

# Improving students' perceptions of learner autonomy in learning english at Thuong Mai university

Nguyễn Thị Thanh Hà\*, Trần Thị Thu Hiền\*, Dương Thị Hồng Thắm\*

\*ThS. Bộ môn Lý thuyết tiếng Anh. Khoa Tiếng Anh. Trường Đại học Thương mại

Received: 26/12/2022 Accepted: 27/12/2022 Published: 29/12/2022

**Abstract:** The study was conducted with mixed methods approach with the participation of students from K52, K53 and K54. The author used two research instruments including a survey questionnaire and interview questions to collect the data. In this study, the author presented a situation of self-study of English non-major students in 11 faculties in Thuongmai University. Based on this analysis, authors propose solutions to raise awareness or perceptions of learner autonomy of students to improve the quality of learning English.

**Keywords:** perceptions; learner autonomy; competent; situation; rights

## 1. Introduction

According to Littlewood (1996), in foreign language teaching and learning, learner autonomy has been a major area of interest for many years. Many scholars have defined autonomy from different points of view. For example, Benson (2006) defined autonomy as the ability of people to take control of their own lives as individuals, and in a particular learning context, autonomy refers to the fact that the individual learner controls the learning process in and out of the classroom. Benson (2006) also argued that autonomy in language learning denoted control and decision-making related to language acquisition, including different methods and techniques used to acquire desired language.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Definition of learner autonomy

According to Nguyen Canh Toan, "Learning is always associated with self-study, self-training to change one's personality. A good teacher is those who teaches learners how to self-study and self-educate. From his point of view, "Self-study is self-thinking, brainstorming, using intellectual abilities and sometimes muscles and other qualities of learners, both emotional motivation, human outlook, worldview to possess a certain knowledge of mankind, turning that knowledge into one's own possession". According to Pham Viet Vuong, "Self-study is a form of learning outside of class time by individual efforts according to the general learning plan and without the direct presence of the teacher".

### 2.2. The importance of learner autonomy towards students

Self-studying students are those who have the ability to act independently in the learning process,

they can define and build their own goals, can change the goals to suit their learning needs and interests; they can also use learning strategies and monitor their own learning. The basis of autonomous learners is that learners accept responsibility for their own learning.

A person with a good sense of self-study shows how they have an attitude towards learning. A student with a good sense of self-study must be someone who knows how to arrange appropriate study time, has a thirst for knowledge, research, and has a good study method, which is reflected in some of the following characteristics: - select good study material; - set your own goals and make them a priority; - make a plan to achieve the goals; - self-assess their progress and achievements; - self-evaluate your study program.

## 3. Research methodology

- Investigate by survey questionnaire using semi-structured questionnaires for students of Thuongmai University to find out the real situation of students' English self-study in credit-based training and English as an optional subject.

- Randomly select 785 students K52, K53 and K54 from 11 non-English majors at Thuongmai University to distribute questionnaires.

After analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the survey, the author conducted in-class interviews, during breaks, with students K52, K53, K54 of all majors to check the reliability of the data obtained from the questionnaire.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Students' perception of the concept of English self-study

Table 1 showed us that almost students of courses of K52, 53, 54 (second, third, and final year students) at Thuongmai University are aware of the concept

of self-studying English and had a positive attitude towards self-study. Most students chose to agree or completely agree with the concepts of English self-study that the author put forward. More than 50% of the students agree and completely agree with the above definitions. However, more than 20% of students were unsure or disagreed with taking notes, summarizing lessons.

Table 1. Students' perception of the concept of English learning autonomy

The perception of English self-study is .....	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
1. Students are responsible for finding their own way to learn English.	0	2.5	17.8	45.9	33.8
2. Students should use self-study materials to learn English.	0	3.2	20.4	48.4	28.0
3. Students must self-examine and evaluate their own English learning in order to improve for the better.	1.3	3.2	14.6	41.4	39.5
4. Students should be allowed to participate in the choice of class activities and assignments.	1.9	4.5	19.7	52.2	21.7
5. Students should exchange ideas with friends or teachers about effective English learning methods.	0.6	2.5	12.7	42.7	41.4

#### 4.2. Students' perception of the capacity and decision-making power that students need when self-studying English at the University

It is clear that, from Table 2, the majority of students wish to take responsibility for their English learning because most of them choose occasionally,

often and always. Specifically, 42.2% choose occasionally, 31.3% choose regularly and 4.6% choose always responsible for deciding the topics and learning activities of their English class. Similarly, 44.1% chose occasionally, 22.4% chose frequently and 5.9% chose always are responsible for deciding how the class is to be managed.

Table 2 also showed that most students are aware that they can sometimes or often or always be aware of their own English learning needs (24.2%, 51.6%, 20.4%), their own strengths in English (32.5%, 42.0%, 18.5%), recognize their own weaknesses in English or manage their own progress in learning English.

Table 2. Students' perceptions of the capacity and decision-making power

I want to be responsible for.....	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Usually %	Always %
1. Deciding on learning goals in a certain semester	0.1	9.0	40.3	36.4	14.1
2. Deciding what books and study materials my English class uses	3.3	15.4	32.6	37.1	11.6
3. Deciding on the topics and learning activities of my class	7.1	14.8	42.2	31.3	4.6
4. Deciding on the types of tests and assessments in my English class	9.7	14.8	42.2	24.3	9.0
5. Deciding on teaching methods in the classroom	7.8	20.5	36.4	29.4	5.9

#### 4.3. The real situation of students' ability and decision-making power when self-studying English in English classes at Thuongmai University

Contrary to the results in Table 2, with Table 3, students showed that they hardly or always made decisions in their English class. Specifically, more than 70% of students said that they never, or rarely, or occasionally decided on textbooks as well as studied materials (85.5%), topics and learning activities of class (86.1%), forms of assessment (78.4%), teaching methods in class (77.2%), lesson content (82%), and time location of English classes (79.5%).

Table 3 also showed the perception of students' self-study English ability of faculties at Thuongmai University. Although they want to have the right to decide on issues in their English class, most students are also aware of their strengths and weaknesses,

and can self-assess their English learning. More than 60% of students can rarely or sometimes manage their progress in English learning (73.8%), combine English group study with other students (68%), self-study English alone (73.7%), find their own method of learning English (75%). They also shared when being interviewed that: *"We also often have teachers share how to learn English by ourselves, but we do not have enough self-study ability, maybe that is the reason that teachers teach us. not trust enough to give us the right to decide on issues of learning English in class. But when is the fact that teachers keep empowering us as a way to motivate us to have a sense of self-study from class and continue to self-study at home?"* (T – K53 Faculty of Marketing).

Table 3. Real situation of capacity and decision-making power of students

Students in your ENGLISH CLASS can.....	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Usually %	Always %
1. Identify your own English learning needs	2.3	15.0	34.8	36.1	11.8
2. Recognize your own strengths in English	1.0	12.5	38.0	37.3	11.2
3. Recognize your own weak points in English	1.7	11.2	39.9	31.0	16.3
4. Self-manage the level of progress in learning English	4.8	32.9	36.7	19.5	6.1
5. Self-evaluate your English learning	4.2	16.3	31.6	41.8	6.1

#### 4.4. The real situation of students' English self-study outside of school hours at Thuongmai University

Learning autonomy or self-studying with English is extremely important, not only in classes, under the supervision of teachers but also need to be constantly by activities outside the classroom or at home. Table 4 shows the current situation of self-studying English of students at the University of Commerce outside of class time. More than 70% of the students in the school sometimes, often and always focus on some activities such as: practicing English watching and listening to English TV or radio programs (74.9%), listening English songs (81.9%), self-study English grammar (75.5%), self-study English vocabulary (77.4%), participate in English courses at language centers England (75.6%).

#### 5. Recommendations to raise students' perception of English learning autonomy and English self-study ability

**For students:** Increase self-study time: As a rule, students who go to class for one credit will have 2

credits to prepare homework. With an English course of 2 credits (30 class periods), students have to spend 60 hours preparing their own lessons at home. If you go to class for 2 periods a week, you have to study 4 periods at home, equivalent to 2 hours and 30 minutes of self-study. If students only spend 2 days to study foreign languages by themselves in a week, and study for 30 minutes each day, students have not achieved 50% of the required self-study time.

**For lecturers:** Identify and assign self-study and self-study tasks to students: Choose in the course curriculum the contents and problems (in addition to the contents and issues discussed in class, activities). in groups) and specify the purposes, requirements, and implementation methods to assign students to self-study and self-study. Make a detailed list of the tasks that students have to do at the end of class.

**For the university:** When self-studying, students must have an autonomous learning environment. The school should invest more in handing out materials for students so that in addition to the main curriculum in class, students can improve themselves on other skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing).

The university need to add English materials to the library, basic English documents and specialized English suitable for each training discipline.

#### 6. Conclusion

In summary, with this study, the author has shown that, although today's students have had many changes in the way they learn English, students' learning autonomy perception is not high. They know they have to take responsibility for their own learning, but they are not ready to take responsibility for their learning yet. Besides, lecturers of Faculty of English have not given students autonomy in learning English in class so that they form the habit of self-studying English anytime, anywhere.

#### References

- Balçıklı, C. (2008). Fostering learner autonomy in EFL classrooms. *Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, 16 (1), 277-284.
- Balçıklı, C. (2010). Learner autonomy in language learning: student teachers' beliefs. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(1), 90-103.
- Cotterall, S. (2000). Promoting learner autonomy through the curriculum: Principles for designing language courses. *ELT Journal*, 54(2), 109-117
- Dam, L. (1995). *Learner Autonomy 3: From Theory to Classroom Practice*. Dublin: Authentik.