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Non-English major students' perceptions of aspects of their autonomous language learning

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Abstract: The study investigated the perceptions among non-English major students of autonomous language learning (ALL) of their responsibilities, ability to act autonomously, motivation to learn English, and autonomous activities within and outside of class. The data were collected using questionnaires and follow-up interviews. Nearly 300 students at a university in Hanoi, Vietnam, participated, 11 of whom were later interviewed. The analysis suggested that students preferred shared responsibilities. They were relatively confident in their abilities to act autonomously and were moderately to highly motivated to learn English. Nevertheless, ALL activities were conducted only on an irregular basis. Our results indicated that gender did not affect the implementation of ALL. The more motivated the students, the more frequently they practiced ALL activities. A relatively strong positive correlation was observed between self-perceived ALL abilities and activities. Some pedagogical implications were also extracted.

Keywords: autonomous language learning; learner autonomy; non-English major students; perceptions; responsibility

1 Introduction

The concept of learner autonomy (LA) in English language teaching (ELT) is of significant interest for researchers, educators, and practitioners in language education. This interest is reflected in the increase in the number of academic publications reporting developments in this field. In part, because of its roots in Western countries, LA was originally deemed unsuitable for Asian countries, such as Vietnam (Pennycook 2013). However, LA has been accepted and adopted by learners from a range of sociocultural backgrounds (Humphreys and Wyatt 2014;

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Nguyen 2009). The Vietnamese case may not ultimately be an exception to this trend.

Students who enter Higher Education in Vietnam tend to be dependent on their teachers for learning materials and input throughout high school (Nguyen and Hoang 2010) and are accustomed to such modes of instruction when they enter university. Consequently, it is more challenging to promote LA at universities where lecturers receive little support but are required to achieve institutional goals (Humphreys and Wyatt 2014). It is widely accepted that fostering LA among non-English majors is difficult (Le 2017; Trinh and Mai 2018). Moreover, the credit-based system used in Vietnamese Higher Education requires increased LA from students (Tran 2019), so LA “has been endorsed to be included in English language education from the policy level” (Bui 2018: 161). Nevertheless, LA has not received systematic attention with regard to its theory and practice, there have been few studies on autonomous language learning (ALL), and those that have been conducted focus on teachers and English-major students (e.g., Dang 2012; Le 2013; Nguyen 2009; Tran 2019). Studies of ALL among non-English major students are scarce. To address this gap, this study investigates ALL in non-English major students in Vietnamese Higher Education, observing several aspects of LA, including perceptions of responsibility, decision-making abilities, motivation level, and ALL activities. The study seeks to deduce rigorously the implications of ALL for ELT.

2 Theoretical background

LA has been an important topic in ELT for nearly four decades. It is considered to be the most essential component of a successful language learning process (LLP) (Farrell and Jacobs 2010) and an important educational goal in English as a foreign language (EFL) (Teng 2019).

LA is widely recognized as having “a myriad of different meanings” (Oxford 2008: 42). However, scholars usually begin discussion of LA with Holec’s (1981) definition, which is considered a “useful starting point for closer scrutiny of the concept” (Hamilton 2013: 17). In his report, Holec (1981: 3) wrote that LA is the “ability to take charge of one’s own learning ... to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning”. Accordingly, an autonomous learner is someone who is capable of the following:

- determining objectives
- defining content and progression
- selecting methods and techniques

- monitoring acquisition of proper speaking (e.g., rhythm, time, and place)
- evaluating acquired knowledge

(Holec 1981: 3)

This definition, which characterizes the capacity to make decisions about one's own learning, is the emphasis for many other definitions of LA in ELT. The instruments used in this study are adopted to investigate the ability to act autonomously.

The conceptualization and definition of LA have been expanded considering additional components. For instance, responsibility and decision-making became popular, such as to be considered “the flavor of the month” in the 1980s (Hsu 2005: 13). In the 1990s, willingness and capacity became understood as crucial components that must be considered for the development of LA (Hsu 2005; Le 2013). Thus, investigating learners' willingness particularly and readiness generally for autonomous learning indicates the critical role that educators can play in promoting LA among students (Le 2013; Ming and Alias 2007). First, learners are expected to develop awareness of the roles that students and teachers should play because learners' perceptions of these roles may exert an important influence on their exercise of LA in class and outside of it and their preparedness to learn English autonomously. Many studies, including Chan et al. (2002), Le (2013), and Mousavi Arfae (2017), provide support for this point. Students who consider that teachers facilitate their learning are ready for autonomous learning. On the other hand, those who think of their teachers as the dominant figures in their learning and who expect to be told what to do, to receive help, and to have everything explained are not ready. Hence, an expectation of teacher authority can prevent teachers from transferring responsibility to their students (Chan et al. 2002; Gan 2009). Thus, learners' beliefs about their own role and that of their teacher will greatly contribute to their willingness/readiness for LA (Nguyen and Habók 2020, 2021).

Second, learners are expected to be motivated (Nguyen and Habók 2020, 2021). An increase in motivation is conducive to the development of LA (Hsu 2005), since motivation is essential to promoting autonomous learning (Benson 2007). Previous studies have found that motivation is a precursor of LA (Chan et al. 2002; Hsu 2005; Le 2013; Nguyen and Habók 2020). Therefore, this study explores learners' perceptions of roles and motivation levels.

Another point of interest is that students' actual activities, whether in class or outside of it, can be understood as ALL behaviors (Chan et al. 2002; Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee 2017). Hence, this study considers the nature of ordinary ALL activities as reported by students and examines whether students' abilities and motivations can necessarily be translated into actual behaviors.

3 Empirical background

There have been many theoretical and empirical studies of LA in language learning in general, but this section only examines work on non-English majors' ALL to provide a comprehensive overview of the research problem and elucidate how the present study contributes to the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to identify the relevance of the review. The studies reviewed are journal articles in English from 2000 to the present on the subject of EFL at tertiary level. The literature search uses the keywords *perceptions of responsibilities*, *autonomous language learning abilities*, *autonomous language learning activities*, and *learner autonomy*. All publication journals are indexed in either *SCOPUS* or *SCIMAGO Journal & Country Rank*. The search is performed on *SCOPUS*, *Science Direct*, *Google Scholar*, *ERIC*, and *JSTOR*. This search produces six studies that fulfill the above-mentioned criteria (Table 1).

Chan (2001) investigated a small group of learners and observed their attitudes and perceptions in language learning, their roles as learners, perceptions of LA, and learning preferences. The findings indicated that students demonstrated positive attitudes toward LA and were deemed autonomous to a certain extent because they displayed clear learning objectives, preferences, expectations, and a desire to be involved in an LLP.

Chan et al. (2002) examined the perceptions of undergraduates in Hong Kong regarding their responsibilities, ability to act autonomously, motivation level, and

Table 1: Brief review of previous studies.

References	Context	Participants (<i>n</i>)	Instruments
Chan (2001)	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Second-year language majors (<i>n</i> = 20)	Questionnaire survey and interviews
Chan et al. (2002)	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Undergraduates (<i>n</i> = 508)	Questionnaire and interviews
Abdel Razeq (2014)	Birzeit University, Palestine	First-year English-major students (<i>n</i> = 140)	Questionnaire (adapted from Chan et al. 2002)
Alrabai (2017)	Saudi Arabia	EFL learners (from intermediate schools to universities; <i>n</i> = 319)	Questionnaire
Lin and Reinders (2019)	Seven universities in Anhui, China	First-year students (<i>n</i> = 668)	Two questionnaires (close- and open-ended questions)
Şenbayrak et al. (2019)	A state university in Ankara, Turkey	EFL learners in preparatory language courses (<i>n</i> = 250)	Questionnaire

ALL activities. The students' responses illustrated a well-defined view of their roles, which demonstrated a preference for the teacher to have a dominant role. Additionally, the students appeared to be generally confident in their own decision-making abilities. They reported relatively high motivation levels, but these levels did not seem to be equivalent to the frequency of their performance of ALL activities.

In the Palestinian context, Abdel Razeq (2014) examined university students' perceptions of aspects of ALL. He found that learners attributed success or failure in learning English to the teacher, although he also believed that they were capable of autonomous learning. The statistics indicated a difference in the practice of ALL activities. Nevertheless, no significant difference in the students' perceptions of their abilities was noted between genders and/or across levels of achievement.

Alrabai (2017) found that Saudi EFL learners had low levels of readiness for LA. The students perceived moderate to high motivation levels and decision-making ability but low levels of independence, responsibility, and involvement in ALL activities.

Lin and Reinders (2019) argued that students appeared to be psychologically ready but not technically or behaviorally prepared for ALL. Specifically, they reported positive perceptions of their roles but a lower level of readiness for autonomous ability and behavior. In other words, their behavioral readiness for LA was lower than their psychological and technical readiness. Interestingly, the study identified a gap between the beliefs and actual practices of learners. Şenbayrak et al. (2019) pointed out that the participants considered teachers to be the dominant figures in their LLP. Additionally, the perceived levels of decision-making ability among the students were above average, with relatively high motivation levels. Furthermore, the students adopted metacognitive strategies to enhance their English skills. In summary, the students were considered to be ready for LA despite their inclination to accept the authority of the teacher.

This study draws three themes from the studies examined. First, all the studies used questionnaires, most of which were adapted from Chan et al. (2002). Other studies also elaborated on the findings with the support of interview data. This point laid the methodological basis for the present study. Second, there was little consistency in the results of these studies, particularly regarding the relationships between aspects of ALL and variables such as gender. The variations in the findings are subject to the differing sociocultural contexts, individual differences, and various levels of experiences among learners. However, all the studies contributed to the call for promoting LA in ELT. Third, the studies emphasized the importance of students' readiness for LA in relation to pedagogy and curriculum planning. Moreover, they investigated learner perception regarding ALL from a wide range of mainly Asian contexts, including Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, and China.

However, the topic has been under-researched in the Vietnamese context; thus, this study is intended to address the above-mentioned gaps and help develop an overview of the topic in the Asian context. In summary, the present study investigates the following research questions:

- (1) How do students perceive the division of responsibility between teacher and students regarding ALL?
- (2) How do students view their own decision-making abilities in relation to learning English?
- (3) How do students view their own motivation level to learn English?
- (4) What ALL activities do students conduct in and outside of class?
- (5) Does student gender influence students' perceptions of their own responsibility, ability to act autonomously, and ALL activities?
- (6) Does a relationship exist between motivation level and learning activities on the one hand and autonomous learning abilities and learning activities on the other?

4 Methods

4.1 Context and participants

This study was conducted at a large public technical university in Hanoi, Vietnam. In 2016, this university became one of the first in Hanoi to implement blended learning in EFL education. The two key components of EFL courses here are traditional face-to-face instruction and online instruction or learning (Hrastinski 2019). The blended learning approach provides learners with access to rich resources, accommodates reflective learning, develops independent study skills, and improves learning outcomes (Hoang 2015). The university staff designed language courses in the form of blended learning and cultivated an integration of general English and English for career purposes. For example, students majoring in electronic and electrical engineering (EEE) used a coursebook entitled *English for EEE*, whereas students with a major in tourism worked with *English for Tourism*. The EFL content differs by major, but the course formats are similar. Students are required to attend four face-to-face lessons per week focusing on improving speaking skills and to complete online sessions working on grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, listening, reading, and writing. The in class lessons and online components cover the same topics in each unit.

The target population of the study was first- and second-year non-English major students learning English as part of an overall degree. They had finished at least one semester of English language Higher Education and therefore were

Table 2: Participants in this study.

Total number	Year of study		Majors				Gender		English level
	1st	2nd	EEE	IT	ME	COM	Male	Female	
276	158 (57.2%)	118 (42.8%)	154 (55.8%)	57 (20.7%)	58 (21%)	7 (2.5%)	248 (89.9%)	28 (10.1%)	A1–A2 in CEFR

IT = information technology; ME = mechanical engineering; COM = commerce; CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference.

familiar with language learning at the university level. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic restricted the researchers to recruiting the participants on the basis of convenience sampling. Table 2 presents the information of the participants.

The students reported allotting an average of 4.7 h per week to learning English outside class.

4.2 Instruments

Two instruments were applied to gather data to answer the above-mentioned research questions, namely, an adapted questionnaire survey and a follow-up interview. The questionnaire was adapted from Chan et al. (2002) to suit the Vietnamese sociocultural context. The follow-up interview questions developed by the researchers in this study were formulated using the components of the survey, including responsibilities, autonomous learning abilities, motivation, and learning activities.

The survey component was used to investigate EFL students' perceptions of several aspects of ALL. We made the following changes to the original questionnaire. The questions on students' background information were moved to the end of the survey. Section 1, regarding responsibilities, adds two more options referring to *both teacher and student* and *no idea* so that students could choose what best reflected their viewpoint. We did not use two items from the original version regarding *choosing materials* and *evaluating the course* because the prescribed curriculum in our university context did not enable students to select their own learning materials or provide course evaluations. The other items were not changed in terms of content but were paraphrased and shortened. For example, *deciding how long to spend on each activity in class* was changed into *deciding on a timeframe for each activity in class*. Section 2, regarding the ability to act autonomously, and Section 3, regarding motivation level, are the same as in the original survey. Section 4, discussing ALL activities, adds four items on *planning your*

study, taking notes, summarizing lessons, and using external resources, but we merged the relevant items into new ones. For example, *read English notices around you, read newspapers in English, read books or magazines in English*, and *collected texts in English (e.g., articles, brochures, and labels)* were turned into one item entitled *finishing reading material in English*. Our version of the questionnaire consisted of five parts with a total of 45 questions (Appendix): (a) participants' perceptions of teacher and student responsibilities in EFL (11 questions), (b) learners' self-perceived ALL ability (13 questions), (c) motivation level to learn English (one question), (d) frequencies of ALL practices (17 questions), and (e) students' demographic information (three questions). The students responded to the questionnaire on a Likert scale to reflect their ALL process. The researchers then applied back translation to translate from English to Vietnamese and facilitate the participants' understanding (for more, see Behr 2017).

Semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted to elicit additional information regarding students' perspectives on the issues raised in the survey. Interpreting the quantitative data using the detailed descriptive information obtained from the participants in interviews enabled the researchers to "explain or build upon initial quantitative results" (Creswell and Clark 2007: 71). The main interview questions included the following. (1) What responsibilities do you have in an EFL class, and what responsibilities does your teacher have? Which aspects identified in the survey are you and your teacher responsible for? (2) What is your ability to act autonomously in the aspects mentioned in the survey? (3) How motivated are you to learn English? (4) Which English learning activities do you prefer to show your LA? How often do you participate in those activities?

4.3 Data collection and analysis

This study was conducted with ethical approval from the researchers' university, permission from the administration of the participating university, and the informed consent of the participants. Data collection lasted nearly 2 months from May 2020 to mid-June 2020. The questionnaires were administered online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a total of 290 students provided responses, of which 276 were valid questionnaires and were utilized, while 14 were discarded, for an approximate valid response rate of 95.2%. Using the questionnaire data and on a random basis, 30 students who provided their email addresses, accounting for over 10% of the total questionnaire respondents, were emailed and invited to participate in Zoom follow-up interviews, of whom 11 agreed. The interviews were conducted in the interviewees' native language (Vietnamese) and recorded with their consent. Other questions were posed as the students responded to the main

questions dependent on the conditions of the given interview, which lasted approximately 30 min in each case.

Data from 276 valid questionnaires were coded and encoded into SPSS version 24. Initial analyses showed that the questionnaire had an excellent level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.935$) (Taber 2018) and adequate validity (KMO = 0.919, $\chi^2 = 7,618.66$, d.f. = 861, $p < 0.001$, total variance extracted = 55.6%). The statistics included the means (M) and standard deviations (SD), independent-sample t -tests, Pearson's correlations, and ANOVA. These statistical analyses allowed the researchers to evaluate the questionnaire's results, examine trends, and determine any relationships or differences between the samples and variables.

Students' answers in the interviews helped interpret the questionnaire's results to obtain an improved understanding of the responses. Data from the interviews were transcribed and translated into English before coding. The students' names were not provided or recorded, to ensure anonymity, but the students were assigned codes, from S1 to S11, to enable cross-reference. The researchers then employed thematic content analysis to observe the themes that emerged from the data and matched them with the equivalent research questions. For example, the interviewees discussed the activities they carried out to study English at home, including activities related to ALL. These statements were coded as autonomous activities and were used to provide an answer to the sixth research question.

5 Findings

5.1 Students' perceptions of responsibilities in language learning

As indicated in Table 3, the first part of the questionnaire survey elucidated students' perceptions of their responsibilities and their teacher's role in LLP.

Obviously, some students did not know how to assign certain responsibilities in all aspects of LLP. However, nearly 90% of respondents considered that they had at least some responsibility for making progress outside of class, and approximately 60% of the respondents considered that the teacher should be responsible for evaluating the students' learning. More than half of the students perceived the existence of shared responsibilities in students' progress during lessons, students' interest in learning English, hard work among students, and learning goals in English courses. For certain pedagogical activities, such as deciding on class activities for learning, establishing the content of the lessons and the timeframe to be

Table 3: Students' perceptions of English teachers' and students' responsibilities in % ($N = 276$).

	Teacher	Student	Teacher and student	No idea
1. Students' progress during lessons	3.3	7.2	87.3	2.2
2. Students' progress outside class	2.9	65.9	27.5	3.6
3. Students' interest in learning English	24.3	11.6	59.8	4.3
4. Students' working harder	10.5	34.1	52.2	3.3
5. Identifying students' weaknesses in English	19.9	26.1	45.7	8.3
6. Setting learning goals for students in the English course	14.9	31.5	50.4	3.3
7. Establishing concepts for learning in English lessons	46.4	7.6	43.1	2.9
8. Selecting educational activities for English learning in lessons	40.2	9.4	47.8	2.5
9. Deciding on a timeframe for each activity in class	47.1	9.1	40.9	2.9
10. Evaluating students' learning	57.2	7.2	33.3	2.2
11. Deciding what students learn outside class	16.7	38.8	40.2	4.3

allotted for each activity, the respondents tended to attribute these responsibilities to the teacher.

Several noteworthy points emerged from the follow-up interviews in support of the results. First, all participants considered that their own personal endeavors determined their progress, as one of them stated that “no one but me can make progress in learning English” (S4). Second, the interviewees (91%) considered that learning materials, class activities, length of activities, and student evaluations should be considered teachers' work because “the syllabus was already prescribed by the leaders, and students have to follow it to achieve its objectives” (S2). Third, most students interviewed (9 out of 11) highly valued shared responsibilities as a means of facilitating students' success in language learning. Specifically, the students were relatively aware of their main roles. However, the teachers helped stimulate the students' interest by encouraging them to work hard or by helping them set goals because they had “low English proficiency as a result of poor language education in high school” (S7).

5.2 Students' views of their autonomous learning abilities

This part of the questionnaire indicated how students rated their ability in making decisions regarding their activities in the ALL process. As shown in Table 4, a

Table 4: Students' perceptions of their abilities in autonomous learning ($N = 276$).

	Very poor and Poor (%)	OK (%)	Good and very good (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
12. Choose learning activities in class	19.9	56.2	23.9	3.1	0.84
13. Choose learning activities outside class	32.6	48.2	19.2	2.88	0.89
14. Choose learning objectives in class	18.4	54.0	27.6	3.14	0.83
15. Choose learning objectives outside class	30.4	46.4	23.2	2.97	0.92
16. Choose learning materials in class	18.4	52.2	29.4	3.16	0.91
17. Choose learning materials outside class	30.8	45.7	23.5	2.95	0.95
18. Evaluate your learning	31.2	46.7	22.1	2.92	0.90
19. Identify your weaknesses in English	27.5	51.1	21.4	2.96	0.87
20. Decide the next content of the English lessons	25.7	52.5	21.8	2.98	0.87
21. Decide on the timeframe for each activity in class	31.5	43.8	24.7	2.94	0.92
22. Plan your learning	35.8	42.8	21.4	2.84	0.94
23. Evaluate the course	17.4	50.4	32.2	3.2	0.88
24. Set learning goals	24.3	46.0	29.7	3.1	0.91

Very poor = 1; poor = 2; OK = 3; good = 4; very good = 5.

significantly higher percentage of responses are clustered under the OK category than under other categories. Students tended to rate their abilities as average, indicating a positive self-rating of their ability to carry out activities. The respondents considered themselves autonomous in learning because they could evaluate their course ($M = 3.2$), select their own learning materials in class ($M = 3.16$), set their own learning objectives in class ($M = 3.14$), set learning goals ($M = 3.1$), and select their own learning activities in class ($M = 3.1$). Nevertheless, the participants reported that they had little ability in planning and evaluating their learning, selecting learning activities, objectives, or materials outside of class, or setting the timeframe for activities. For the remainder of the activities, the students self-reported moderate abilities.

The interview data enabled an interpretation of the survey results. Of the 11 interviewees, seven expressed that they would be able to set goals and choose learning objectives, materials, or activities in class if allowed. One student expressed the view that “I totally can do these things if my teacher lets me do them. Among available choices offered by my teacher, I can easily select what I think is suitable or what I prefer” (S3). All interviewed participants shared a similar viewpoint, that is, that formulating a learning plan and selecting materials or activities outside class was challenging. They “did not know which sources to refer to and whether those

sources were reliable or not” (S9), and, importantly, they lacked “training or guidance in doing these activities. The focus of English courses was on knowledge and language skills, rather than study skills” (S5). Six students shared the opinion that choices were given to them for certain aspects, such as what sections in each unit should be learned, which objectives to achieve, and which activities to do. Nevertheless, the teacher made the final decision, informed by the choices of the majority. These students reported feeling satisfied and respected.

5.3 Students’ perception of their motivation level

The third part of the survey requested the respondents’ motivation level as EFL learners. They produced a comprehensive picture in which a majority (69.2%) of them perceived themselves to be *motivated* (54.7%) or *highly motivated* (14.5%) to learn English. Nevertheless, others reported that they were *moderately motivated* (27.5%), and the fact that only a small percentage of students felt *not at all motivated* to learn English (3.3%) was encouraging.

The follow-up interview data were consistent with these results. More than half of the interviewees (63.6%) indicated that they had a high motivation level to learn the English language due to its importance to their future career prospects and ability to communicate with foreigners. One interviewee said, “I am highly motivated to learn English. I know it is necessary for my future job promotion and probably my study abroad” (S11). Four other students indicated that they were relatively motivated to learn English to satisfy the minimum requirements of the university and their future employers.

5.4 Students’ English language learning activities inside and outside class

In the last part of the survey, the participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they conducted several ALL activities. Table 5 demonstrates the frequency of each activity.

The top activities of the students were as follows:

- listening to English songs ($M = 3.28$; 86.9%; *sometimes* and *often*)
- taking note while studying ($M = 3.10$; 79.7%; *sometimes* and *often*)
- writing down new words and their meanings ($M = 3.09$; 79.7%; *sometimes* and *often*)
- engaging in group studies in English lessons ($M = 3.00$; 78.9%; *sometimes* and *often*)

Table 5: Frequency of students' practice of ALL activities ($N = 276$).

	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
26. Completing non-compulsory assignments in English	6.5	18.8	60.9	13.8	2.82	0.75
27. Writing down new words and their meanings	4.3	15.9	46.4	33.3	3.09	0.81
28. Finishing a reading material in English	8.3	31.2	40.9	19.6	2.72	0.87
29. Visiting teachers to inquire about tasks related to learning English	11.6	44.9	33.3	10.1	2.42	0.83
30. Watching English programs	8.3	22.8	45.3	23.6	2.84	0.88
31. Listening to English songs	2.9	10.1	43.1	43.8	3.28	0.76
32. Practicing conversational English with friends	5.8	33.3	48.9	12.0	2.67	0.76
33. Conversing with foreigners in English	38.8	33	21.7	6.5	1.96	0.93
34. Engaging in group studies in English lessons	5.4	15.6	52.5	26.4	3.00	0.80
35. Asking the teacher questions when you do not understand	5.8	27.2	46.7	20.3	2.82	0.82
36. Making suggestions to the English teacher	17.8	34.1	38.0	10.1	2.41	0.90
37. Planning your lesson/study	4.7	28.3	45.3	21.7	2.84	0.82
38. Taking notes while studying	4.3	15.9	45.3	34.4	3.10	0.82
39. Summarizing lessons while studying	6.5	32.6	41.7	19.2	2.74	0.84
40. Using external resources while studying	8.3	26.8	42.4	22.5	2.79	0.89
41. Discussing learning problems with classmates	5.1	27.5	48.2	19.2	2.82	0.80
42. Taking opportunities to speak in English inside the classroom	10.5	35.5	38.0	15.9	2.59	0.88

The low-frequency activities included

- talking to foreigners in English ($M = 1.96$; 71.8% *never* and *rarely*)
- suggesting something to the English teacher ($M = 2.41$; 51.9% *never* and *rarely*)
- asking the teacher about English tasks ($M = 2.42$; 56.5% *never* and *rarely*)

The percentages for “rarely” were relatively high for other activities.

The interview data corroborated these results. The interviewees reported that their most frequent activities were listening to English songs, working in groups during English lessons, and writing down new words and their meanings, and the

least commonly pursued activities were communicating in English with foreigners and asking teachers about assignments. The following quotations illustrate the results:

Along with English lessons in class, I learn English by listening to songs in English performed by my favorite singers, such as Westlife or Justin Bieber ... but for entertainment rather than learning purpose. (S1)

At home, I usually write down any new words and look up for their meanings to improve my vocabulary In every English class lesson, we have group studies with my classmates to complete tasks from our teacher. We also work in pairs very much to role-play some speaking activities. (S6)

Well, I hardly communicate with my teacher to make suggestions or ask her about something although she is so friendly. I am not shy at all but I can find solutions on the Internet. Occasionally, I ask her what homework is or how exams will be. (S3)

For me, speaking English with foreigners never happens because they are not around me and I do not know how to look for them. The classroom environment is the only place to practice English. (S5)

Eight students believed that the heavy workload of other subjects and personal matters hindered them from performing ALL activities. For example, “practicing English is not my most frequent activity because I have too many assignments from other courses” (S10) or “I work a part-time job to make my living and my studies in Hanoi affordable” (S2).

5.5 Gender and students' autonomous learning

A set of independent-sample *t*-tests was conducted to compare the aspects of ALL between male and female students. No significant differences were noted in respect of the views of autonomous learning abilities between male ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.73$) and female ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.74$) students [$t(274) = 1.19$, $p = 0.23$]. Finally, no significant difference was found for the frequencies of ALL activities between male ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.58$) and female ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.59$) students [$t(274) = 1.15$, $p = 0.25$]. The responses regarding ALL were not statistically different between genders.

5.6 Level of motivation and learning activities

ANOVA results indicated a significant difference in the scores of autonomous learning activities ($F = 9.25$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 3$) in terms of motivation level, as

reported by the respondents (Table 6). Pairwise comparisons were used to further explore the significant effects using Tukey's correction.

A Tukey's^{a,b} post-hoc analysis indicated that motivation levels differ significantly between groups regarding autonomous activities. The scores for autonomous learning activities for the highly motivated group were significantly higher than those for the motivated, slightly motivated, and unmotivated groups (Table 7). The higher the degree of motivation, the more frequently students participated in autonomy-promoting activities.

In addition, Pearson's product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between motivation level and ALL activities. A strong positive and statistically significant correlation was noted between motivation level and autonomous activities ($r = 0.544$, $N = 276$, $p < 0.001$). Increases in motivation level were correlated with increases in the frequency of autonomous learning activities.

5.7 Autonomous learning abilities and learning activities

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between autonomous learning abilities and learning activities, and a bidirectional correlation was found between the two variables ($r = 0.503$, $N = 276$, $p < 0.001$). In summary, a strong, positive correlation between ALL abilities and activities was perceived and reported.

Table 6: ANOVA of motivation level.

Level of motivation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between groups	27.75	3	9.25	3.55	0.00
Within groups	65.27	272	0.24		
Total	93.02	275			

Table 7: Tukey's^{a,b} post-hoc analysis for motivation level.

Level of motivation	<i>N</i>	Subtest for alpha = 0.05
None	9	1.84
Moderate	76	2.43
Average	151	2.84
High	40	3.29

^aUses harmonic mean sample size = 25.659.

^bThe group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

6 Discussion and conclusions

This study explored the perceptions of non-English major students of LA regarding their perceptions of their responsibilities in learning and their ALL activities. Data were collected using an adapted questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. A total of 276 students at a technical university in Hanoi, Vietnam completed the questionnaire, and 11 participated in the interviews.

The students preferred responsibilities to be shared between the teacher and themselves for most aspects of ALL. However, they remained aware of their own responsibility in making progress outside of class. The students indicated that the teacher was responsible for evaluating the students' learning. Contrary to previous studies (Abdel Razeq 2014; Arabai 2017; Chan et al. 2002; Lin and Reinders 2019), the present study found a sense of responsibility and involvement in the ALL process among the respondents although the teacher still had an undeniably important role in LLP. This could be explicated from a consideration that the sociocultural context of the study was environment. A blended learning approach has been prominent at the university for several years, and students have had the opportunity to study career-oriented English. In other words, students have additional time to self-study at home and take charge of their home learning, facilitated by the teacher if required. Because of the availability of learning resources on the Internet, students can work on their own at any time they wish. However, they are not allowed to change anything in the curriculum provided by the university (Nguyen 2009). Thus, in the context of English tertiary education, pedagogical activities were assigned to the teacher, and the students merely followed the teacher's instructions and considered the teacher an important but not dominant figure. Moreover, because of their low levels of English and uneven proficiency (Trinh and Mai 2018), teacher support is necessary (Breen and Mann 2013), especially in the Vietnamese context, where English has yet to be established as a second language.

Students' perceived ability to act autonomously in learning English was relatively positive. Relevant to the perceptions of the above-mentioned roles, if the students had the chance, they deemed themselves capable of ALL. This result is consistent with the results in the literature (Abdel Razeq 2014; Arabai 2017; Şenbayrak et al. 2019), which indicated that learners appeared confident about their ALL abilities. Although they are not inborn, these abilities could be recognized and nurtured through learner training by EFL teachers and experts (Abdel Razeq 2014; Le 2013; Nguyen 2009; Oxford 2017). Specifically, planning learning, evaluating learning, and selecting learning materials should be prioritized because of the participants' low self-perceived abilities. In addition, ALL abilities vary among learners; thus, teachers should diversify their teaching methods to consider individual differences (Cirocki et al. 2019). Moreover, a negotiated syllabus can be

applied to engage learners in the decision-making process and develop decision-making abilities (Azarnoosh and Kargozari 2018).

Regardless of internal or external motivation (Hsu 2005), the participants reported moderate to high motivation levels to learn English, primarily because of its usefulness in their future careers in the internationalized labor market and for communication purposes. This finding matches those of previous studies (Alrabai 2017; Chan et al. 2002; Lin and Reinders 2019; Şenbayrak et al. 2019). Interestingly, the statistics indicated that the more motivated the students were, the more frequently they carried out ALL activities. Hence, EFL learners should strengthen their motivation to learn English for prospective future opportunities and to avoid lagging behind due to their low levels of language proficiency. EFL teachers should help students improve their motivation level when necessary. As a result of an increase in motivation, students will develop LA (Borg and Alshumaimeri 2017).

Both within and outside of class, students were most engaged in listening to English songs, taking notes, noting new words and their meanings, and engaging in teamwork in English lessons. This result is in line with those of previous studies (Abdel Razeq 2014; Alrabai 2017; Chan et al. 2002). The first of these, namely, using English language media, may be considered a by-product of their ordinary pursuits because students spontaneously make use of entertainment and the Internet. The three other popular activities are frequently implemented in other subjects, not only in English lessons. Importantly, the findings indicated low to moderate levels of frequency of ALL activities for two main reasons. First, sociocultural contexts, such as the absence of an English-speaking community, pressure from workload, and other personal matters prevent students from frequently practicing ALL. Second, the activities mentioned above were not introduced and implemented in the curriculum during the student training.

The statistics indicate that no significant difference appeared in any aspect of ALL between genders. Understandably, each student at the university has an equal chance to access language education, and there is no gender discrimination in tertiary education in Vietnam. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between ALL abilities and ALL activities. Accordingly, the more the students were able to act autonomously, the more frequently the ALL activities were performed (Chan et al. 2002). It may be that students with better abilities may engage in ALL activities more frequently because of their self-beliefs and a lack of fear or shyness.

7 Suggestions

The findings suggest several pedagogical implications to guide relevant stakeholders in TESOL.

First, on the macro-level, policymakers should introduce and promote the notions of LA and ALL in the language education curriculum to raise awareness among stakeholders, including leaders, teachers, students, and parents. Notably, only the aspects that are culturally appropriate in the local sociocultural contexts should be implemented (Bui 2018). Another important point here is the integration of courses specialized in LA into teacher education programs, such that preservice teachers are familiarized with the concept and apply it in their own future teaching (Mai and Pham 2018).

Second, at the meso-level, unique and specific institutional initiatives for language education should be established that can promote ALL, such as modifying the class size, time constraints, testing and assessment, benchmarking, teaching facilities, learning materials, computer-assisted access, and Internet access to support expanded ALL (see more at Bui 2018; Hamilton 2013; Le 2017, 2020; Trinh and Mai 2018). For example, a class of non-English majors is typically crowded, including more than 40 students, which prevents teachers from adequately managing the class and designing activities, thus hindering ALL. The curriculum should emphasize competency-based learning and balance students' workload to provide additional time to practice study skills and study languages for global integration to a greater degree. Reducing unnecessary workload can create space to develop ALL abilities and increase motivation, as seen in the relationships between the variables and frequencies of ALL activities. Moreover, EFL teachers are expected to be aware of LA and to act autonomously if they desire to promote LA among their students (Breen and Mann 2013). Thus, university leaders should facilitate professional development programs (PDPs) to support teachers financially, technically, and psychologically, especially those working at technical universities, where English is a minor component of education.

Third, at a micro-level, teachers are advised to regularly attend PDPs in order to be able to introduce LA to students and systematically implement diverse approaches to the fostering of ALL, with an emphasis on learner training and motivation, due to the relationship of both aspects with the frequency of autonomous activities. Teachers' willingness to transfer some of their responsibilities and allow learners to have more choice in their education is encouraged as a means of fostering LA, despite the difficulty of this task. Initially, teachers may seek to remain open-minded and friendly with students, sharing their learning experience and accepting criticism from them (Bui 2018). Additionally, students themselves should increase their awareness of LA and the importance of English in the present era. LA will help them become global citizens in the 21st century (OCED 2005). This study's findings show that students should develop their own motivation so that the frequency of ALL activities will increase and the students will gradually become autonomous.

Appendix

Student questionnaire

Dear students,

I am currently doing a research on English language learning among Vietnamese learners. Following is a survey and I do hope that you can spend time helping me complete it in an honest way to reflect your own learning. Your responses will help me much describe how students learn English. Thank you so much.

Responsibility

Tick the box that reflects your viewpoint (✓). Whose responsibility do you think belongs to?

	Teacher	Student	Both teacher and student	No ideas
1. Students' progress during lessons				
2. Students' progress outside class				
3. Students' interest in learning English				
4. Students' working harder				
5. Identifying students' weaknesses in English				
6. Setting learning goals for students in the English course				
7. Establishing concepts for learning in English lessons				
8. Selecting educational activities for English learning in lessons				
9. Deciding on a timeframe for each activity in class				
10. Evaluating students' learning				
11. Deciding what students learn outside class				

Abilities

Tick the box that reflects your viewpoint (✓). How do you evaluate your abilities in learning English?

Very poor Poor OK Good Very good

12. Choose learning activities in class
 13. Choose learning activities outside class
 14. Choose learning objectives in class
 15. Choose learning objectives outside class
 16. Choose learning materials in class
 17. Choose learning materials outside class
 18. Evaluate your learning
 19. Identify your weaknesses in English
 20. Decide the next content of the English lessons
 21. Decide on the timeframe for each activity in class
 22. Plan your learning
 23. Evaluate the course
 24. Set learning goals
-

Motivation

How do you describe your motivation? (*circle the suitable option*)

- A. highly motivated
- B. motivated
- C. moderately motivated
- D. not motivated

Activities

Tick the box that reflects your viewpoint (✓). How frequently do you ?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often

26. Complete non-compulsory assignments in English
27. Write down new words and their meanings
28. Finish a reading material in English
29. Visit teachers to inquire about tasks related to learning English
30. Watch English programs
31. Listen to English songs
32. Practice conversational English with friends
33. Converse with foreigners in English
34. Engage in group studies in English lessons
35. Ask the teacher questions when you do not understand
36. Make suggestions to the English teacher
37. Plan your lesson/study
38. Take notes while studying

(continued)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
39. Summarize lessons while studying				
40. Use external resources while studying				
41. Discuss learning problems with classmates				
42. Take opportunities to speak in English inside the classroom				

Background information

Gender (circle one option)

- A. Male
- B. Female
- C. Others

Thank you for your cooperation. Good luck.

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