

PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNER AUTONOMY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG VIETNAMESE NON-ENGLISH MAJORS FROM DIVERSE ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS

Nguyen Thi Tuyet*, Nguyen Hai Quynh

TNU - University of Sciences

ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	28/5/2026	Learner autonomy known as autonomous learning or self-directed learning, plays a crucial role in language learning in general, and in English language learning, as it enables learners to develop their language skills. This study aimed to investigate Vietnamese non-English majors' perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Data were collected using a questionnaire administered to 138 non-English major students at a university in Vietnam. Four dimensions of learner autonomy namely abilities, responsibility to make decisions, motivation, and actual activities were examined in terms of students' perceptions. The finding revealed that students' overall perception of learner autonomy in English Language learning was at a moderate level. Among the ethnic groups, Mong, Dao, Tay, and Kinh students had higher mean scores than other ethnicities. These students demonstrated a higher level of perceived ability and responsibility in managing their English learning. However, they lacked motivation to learn English, and sufficient learning activities inside and outside the classroom to improve their English proficiency. The study also suggests several recommendations to enhance students' learner autonomy in English language learning.
Revised:	19/8/2026	
Published:	19/8/2026	
KEYWORDS		
Perception		
Learner autonomy		
Non-English majors		
Ethnic backgrounds		
English language learning		

NHẬN THỨC VỀ TÍNH TỰ CHỦ TRONG VIỆC HỌC TẬP TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN TIẾNG ANH Ở VIỆT NAM THEO CÁC NHÓM DÂN TỘC

Nguyễn Thị Tuyết*, Nguyễn Hải Quỳnh

Trường Đại học Khoa học - ĐH Thái Nguyên

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	28/5/2026	Tính tự chủ của người học, được biết đến là học tập tự giác hoặc học tập tự định hướng, đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc học ngôn ngữ nói chung và trong việc học tiếng Anh nói riêng, vì nó giúp người học phát triển các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ của mình. Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích điều tra nhận thức của sinh viên không chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại Việt Nam thuộc các dân tộc khác nhau về tính tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh. Dữ liệu được thu thập bằng bảng câu hỏi khảo sát đối với 138 sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam. Bốn khía cạnh của tính tự chủ của người học bao gồm: khả năng, trách nhiệm đưa ra quyết định, động lực và hoạt động thực tế đã được xem xét dựa trên nhận thức của sinh viên. Kết quả cho thấy nhận thức tổng thể của sinh viên về tính tự chủ của người học trong việc học tiếng Anh ở mức độ trung bình. Trong các nhóm dân tộc, Mông, Dao, Tày và Kinh có điểm trung bình cao hơn các dân tộc khác. Những sinh viên này thể hiện mức độ nhận thức cao hơn về khả năng và trách nhiệm trong việc quản lý việc học tiếng Anh của họ. Tuy nhiên, họ còn thiếu động lực học tiếng Anh, và chưa tham gia đầy đủ các hoạt động học tập trong và ngoài lớp để cải thiện trình độ tiếng Anh của mình. Nghiên cứu cũng đề xuất một số khuyến nghị để tăng cường tính tự chủ của người học trong việc học tiếng Anh.
Ngày hoàn thiện:	19/8/2026	
Ngày đăng:	19/8/2026	
TỪ KHÓA		
Nhận thức		
Tính tự chủ của người học		
Sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh		
Nền tảng dân tộc		
Học tiếng Anh		

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.15928>

* Corresponding author. Email: tuyetnt@tnu.edu.vn

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy (LA) is an educational concept that emerged in the 1960s in Western countries. One of the pioneering scholars to define LA was Henri Holec [1], who argued that it is the ability of learners to take responsibility for their own learning process, including making decisions related to all aspects of learning. Following Holec's definition, there have been several different views in the literature [2], [3]. Recent studies further confirm that LA is a multidimensional concept, encompassing cognitive, motivational, and social factors in the learning process [4], [5].

By the mid-1970s, LA gradually attracted the attention of researchers, lecturers and learners in the field of language education, because it contributes to enhancing learners' autonomy and helps them gain a deeper understanding of the language [6]. Notably, in the context of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the university level, interest in learner autonomy has increased, as evidenced by the large number of research studies and academic publications focusing on the development and results related to this field.

Within the context of Viet Nam higher education, English language learning is a compulsory subject for non-major students [7]. The students who graduated from university had to achieve the English language proficiency standard of B1. English language teaching has undergone significant changes, not only in methods but also in the roles of both learners and teachers [3]. The goal of developing communicative competence has fostered the formation of a learner-centered approach. Accordingly, learners are seen as subjects responsible for their entire learning process, including all aspects of language learning [8]. This perspective has contributed to clarifying the concept of learner autonomy. Recent studies in Vietnam also emphasize the role of out-of-class learning and self-assessment in developing student autonomy [9], [10].

In this study, the students came from various ethnic groups with different socio-economic conditions and academic backgrounds. To achieve English language proficiency at the B1 level and use English to support a student's career prospects. Given the crucial role of learner autonomy in higher education in Vietnam, it is necessary to examine students' perceptions of learner autonomy. Although various aspects of learner autonomy in English language learning have been widely studied, there remains a paucity of research addressing LA among students from diverse ethnicities. Thus, to address this gap, this study was conducted.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Vietnamese non-English majors' perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning?
2. How are these perceptions reflected among Vietnamese non-English majors from diverse ethnic backgrounds?

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research design

This study employed using a quantitative method. Survey questionnaires was chosen as data collection instruments to find out the non-English major students' perceptions of aspects of learner in English language learning and to identify how learner autonomy is affected by ethnicities. The study was conducted at a public university in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam. Here, the English program was designed with three modules: English 1, English 2, and English 3, corresponding to each academic year, and structured according to a progressively increasing level of difficulty and complexity. Upon completion of these modules, students are expected to achieve the necessary language proficiency to meet the university's learning outcomes, equivalent to level B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), as well as to meet the communication needs of social life before graduation.

2.2. Participants

In this current study, a total of 138 non-English major students were selected to participate. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula (as cited in Tran, 2012) [11], which is

expressed as: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, where n represents the sample size, N is the total population, and e is the margin of error. In this study, with a population size of approximately 210 students ($N \approx 210$) and a margin of error of 0.05 ($e = 0.05$), the calculated sample size was 138 participants. A purposive sampling method was then employed to select participants who met specific criteria.

- (1) They were non-English majors;
- (2) They represented a large proportion of the university's student population and English was a compulsory subject for them; and
- (3) They had some familiarity with the English learning environment at the university level, as demonstrated by completing English 1 in the first semester and English 2 in the second semester of their first year.

This study did not examine the characteristics of each ethnic group among the participants. The main aim of the research was to look at the ethnic distribution of first-year non-English major students. Because of this, the results may not fully explain the influence of each ethnic group's characteristics on autonomy in learning English. Cultural and language differences may have some influence on learning. Future studies should look more closely at these differences to better understand all groups of students.

2.3. Research instruments

The study data was collected through a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (from 1 to 5) to assess the perceptions of non-English major students regarding autonomy in English learning, based on previous studies. The survey tool was adopted from the study of Nguyen and Habok [12], in which the authors investigated the perceptions of non-English major students regarding autonomy in the Vietnamese context.

In this study, the model of autonomy was built on four main aspects, forming the basis for the questionnaire design, including (1) students' perceptions of personal ability related to learner autonomy in the learning process; (2) students' perceptions of their self-responsibility in the learning process; (3) students' perceptions of the level of their motivation to learn English; and (4) students' perceptions of activities associated with autonomous learning.

The questionnaire consisted of four scales with a total of 40 observed items. A five -point Likert scale was applied throughout the survey tool. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and reached a value of 0.96, showing a very high level of reliability according to the evaluation criteria of George and Mallery [13].

3. Findings and discussions

3.1. Ethnic distribution

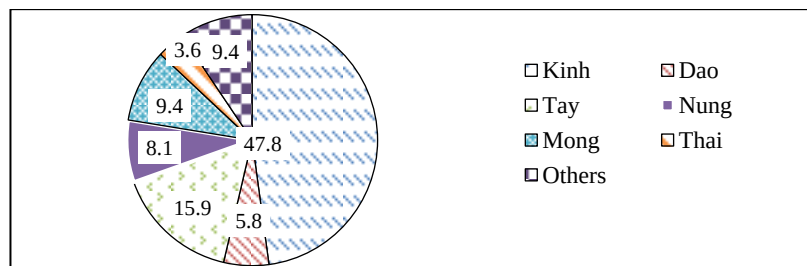


Figure 1. Distribution of ethnic groups

As shown in Figure 1, the study participants came from seven different ethnic groups in the mountainous region of Northern Vietnam, including the Kinh, Dao, Tay, Nung, Mong, Thai, and several other minority groups. Among them, Kinh students (the majority ethnic group in Vietnam) accounted for the highest percentage with 47.8% of the total participants. This was followed by the Tay (15.9%), Mong (9.4%), Nung (8.1%), Dao (5.8%), and Thai (3.6%). The remaining 9.4% belonged to other minority ethnic groups such as the San Chi, San Diu, Ha Nhi, and Muong.

3.2. Non-English-major students' perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning

This section presents the findings related to the perceptions of non-English major students regarding autonomy in the English learning process. Descriptive statistics on students' self-study activities are summarized and presented in Table 1. The survey-item response mean score for LA was 2.91. Referring to the perception of ability, responsibility, motivation level, and activities, the mean scores were 3.03, 3.21, 2.55, and 2.85, respectively. It could be concluded that the participants rated themselves as being able to learn independently at the average level.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of autonomous English learning

	Mean score (M)
Non-English major students' perception of their abilities regarding autonomous learning	3.03
Non-English major students' perception of their responsibilities regarding autonomous learning	3.21
Non-English major students' perception of the level of their motivation to learn English	2.55
Non-English major students' perceptions of activities relating to autonomous learning	2.85
Learner autonomy	2.91

Pearson correlation analysis of the study also revealed a noteworthy finding. Based on the scatter plot (Figure 2), the relationships between the variables are positively correlated, indicating that as students' perceptions of ability, responsibility, and motivation increase, their frequency of participation in autonomous learning activities also increases.

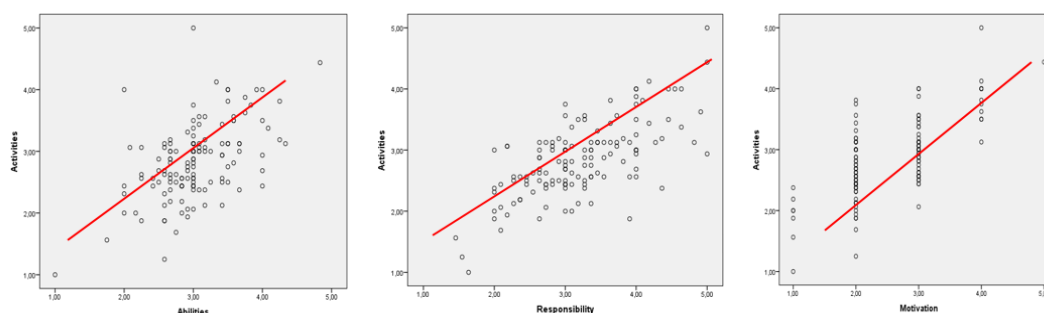


Figure 2. A scatter plot illustrates the correlation between factors such as ability, responsibility, motivation, and level of participation in learning activities among students

Table 2. The Pearson correlation coefficients between the observed variables

		Correlations			
		Abilities	Responsibilities	Motivation levels	Activities
Abilities	Pearson Correlation	1	0.609**	0.492**	0.539**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	138	138	138	138
Responsibilities	Pearson Correlation	0.609**	1	0.580**	0.678**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	138	138	138	138
Motivation levels	Pearson Correlation	0.492**	0.580**	1	0.679**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	138	138	138	138
Activities	Pearson Correlation	0.539**	0.678**	0.679**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	138	138	138	138

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

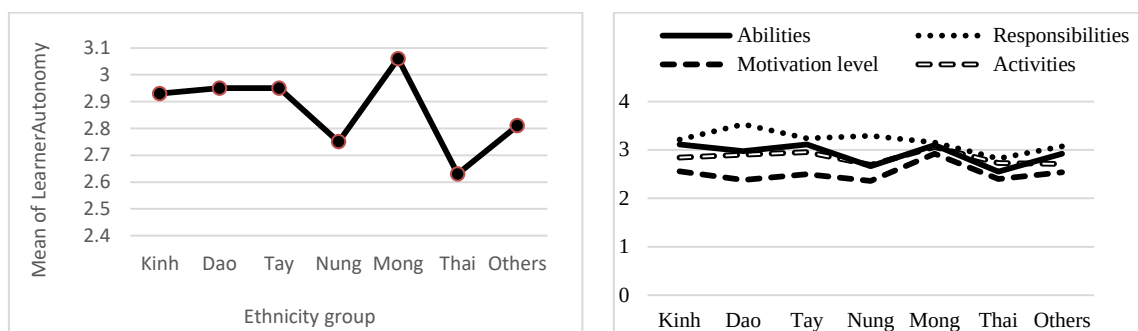
According to the results presented in Table 2, students' perceptions of ability, responsibility, and motivation have a statistically significant linear relationship with their activities (correlation coefficients r are 0.539, 0.678, and 0.679, respectively, with $p < 0.001$). When the " r " value is between 0.5 and +1, this correlation is considered strong.

3.3. Students' perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning across ethnic backgroundss

One of the aims of the current study was to explore how these perceptions are manifested among Vietnamese non-English majors from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This section presents the findings in terms of learners' abilities, responsibilities, motivation levels, and leaning activities. The results are pretended in Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 3. Summarize the mean values (M) of the variables in the study

Ethnicities	Kinh	Dao	Tay	Nung	Mong	Thai	Others
Abilities	3.11	2.97	3.11	2.66	3.10	2.55	2.92
Responsibilities	3.21	3.53	3.24	3.29	3.15	2.82	3.07
Motivation levels	2.56	2.38	2.50	2.36	2.92	2.40	2.54
Activities	2.84	2.90	2.95	2.69	3.06	2.73	2.71
Learner Autonomy	2.93	2.95	2.95	2.75	3.06	2.63	2.81



(a) Mean scores for LA

(b) Mean score values for attributes

Figure 3. The mean scores of (a) LA and (b) attributes: abilities, responsibilities, motivation level, and activities of ethnic groups

As shown in Table 3 and Figure 3:

Learner autonomy: The average autonomy scores of ethnic groups are ranked in descending order as follows: Mong students ($M = 3.06$), Dao ($M = 2.95$), Tay ($M = 2.95$), Kinh ($M = 2.93$), other ethnic groups ($M = 2.81$), Nung ($M = 2.75$), and Thai ($M = 2.63$).

Abilities: The average competence values of ethnic groups range from 2.55 to 3.11. The highest scores ($M = 3.11$) belong to Kinh and Tay students; followed by Mong ($M = 3.10$), Dao ($M = 2.97$), other ethnic groups ($M = 2.92$), and Nung ($M = 2.66$). The Thai ethnic group has the lowest average score ($M = 2.55$).

Responsibility: The average responsibility score also varied among groups, ranging from 2.82 to 3.53. The Dao ethnic group achieved the highest score ($M = 3.53$), followed by the Nung ($M = 3.29$), Tay ($M = 3.24$), Kinh ($M = 3.21$), Mong ($M = 3.15$), and other ethnic groups ($M = 3.07$). The lowest was the Thai ethnic group ($M = 2.82$).

Motivation Level: The level of learning motivation varied among ethnic groups, with average values ranging from 2.36 to 2.92. The highest was the Mong ethnic group ($M = 2.92$), followed by the Kinh ($M = 2.56$), other ethnic groups ($M = 2.54$), Tay ($M = 2.50$), and Thai ($M = 2.40$). The two groups with the lowest scores were Dao ($M = 2.38$) and Nung ($M = 2.36$).

Activities: When considering learning activities, the highest average score belonged to the Mong ethnic group ($M = 3.06$), followed by Tay ($M = 2.95$), Dao ($M = 2.90$) and Kinh ($M = 2.84$). Thai ($M = 2.73$) and other ethnic groups ($M = 2.71$) had similar levels, while Nung was the group with the lowest score ($M = 2.69$).

These comparisons show the differences in perception of factors among ethnic groups such as Kinh, Dao, Tay, Nung, Mong, Thai and other groups in the study sample. Overall, the analysis results indicate that (1) The Mong, Dao, Tay and Kinh groups had higher average scores than the remaining groups. (2) Students in these groups were generally aware of their abilities and responsibilities in

learning English. However, they still lacked motivation to learn and did not participate much in English learning activities both inside and outside the class to improve their level.

To determine whether the difference in the students' perceptions of autonomous English learning among ethnic groups is statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Analysis of one-way ANOVA for variables by ethnicity

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Abilities	Between groups	3.463	6	0.577	1.975	0.074
	Within groups	38.295	131	0.292		
	Total	41.758	137			
Responsibilities	Between groups	1.988	6	0.331	0.567	0.756
	Within groups	76.478	131	0.584		
	Total	78.466	137			
Motivation levels	Between groups	2.613	6	0.436	0.776	0.590
	Within groups	73.532	131	0.561		
	Total	76.145	137			
Activities	Between groups	1.423	6	0.237	0.624	0.711
	Within groups	49.766	131	0.380		
	Total	51.189	137			
Learner Autonomy	Between groups	1.277	6	0.213	0.702	0.648
	Within groups	39.711	131	0.303		
	Total	40.988	137			

As shown in Table 4, the results of the one-way ANOVA indicated no statistically significant difference in students' perceptions of learner autonomy among students from different ethnic groups (Sig. = 0.648 > 0.05). The aspects of autonomous English learning, including abilities, responsibilities, motivation level, and activities also showed no significant differences in students' perceptions with Sig values of 0.074, 0.756, 0.590, and 0.711 (all > 0.05), respectively.

4. Conclusion

Regarding the first research question, the findings revealed that students from seven ethnic groups assessed their learner autonomy (LA) in terms of abilities, responsibilities, motivation, and learning activities at an average level. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in the Vietnamese context [12], [14], [15], which also reported moderate levels of learner autonomy among non-English major students. This similarity may be explained by the common educational context in Vietnam, where students are still influenced by teacher-centered approaches and may not have many opportunities to develop independent learning skills.

With regard to the second research question, the results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in students' perceptions of learner autonomy among different ethnic groups. This suggests that ethnicity may not be a determining factor influencing students' perceptions of autonomy in English learning in this context. However, it should be noted that there is a limited number of previous studies specifically examining ethnic differences in learner autonomy in the Vietnamese context. Therefore, it is difficult to make a direct comparison with previous research findings.

Nevertheless, there are minor differences in the results. Specifically, Mong, Dao, Tay, and Kinh students tended to achieve slightly higher mean scores (M) in some aspects of LA compared to other groups. Although these differences were not statistically significant, they may reflect differences in learning experiences, cultural and language backgrounds, or access to educational resources. Therefore, future studies should further investigate these factors to gain a deeper understanding of how ethnic background may interact with learner autonomy.

The results highlight several pedagogical implications for teachers, for students, and curriculum developers.

For teachers, it is important to promote active participation from students in classroom discussions, encourage group work and collaborative projects to boost social interaction and

language practice, motivate students to establish academic goals that align with their interests and requirements, and demonstrate flexibility and be willing to adapt their teaching methods to meet the ever-changing needs and interests of learners. At the same time, they should regularly introduce LA and apply various strategies to promote this ability in language learning, with particular emphasis on fostering competence and enhancing learners' motivation.

For students, it is essential to recognize the importance of engaging in autonomous learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. This awareness not only helps to improve understanding but also contributes to the development of autonomy in practice [15], [16]. One of the effective and common ways to develop autonomy is to foster learning motivation [12], [14]. Motivation plays a key role in helping learners control their learning process. Motivated learners are more likely to set clear goals, actively seek opportunities and learning resources, persevere through difficulties, actively participate in language learning activities, personalize their learning, self-assess their progress, and feel interested in learning. Therefore, maintaining and developing motivation is an important factor in promoting autonomy, helping learners become more proactive and achieve significant progress.

For curriculum developers, integrating autonomous learning into training programs is necessary to raise awareness among stakeholders such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents [12], [15]. In addition, it is necessary to focus on including in-depth modules on LA in teacher training programs, thereby helping future teachers understand this concept and be able to apply it effectively in teaching practice [12].

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