

## Factors Affecting Learner Autonomy in Tertiary Level English Learning: A Study at Van Lang University

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** English-majored students, learner autonomy, impeding factors, facilitating factors

In the era of the Industrial Revolution, learning is acknowledged as a continuous process, with learner autonomy as one of its most crucial elements. Numerous studies have found that independent language learners benefit more than learners who study passively. Consequently, it is vital to comprehend the aspects that drive learner autonomy. The objective of this study was to identify the factors that both foster and impede the growth of learner autonomy. Data was collected from 233 English majors at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, using qualitative and quantitative methods (VLU). The findings revealed that there are a number of elements that both help and hinder students' capacity to study English independently. The study also found that learners can learn independently with the support of their surroundings, intrinsic motivation, learning preferences, and technology advancements. Teachers' viewpoints on issues impacting learner autonomy are urged to be taken into account.

### Introduction

The popularity of students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) is widely acknowledged among educators (Beare, 2020). Nonetheless, the status of English teaching and learning in Vietnam has run into several issues due to long-standing traditional teaching and learning techniques. Vietnamese students usually recall information and learn by rote rather than exploring new things during the learning process. (Nguyen, 2010). According to recent research, learner-centered classrooms are replacing conventional teacher-centered classrooms. However, it's still evident that individuals will rely largely on the assignments and instructions given by their teachers. Instead of applying what they have learned or even creating entirely new knowledge in the real world, individuals frequently adhere to pre-existing or pre-determined patterns or frameworks (Pham, 2010). Additionally, it has been challenging for English language instructors and students in Vietnam to find teaching resources. Although tertiary teachers are permitted to produce their own course materials, they must adhere to strict criteria of the curriculum, and the students influence neither the design nor the choice of course materials.

Learner autonomy (LA), articulated by Holec (1981, p. 3) as "the capacity to take charge of one's learning" and "the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning," is linked to issues mentioned above. According to Scharle and Szabó, LA was also recognized as a person's capacity to handle his or her own matters and self-determination (2000). In other words, it emphasizes how independent their teacher's students can be and how they are encouraged to pause a teacher's explanation to ask questions, etc. According to Le & Nguyen (2022), students lack confidence in learning autonomy. Specifically, they struggle with self-control when setting learning objectives and deciding what to learn. Aside from that, peer and academic support were ineffective.

This study aimed to identify the factors that support the growth of learner autonomy in English-major classrooms. As Dinh (2017) points out, since 2007, at least 25 studies on using LA in language acquisition have been conducted in Vietnam. On the other hand, only some addressed what helps or hinders the growth of LA among Vietnamese students.

## Literature review

### *Learner Autonomy*

Holec (1981, p. 3) defined LA as the ability to control one's own learning. The researcher is of the opinion that students will be fully responsible for all aspects of this learning, including setting their own learning goals, choosing their own resources, choosing their learning strategies, and self-monitoring and assessing their learning processes (Holec, 1981). Furthermore, based on Holec's viewpoints, Benson (2001) emphasized that autonomy in language acquisition entails control over the cognitive learning process, management, and contents. It is important to note that students are accountable for their own learning and take more active roles throughout the process, regardless of how LA is defined. Learners are recommended to develop their own learning strategies and procedures and choose their own learning materials, methods, and assessments (Richards & Rodgers, 2015).

### *Autonomous Learners*

How is a learner considered autonomous? Several characteristics of independent learners are seemed to exist in educational contexts. Littlewood (1996) defined them as individuals who are able and willing to make all learning-related decisions on their own, including setting learning objectives, choosing learning resources, and adopting learning method criteria. Similarly, Wenden (1998) agrees with these findings when he states that autonomous learners frequently use interactive ways and are more likely to take risks and make accurate judgments in their learning. They focus heavily on learning that is both accurate and appropriate. They are willing to discard any theories or principles that cannot be applied to the learning process, and they can create their own frame of reference to improve the target language. Little (2000) added that the ability to choose learning topics, guide their learning process and plan or execute tasks and activities in both proactive and constructive ways is crucial for learning a new language. Such students are able to work independently as well as effectively and socially acceptable in collaboration with others, according to Wenden (1998) and Crabbe (1999). Hasim and Zakaria both emphasize this view of the self-directed learner (2015). To put it another way, independent

learners prefer to be involved in the acquisition of knowledge rather than simply receiving it.

### *Factors Affecting EFL Learner Autonomy*

Many distinct factors have had an impact on LA's expansion, both positively and negatively. In this study, these variables are separated into two categories: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include psychological aspects, learning habits and learning strategies, positivism, constructivism, critical theory, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and developed skills and awareness. External factors include the teachers, the tasks, and the environment.

#### *Internal Factors*

##### *Psychological Aspects*

Recent studies have demonstrated that personality traits, including attitudes, motivation, and inclinations, along with anxiety, can influence how autonomous a learner is.

According to Wenden (1998), learners' attitudes and self-beliefs have an impact on their learning efficiency. A student may not exert the necessary effort if he or she believes they lack the ability to learn. In other words, it does not favorably contribute to LA's growth. In support of this, Qin (2016) asserts that eager learners are more likely to have optimistic views. As a result, they will spend more time studying and are almost certain to set learning goals. This boosts morale. Coppersmith (1967) shares a similar viewpoint, asserting that students with greater self-esteem have higher success rates. This is further supported by Leaver, Ehrman, and Shekhtman (2005). They also underlined the significance of maintaining a balance between one's self-confidence and faith in others by asking for help from others when they need it.

Furthermore, many researchers agree that motivation is essential to the growth of LA. Dickinson (1992), for example, believes that inner drive is a requirement for LA. Furthermore, Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) stated that the stronger the motivation, the greater the sense of engagement in learning activities. Chen (2015) also claims that learners with a strong passion are more inclined to go forward and implement their learning methods better, which demonstrates LA's fundamental qualities.

The apprehension of learning a new language is another element that seems to have an adverse stimulus on LA. Zaqiri (2015) and Chen (2015) assert that learners become less independent the more nervous they are (2015). This might be because these students tend to be reserved and dependent on their teachers. Thus, they avoid taking chances at all costs (Zaqiri, 2015).

##### *Learning Habits and Learning Strategies*

Learners have different learning styles and employ various learning strategies, according to Begum and Chowdhury (2015). They consequently think these study habits and methods may help or hinder learners' autonomy.

##### *Positivism*

This teaching method strongly emphasizes the value of instructors as knowledge facilitators. As a result, learners will lose the motivation to set learning objectives or make decisions and instead become passive recipients. This constantly clashes with LA, impeding its development.

### *Constructivism*

This approach facilitates students in deriving new information from their existing knowledge base. It is anti-positivism; therefore, it promotes the development of LA. Participants were also encouraged to make their own discoveries.

### *Critical theory*

As Leaver et al. (2005) recognize, analytical thinking is advantageous to LA. The approach encourages critique and change rather than striving to comprehend and explain things. As a result, students are able to learn independently and construct their own concepts. This enables students to consider the topic from a variety of angles, which might aid them in deciding whether or not to pursue it further.

### *Cognitive strategies*

These include repetition, resourcefulness, translating, note-taking, deduction, contextualization, transferring, inference, and clarifying inquiries, and they allow learners to apply cognitive functions to language learning. Learners become self-sufficient once they have mastered the utilization of these strategies.

### *Metacognitive strategies*

Some of these tactics include planning, thinking, monitoring, and analyzing a person's learning capacity. Individuals who can apply them are more involved and self-directed in their learning journey and exhibit stronger self-regulation, which significantly illustrates LA (Leaver et al., 2005). Thus, if these techniques are applied, students will be more cooperative and self-assured in their language learning, according to Akici (2015, p. 36).

### *Developed Skills and Awareness*

Balçikanlı (2010) states that a deficiency in learning abilities and knowledge correlates with poor self-study performance. Learners Students will be far more positive and independent, as Tran and Duong (2018) similarly agree if they possess some expertise in a certain field related to the goals of their course.

### *External Factors*

#### *The Teachers*

Many scholars believe that the best way to help improve LA, teachers should play more than simply the position of knowledge transmitters in traditional classroom settings. Little (1996) pointed out that although learners have the capacity to be self-regulated learners, this does not indicate that they will do it independently of teachers. Kemala (2016) and Leaver et al. (2005) believe that teachers not only help students understand how to define learning objectives, choose appropriate learning tools, and so on, but also accommodate them with an opportunity to make their own decisions. According to Alonazi (2017), to encourage students to be more fully independent, teachers should take on various responsibilities, including those of guide, resource, and facilitator. Also, most EFL students are more interested in learning when taught by a teacher who is passionate about teaching, as seen by the findings by Tran & Le (2022). Learners think that a passionate instructor will help them advance in their academic

performance and has motivated them to engage in the learning process (Tran & Le, 2022).

### *The Tasks*

According to Kemala (2016), tasks that must be accomplished have a major effect on LA, either in a positive or negative way. Students will become more intrinsically driven if they work on both intriguing and demanding tasks. Students, on the other hand, may feel unmotivated by monotonous tasks. This view is similar to Tran and Duong's point (2018) in several ways. Their observations show that students who comprehend the importance of a task (such as a portfolio) gain a variety of advantages, such as improved self-management, self-assessment, decision-making abilities, etc.

### *The Environment*

Environmental factors, including situational and social aspects, have a significant impact on LA, according to Benson (2001, p. 49). Parents, siblings, relatives, friends, and teachers all contribute to the social aspect of learning. What kind of influence do you think they'll have on the students? Self-regulated learners, on the other hand, are in need of peer interactions. Hence this social setting can make it simpler for students to collaborate in the classroom. Similarly, based on Dang's research (2010), since students in Vietnam are comfortable engaging with others through communication, it is apparently much easier for them to exchange information and resources and work on task accomplishment assigned by teachers thanks to technological advancements. Also, according to Kemala (2016), when students feel involved with their classmates, they become more driven to learn since group work enables participants to share ideas, benefit from each other, and motivate one another.

Learning resources and materials are included in the situational aspect. Reinders and Balcikanli (2011) claim that only a small number of textbooks significantly impacted the development of LA and that many of them provided students with limited chance for practice. "Most commercially produced materials focus on informing their users about language features and on guiding them to practice these features," says Tomlinson (2012, p. 143). As a result, these textbooks provide less chance to engage in learning a language independently. On the other hand, materials, in the opinion of Kemala (2016), affect how enthusiastic and motivated learners are. Harmer (2007) asserts that engaging and stimulating topics increase the likelihood of effective learning. In addition to this, based on Alzubi's study (2021) conducted in Asia and Europe on how mobile devices can affect LA among students, it is concluded that mobile devices play a critical role in influencing LA in EFL environments especially reading and writing, vocabulary, and grammatical abilities.

### *Research Questions*

The study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What factors facilitate English-majored students to learn on their own initiative?
2. What factors impede English-majored students from learning on their own initiative?

## Methods

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, 45 Nguyen Khac Nhu street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Based on the official data extracted from the Faculty of Foreign Languages website at Van Lang University (2022), there were more than 2000 students majoring in the English language at the time.

### *Design of the Study*

The author's use of mixed methods research in this study allowed him to gather and analyze data using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Thus, according to Creswell (2012), correlations between variables that already exist can be found and explained. The main research design was also the embedded design. At first, only qualitative data was collected. The author then devised questionnaire items to obtain quantitative data based on this information.

### *Sample and Sampling Procedures*

English-majored students in their third year of tertiary education took part in this study. During the sampling procedures, two types of samples were employed. In order to establish a range of perspectives, for a focus group interview, the author selected groups of participants; in this context, third-year English-majored students at VLU were selected (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). Then, a two-stage random sample procedure was applied with questionnaires to obtain quantitative data. Initially, random cluster sampling was used to choose groups of individuals randomly. Members were then chosen with equal and independent probability for each group. Individual random sampling is the term for this method (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1994)

### *Research Instrument*

The author employed focus group interviews and a closed-ended questionnaire to collect data for this study. Focus groups, according to Creswell (2012), are advantageous because of their close relationships with their peers, students who are reluctant to join in 1:1 interviews could feel more at ease doing so. The students first participated in interview sessions to help the author define the issues and identify factors related to the research questions.

Based on Dörnyei & Taguchi's study (2010), 233 students were then randomly selected to complete a closed-ended survey using pre-written responses. While some of the study's questions were adapted from Alonazi's (2017), others were original inquiries based on the authors' prior research. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, each with 37 questions. The first section consisted of four questions that inquired about the participants' demographic data. The second half, which comprised 17 items, was designed to gather data on LA-benefiting aspects, while the third section, which integrated 16 items, was designed to gather data on LA-impeding aspects. The researchers used Likert scales. Thirty-three items are rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 denoting a lot of disagreement and five denoting high agreement.



### *Data Collection and Analysis Procedures*

Without providing any prior notice, the author of the current study requested permission from the Faculty of English Language to conduct the survey during break time (15 minutes). To begin, interviews within focus groups in English-majoring classrooms were performed in order to discover some relevant LA variables. In order to acquire qualified data, 18 students from 3 classes formed into three groups and were asked to join the focus groups. Some broad questions were posed, and responses were collected and recorded from all members of the group. The survey was then executed using 285 questionnaires that were carefully distributed to 8 classrooms. 233 of the 260 copies returned were valid and used, making up 82% of the copies initially distributed. The quantitative data from the surveys were processed using SPSS descriptive analysis, version 19. Descriptive statistics like Means and Standard Deviations were used to analyze the participant responses.

## **Findings of the Study**

### *Factors facilitating self-regulated learning among English-majored students*

#### *Findings from Focus Group Interview*

The discussion questions' purpose is to clarify internal and external elements that support improving the autonomy of English language learners.

When psychological factors are mentioned, participants first express a variety of viewpoints. *"I constantly want to attain good results in studying,"* student (S) 3 explained, *"therefore, I believe my learning process grows independent over time."* *" Because we are frequently under the strain of tests and exams,"* S4 added, *" our learning is self-directed."* Furthermore, the majority of participants claimed that the courses motivated them, as S6 put it: *" Preferring a specific subject allows us to devote more time and effort to studying it both in and out of class. " For instance, topics related to American Culture appeal to me a lot, so I spend time quite a lot of time reading them at home."*

Secondly, all students in the survey reported that they can now study anything, whenever, and anywhere they want, thanks to the assistance of computer and mobile applications, proving that learning styles and techniques have greatly improved LA. *" Interaction with teachers and friends via social media, messaging applications, and emails allows me to learn a lot,"* S5 emphasized. S18 agreed, *" The 'www' environment helps cover the gaps between spaces, and I can interact with my pals on the other side of the planet."*

In terms of accessible skills and knowledge, students who were interviewed admitted that their ability to utilize computers and electronic devices allowed them to become more independent in their studies. *"Electronic gadgets make my learning more practical, simple, and efficient...."* (S17); or *"...they support us in producing qualified learning results, for example, the reports became more appealing and eye-catching,"* according to one student (S16).

Likewise, participants in the interviews believed that their surroundings have an impact on LA's development. Many of them emphasized the significance of teachers in the process. S7, for instance, revealed: *" Teachers put a lot of pressure on us, so we have to study more at home*

*and in class to live up to their expectations and earn outstanding grades." Or S2 acknowledged: " Teachers with enthusiasm and good methodology, professor encourage us to study better." These teachers allegedly assigned projects on a regular basis, encouraged their students, and evaluated task fulfillment. S5 mentioned that he was motivated by teachers who thoroughly understand their students' needs and care about them and are also equipped with better learning and preparation. Additionally, family members are vital in LA's fostering process. For instance, S9 said, " My parents have shaped my learning habit from an early age, and I have been nurturing it throughout time." S13 affirmed, "That's quite similar to me. I am able to direct my own learning because of my older brother, who is now a successful entrepreneur. He has influenced and coached me greatly during my English learning journey since my first days at the university and has provided me with fantastic learning experiences. In terms of learning, my brother serves as a great role model for me."*

A few individuals also mentioned how using textbooks enables them to learn more outside of the classroom. S14 stated that some of their learning materials allowed them to study on their own time at home.

As S11 stated, " Libraries and self-study rooms fully equipped with modern facilities are preferable places to study than rental living spaces," It is believed that the learning surroundings substantially impact LA. "We study more effectively there because of the conducive learning environment."

All of these ideas work together to assist the study's author in creating variables that will answer the research question about what influences LA among students who major in English.

### *Conclusions from questionnaires*

A five-point Likert scale was used to create the survey. The scale is articulated from *1 equals Strongly disagree, two equals Disagree, 3 equals Neutral, four equals Agree, and five equals Strongly agree*. As a result, the data were interpreted using the following standards: Strongly disagree: 1.00-1.80, disagree: 1.81-2.60, neutral: 2.61-3.40, agree: 3.41-4.20, and strongly agree: 4.21-5.00. Table 1, which is listed below, displays the data that was gathered for the research question for 17 items.

Each item in this section has been adapted and designed using the information from focus group interviews and the factors influencing LA development described in section 3. The questionnaire covers five themes with regard to internal and external factors: (1) individual aspects (no.5-8), (2) learning styles and techniques (no.9-11), (3) teachers (no.12–15), (4) learning resources and tasks (no.16–17), and (5) situational aspects and the surroundings (no.18-21).



Table 1. Factors facilitating learning self-regulation

No	Statements:	N	Mean	St.D
	<i>I'm able to learn English on my own initiative because:</i>			
5	I am aware of how important English will be for my future career.	233	4.68	0.766
6	Extracurricular activities are enjoyable to me outside of the classroom.	233	3.57	0.951
7	I wish to improve my English learning outcomes.	233	4.65	0.649
8	I have enough confidence when learning learn English because of my vocabulary and grammar knowledge.	233	4.27	0.926
9	I have access to a variety of software programs and mobile apps to help me study English.	233	3.77	0.918
10	I have access to all of the materials (books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, CDs, and DVDs) provided by the university's library.	233	3.18	1.069
11	What interests me is how I can find and learn things on my own	233	3.62	0.978
12	My teachers offer suggestions for or provide me extra reading material.	233	3.83	0.846
13	My teachers advise me to seek the answers by myself	233	3.71	0.858
14	For any queries or inquiries, my teachers are there to help	233	3.94	0.717
15	My instructors are committed and passionate.	233	4.04	0.872
16	I got the chances to continue my research after class using my English course materials.	233	3.43	0.985
17	Thanks to workbook, I have many activities or assignments to complete.	233	3.37	0.951
18	I have access to audio-visual tools that will aid in my independent English learning.	233	3.68	0.988
19	Some of my family members enjoy the English language.	233	3.57	1.182
20	Many of my friends have a knack for learning English	233	4.01	0.964
21	I can join the English-language clubs at my university.	233	2.39	1.088

First, the findings in table 1 showed that psychological variables assisted LA the most in terms of internal components. For items 5, 7, 8, and 6,  $M = 4.68, 4.65, 4.27,$  and  $3.57,$  respectively, showed that the majority of participants acknowledged their contribution. It was believed that intrinsic motivations, such as a desire to study English and an understanding of the potential benefits of doing so., would help LA more than external factors (items 5 and 7). In addition, students' linguistic abilities are crucial in helping them feel more confident. More than 56% of survey participants agreed with this statement ( $M = 3.56$ ), demonstrating the beneficial impact of students' preferences for extracurricular activities outside of class. Additionally, over 65% of participants reported that their autonomy had increased thanks to the ability to use computer software and apply mobile applications in learning English, which is related to the influence of learning styles. Item 9 with  $M = 3.77$  demonstrates this.

Second, the survey showed that outside variables strategically aided students in developing greater self-reliance. Teachers were thought to have a significant good influence on LA's population. Findings from numerous question items serve as evidence of this. More than 76% of students responded to the survey's item 15 ( $M = 4.04$ ) with the statement that their teachers'

commitment and enthusiasm inspired them to learn. Additionally, encouraging students to ask questions or seek answers on their own gave them more opportunities to decide for themselves about learning-related matters and to guide their own learning (items 13 and 14, respectively demonstrate  $M = 3.71$  and  $3.94$ ). The survey also revealed that the sources of supplementary learning materials provided and/or suggested by teachers helped participants carry out their learning effectively (item 12, with  $M = 3.83$ ). The result also showed how influential connections like family and friends could be. This is shown by the answers to problems in items 19 and 20 with  $M = 3.57$  and  $4.1$ , respectively. When more than half of the respondents said that using course materials outside of the classroom had enhanced their learning (item 16, with  $M = 3.43$ ) it was clear that school learning resources and technological digital gadgets were additional external factors influencing the development of LA. They also said that having access to digital technology helped them learn more independently. (Item 18,  $M = 3.68$ )

Finally, the results showed that the responsibilities of the teachers and the students themselves had the greatest influence on the growth of LA. Additionally, it was believed that educational resources, acquaintances, and family members promoted LA.

#### *Factors impeding learning self-regulation*

##### *The conclusion from the Focus Group Interview*

The majority of participants agreed that the learner's attitude was the most crucial internal factor. Besides learning, there are other concerns that students face on a daily basis: part-time jobs, relationship issues, and so on. They may devote more time and effort to these than their schoolwork if they lack willpower. Participants acknowledged that their learning self-regulation might be hindered after spending a certain amount of time on such mental and physical activities. For instance, S8 wrote, "*After working two part-time jobs, I'm too exhausted and sleepy to continue studying, even if I know and want to.*"

Several participants, including S9, questioned the usefulness of learning resources with regard to external factors: "Some existing learning textbooks offer a lot of literary theory and knowledge but few self-study exercises." Consequently, students had trouble preparing for and reviewing lessons after accomplishing assignments. Some do, but S7 and S8 claimed the tasks were already created, and the students simply needed to put in a little amount of effort to find the answers. This leads to the fact that these books seem to be the reason that holds them back in terms of learning autonomy. When asked about the methods of instruction, S8 added, "*There have been times when I think that my teachers have tried to 'feed' me more information than I can process. They should give me some space or time to digest and/or work it out on my own, if possible. They may become lazy and refuse to learn more because they are aware that teachers will, in any case, provide them with the keys later.*"

##### *Conclusions from questionnaires*

The author used the same questionnaire design in the prior research area, in which a five-point Likert scale is used ranging from 1 to 5, corresponding from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. Additionally, the standards for data interpretation are the same: Strongly disagree: 1.00-1.80, disagree: 1.81-2.60, neutral: 2.61-3.40, agree: 3.41-4.20, and strongly agree: 4.21-5.00. Collected data for 16 items from the research question was demonstrated in table 2 below

Table 2. Factors impeding learning self-regulation

No.	Statements	N	Mean	St.D
	<i>I'm unable to learn English on my own because:</i>			
22	I lose my confidence when it comes to self-learning	233	2.95	1.286
23	When studying alone, I cannot comprehend the knowledge	233	3.01	1.136
24	I find it difficult to speak English with my teachers, friends, and foreigners because I am shy	233	3.91	0.888
25	After class, I am not sure of what to learn more	233	3.80	0.985
26	I struggle with English	233	2.50	1.198
27	I have no idea which method is good for learning English	233	2.98	1.166
28	For the year and each semester, I find it difficult to set my learning goals	233	2.96	1.139
29	My learning techniques may not be as effective as others'.	233	3.75	1.069
30	I'm having trouble deciding which study methods are best for learning English.	233	3.20	1.092
31	Everything is explained in class by my teachers.	233	3.59	1.077
32	My teacher gives the exact answers to all questions and exercises in the course books	233	3.71	1.029
33	Some reading and listening tasks in my course book are beyond my comprehension.	233	3.61	1.022
34	The course book covers a lot of information that are not authentic or outdated.	233	3.47	1.071
35	There aren't many assignments in my course books that motivate me to use my critical thinking skills or learn more.	233	3.78	0.991
36	There are not enough English-language books in my university's library.	233	3.13	1.085
37	I can't find any native English speakers in my neighborhood to practice speaking English with	233	3.55	1.204

Similar to the items in the previous section, all questions in this section were modified and created in light of the results of focus group interviews and section 3's theory of the barriers to LA's development. The following are the internal and external elements that have been questioned: (1) psychological factors (no.22–24), (2) skills and learning awareness, (3) learning styles and techniques, (4) teachers, (5) learning resources and activities, (no.33–35), and (6) environmental factors (no.36-37).

Ultimately, the results revealed that English-majored students were less likely to develop LA due to the fact that they did not acquire enough learning awareness before, therefore affecting their level of efficacy. Furthermore, inadequate learning methods, teachers' roles, and learning resources also contribute to this. The frequency of these responses is shown in Table 3 for your reference.

Table 3. Frequency of items

Items	Frequency (percent)				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Item 24	5 (2.2)	4 (1.8)	62 (26.7)	100 (42.8)	62 (26.7)
Item 25	2 (0.8)	33 (14.3)	31 (13.4)	113 (48.6)	54 (23.3)
Item 29	13 (5.7)	26 (11.3)	14 (6.1)	135 (57.8)	45 (19.4)
Item 31	3 (1.4)	55 (23.7)	21 (9.1)	112 (48.2)	42 (18.1)
Item 32	2 (0.8)	42 (18.1)	31 (13.4)	108 (46.5)	50 (21.6)
Item 33	12 (5.3)	32 (13.8)	19 (8.3)	145 (62.3)	25 (10.8)
Item 34	10 (4.4)	36 (15.6)	62 (26.7)	87 (37.4)	38 (16.4)
Item 35	0 (0)	38 (16.4)	33 (14.3)	107 (45.8)	55 (23.7)

The internal factor that LA struggled with the most was considered to be learning styles in the first place. The data collected showed that more than 77% of participants had trouble identifying the right learning styles, which prevented them from becoming autonomous. Additionally, data from item 25 corresponding to  $M = 3.80$  also showed that 72% of participants thought it was challenging to learn independently since they were unsure what to learn at home without guidance. Some students in the survey also disclosed that their discomfort while conversing in English with teachers, friends, and foreigners had a detrimental impact on their ability to study independently. This is demonstrated by the fact that more than 69 percent of respondents are in agreement with the statement in item 24. The main external factor obstructing LA was recognized by 73% of students as being the learning materials. The students admitted that when they are out of the classroom, it is more difficult to decide what to study when they do not grasp some reading and listening texts. With  $M = 3.61$ , this is demonstrated in item 33. Additionally, with regard to item 34 corresponding to  $M = 3.47$ , more than 54% of the students who were asked the question feel that access to learning resources that contain outdated information prevents them from becoming autonomous. The activities in course books were also an issue that more than three-fifths of the students in the survey brought up. Since there were few important activities in the course books that required students to dig deeper or do more research outside of class, the output of item 35,  $M = 3.78$ , suggested that students lacked the drive to work autonomously. The teachers and their methods of instruction were cited as another obstacle to LA. The results of items 31 and 32, with  $M$  values of 3.98 and 3.71, respectively, demonstrated that teachers' role in developing LA is not always positive in which 70% of the respondents replied that their LA was not improved by instructors' actions of providing thorough explanations and answers to nearly all questions.

## Discussion

### *Factors Facilitating English-majored Students' Autonomous Learning*

The findings indicate that both internal and external aspects significantly influence the development of learning self-regulation among English majors at VLU.

Regarding internal factors, the findings revealed that LA was promoted by students' aspirations for high academic achievement as well as their understanding of the value of English in their

future employment. This kind of drive is innate. As a result, it is similar to what numerous researchers indicated. For instance, as stated by Dickinson (1992), autonomy may be a result of motivation or a pre-condition for it.

Second, LA has been demonstrated to benefit from learners' preferred methods of learning. The result is somewhat consistent with Qin's opinions (2016). According to Qui's research, learners, who are interested in a subject for a while, adopt positive attitudes toward learning. As a result, the subject would receive more focus, and a learning objective would be set. This is a requirement for the growth of LA.

Thirdly, it also highlighted how helpful language competence is. This outcome is consistent with Tran and Duong's (2010), and Balçikanlı's (2010) 's finding. They came to the conclusion that students become more independent the more knowledge, awareness, and learning abilities they have. For instance, students comfortable with English grammar and vocabulary will feel more confident in their capacity to study both in and outside the classroom.

Students at VLU can plan, think through, monitor, and assess their own learning thanks to opportunities to use technological advancements in their English learning. They can also establish their own target in the learning process and use efficient methods to accomplish it. Last but not least, their learning preferences determine the development of students' LA. These suggest the use of metacognitive techniques, which is in line with the idea of contributors to LA by Leaver et al. (2005) and Çakıcı (2015). Additionally, being able to discover knowledge on their own also points out the constructivism in students themselves when it comes to learning strategies. In this way, they can build up their prior knowledge to produce new knowledge. The results appear to align with Begum and Chowdhury (2015).

The instructors have been the most crucial external factors. LA was considered to be promoted by actions like proposing or giving students further reading resources, encouraging them to come to their own conclusions, welcoming any questions or inquiries, etc. Similar findings have been made by Kemala (2016). Kemala (2016) believed that providing students more freedom to select or use their own learning strategies would be advantageous. Alonazi (2017) also agreed with the previous statement in which he found that teachers act as supervisors, resources, counselors, and facilitators in autonomous language classes. The second critical factor is the tasks and instructional materials. Based on the results, the more opportunities the learning materials gave them to discover outside of the classroom setting, the more LA can be enhanced. This is in line with Harmer's (2007) and Kemala (2016)'s hypotheses. They stated that engaging, fascinating, and difficult tasks would encourage students to work both alone and collaboratively.

The people around the students have an impact on LA as well. The students who responded to the survey acknowledged that they are inspired by family members and friends who speak English well. This is called the social context, which helps develop an environment where students can interact with others, as Dang (2010) emphasized.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that a variety of internal and external factors influence learner autonomy. Several individual factors, including extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, language ability, learning preferences, and learning styles, impact the promotion of LA. On the

other side, in addition to family and friends, there are outside factors like teachers, tasks, and learning materials.

### *Factors Impeding English-majored Students' Autonomous Learning*

Being unaware of what is to be learned outside of the English classroom is the first internal issue listed as contributing to LA's poor performance. This outcome is comparable to what Balçikanlı (2010) claimed, namely that a lack of learning abilities and knowledge caused low performance of autonomous learning. The demographic information gathered revealed that the majority of participants studied outside of class for no more than four hours each day, supporting this claim. This finding aligns with Zeng and Liu's (2014) finding of how knowledge can positively impact the growth of LA, which indicates that students become more autonomous after they have the necessary knowledge, awareness, and learning skills.

Student self-efficacy has been noted as the second aspect that hinders LA. Students won't be able to hold a conversation, chat, or speak up since they won't be confident in their ability to do so in English. Wenden (1998) noted that this condition had been shown to hinder students' academic achievement since they may not put the necessary amount of time and effort into their studies. Therefore, it is believed that a lack of self-efficacy may cause low learner autonomy performance. Furthermore, according to an analysis of the data by Mansooji & Javid (2022), all teachers recognize the importance of encouraging learner autonomy in EFL lessons. Quantitative data, however, show a statistically significant gap between what people believe and what they do in reality. The qualitative data also supports the existence of this discrepancy and points to passive learning habits, a lack of enthusiasm, and the strain that the expectations of the classroom put on the teachers as potential causes.

Teachers are observed to have the responsibility for this. The questionnaire results indicated that teachers tend to explain everything in class and respond to nearly all of the activities and quizzes are given in the textbooks. In a focus group interview, students reported that their teachers thoroughly explained and gave answer keys for a vocabulary or grammatical exercises. These behaviors cause students to become less independent and more likely to wait for teachers to explain things. This concept of positivist learning is considered to stop LA from developing (Begum & Chowdhury, 2015). Last but not least, learning resources are also the key factor that impedes the process of LA. This is problematic for students since there are few options for them to continue learning and exploring after school, and the majority of learning materials are irrelevant and contain outdated information. The findings are consistent with Kemala (2006) conclusion, who emphasized that students cannot be motivated to study by challenging or tedious assignments. According to Tomlinson (2012, p. 143), English resources given by the university only "focus on informing their users about language features and on guiding them to practice these features" rather than expanding further issues of the topics. This is in total contrast with the idea of self-discovery since it is the most vital quality that promotes LA. Moreover, Tran and Duong (2018) assert that children will never acquire autonomous learning once they begin to question the value of the learning resources.



## Conclusion

### *Summary of the results*

In summary, our study found a variety of characteristics that both enhance and hinder autonomous English acquisition among VLU English majors. It has been discovered that students' internal drive, language competency, learning preferences, learning styles, and learning techniques are positive internal influences. Instructors, instructional materials, and the people in one's immediate environment, including family and friends, have all been mentioned as variables that can support LA.

Individual aspects such as students' poor language awareness and learning abilities, inappropriate learning strategies, and low self-efficacy levels were also identified as barriers to autonomous learning. It has been demonstrated that teachers and instructional materials negatively impact LA in relation to external factors.

### *Pedagogical Implications*

#### *Implications for Teachers*

The factors that affect LA among English-major students have been identified, and it is advised that teachers change their pedagogical strategies to provide students with more opportunities to decide, solve problems, and learn things on their own. Additionally, teachers significantly impact students' motivation and self-confidence, which is essential for improved autonomous learning. In addition, regardless of their course books, teachers are encouraged to be creative in their teaching adaptations or adjustments to stimulate students to learn English.

#### *Implications for Students*

It is highly recommended that students create their own target and methods in the journey of learning English. Therefore, they are encouraged to establish adequate learning objectives and create suitable ESL learning methodologies. It is also advised that modern technology usage be improved to develop a self-sufficient learning environment.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

It is inevitable that this study will have constraints. First of all, there weren't enough class observations to assess and take into account the association with survey results. Second, the author of this study failed to consider other English teachers' viewpoints. As a result, many adjustments are anticipated to be made in the future for improved research. The research instrument would undergo the first alteration. In order to add more information for discussion, it is vital to include class observations. Future studies should also broaden the sample size to include students with diverse majors. Teachers should also be involved in the study of their variety of viewpoints.

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