/75). Looking at the chart, it can be seen that choosing a positive learning environment creates conditions for students to proactively explore and learn English better.

### 3.6. Methods to enhance students' autonomy in learning English

According to the statistical data in the pie chart (Figure 2.7), there were many methods to improve students' autonomy when learning English. First, "Setting specific goals" was the choice with the highest percentage of 49.3% (27/75). The second position belongs to "Creating study habits" with 25.3% (19/75). The third position was "Finding

diverse learning materials" with 16% (12/75). Finally, students can chose "Other" methods to improve their autonomy at a rate of 9.3% (7/75). Overall, it showed that students choosing to set specific goals and create study habits are the two best methods to improve their autonomy when learning English.

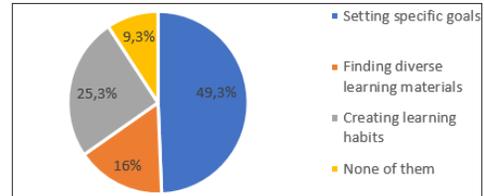


Figure 2.7. Methods to enhance students' autonomy in learning English

## 4. Discussion

The final results confirmed that both internal and external factors have a positive influence on learner autonomy, including 3 internal factors (learning motivation, learning attitude, and learning strategies) and 3 external factors (learning resources, learning environment, teacher's role). These factors not only impact learners' level of autonomy but also affect their learning outcomes. Furthermore, research also suggested practical methods to enhance their autonomy such as setting specific goals, building detailed weekly or monthly study plans, and maintaining daily study habits to motivate and ensure progress in learning level. They also actively seek out a variety of learning materials, including books, online articles, academic videos, and language learning applications to improve their knowledge and skills.

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