


## Factors Affecting Learner Autonomy in EMI Studying of English-Major Students at some Economics Universities in Hanoi, Vietnam

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\*  <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.24333>

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Received: 30/03/2024

Revision: 10/07/2024

Accepted: 17/07/2024

Online: 21/08/2024

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to synthesize and analyze factors affecting learner autonomy in EMI learning and proposes effective solutions to eliminate existing issues related to learner autonomy. Employing a quantitative method, the sample for this study consisted of 224 Business English majors enrolled in the top three economics universities in Hanoi, Vietnam, including National Economics University (NEU), Foreign Trade University (FTU), and Thuongmai University during the academic year 2023-2024. The findings showed that some factors such as motivation, attitude, learning strategies, and English proficiency have a significant impact on learner autonomy in EMI learning, especially motivation, which has the strongest positive influence. Teachers, teaching methods, and learning materials motivate and develop students' learning autonomy. Moreover, the findings also revealed that learning culture might have the least influence on how students control their learning. From these findings, students can recognize which factors actively support their learning autonomy in EMI learning or are likely to hinder their understanding. These findings recommended that students, teachers, and universities implement specific solutions for nurturing and developing learner autonomy in EMI classrooms and university learning environments.

**Keywords:** learner autonomy, EMI learning, English-major students

### Introduction

In Vietnam, the popularity of students studying English at economics universities is widely acknowledged among educators. In this Business English major, students receive instruction in both English language skills and economic principles; moreover, popular learning programs use English to study specific subjects, called specialized subjects. However, in the modern environment - the environment where technology has developed rapidly, and international integration is inevitable, several issues of teaching and learning in Vietnam have emerged due to long-standing teaching and learning techniques. Traditional teaching approaches are claimed to result in students' passiveness in learning and probably hinder their language acquisition. On

the other hand, students are frequently shy and unwilling to question their teachers in the classrooms (Tran, 2013). Therefore, cultivating students' autonomous learning ability is an urgent need for social development to adapt to fast speed and high frequency of knowledge updates. Students need to be proactive in learning and absorbing new knowledge and catching up with rapid changes and daily development. Additionally, teaching methods at economics universities in Hanoi also require autonomous learning from students when students can take the initiative to set their goals, make a clear study plan, select skills and methods to be used, monitor the procedure of acquisition properly, and evaluate what they have learned. Therefore, autonomous learning at economics universities in Hanoi is very important.

Learner Autonomy, according to Holec (1981, p.3), is defined as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. Specifically, it is the idea of “knowing how to learn”, which is supported by the metacognitive abilities of goal-setting, preparation, execution, self-evaluation, and self-assessment. On the other hand, learner autonomy is regarded as a capability - “for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (Little, 1991) or the ability to learn “without the involvement of a teacher” (Dickinson, 1987, p.11). English Medium Instruction (EMI) is commonly defined as using the English language to teach academic or content subjects in contexts where the language is not commonly spoken in society (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018).

While numerous studies have explored learner autonomy, the predominant focus is on foreign language instruction (EFL). For the record, at least 25 studies emphasizing LA in language acquisition have been conducted in Vietnam since 2007 (Dinh, 2017). On the other hand, studying learner autonomy in EMI learning has not been considered. This paper is the first of its kind to identify factors that influence learner autonomy, delving deeper into EMI learning.

## Literature review

### *Learner autonomy*

Learner autonomy has been perceived and translated into practice in different ways in terms of particular political, social, and contemporary situations (Dang, 2012). Autonomy, according to Holec (1981, p.3), is defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning," specifically, it is the idea of "knowing how to learn," which is supported by the metacognitive abilities of goal-setting, preparation, execution, self-evaluation, and self-assessment. On the other hand, learner autonomy is regarded as a capability - “for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (Little, 1991) or the ability to learn “without the involvement of a teacher” (Dickinson, 1987, p.11). It is also contended as an ability to perform rational decision-making processes over learning activities (Hunt, Gow & Barnes, 1989); likewise, other researchers (e.g., Duong & Nguyen, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2018; Tran, 2018; Tran & Vo, 2019) have pinpointed that learner autonomy as a complicated process in which learners must become more active and independent in language classrooms and outside classrooms in different aspects such as choosing extra materials and learning techniques, and self-evaluating their learning outcomes. In short, there are different definitions of learner autonomy. Within the scope of this study, learner autonomy is regarded as a learner’s willingness and ability to take responsibility for his/her own learning.

### *Learner autonomy in English learning*

Learner autonomy has generally been prioritized in educational settings, especially in language learning (e.g, Gremmo & Riley, 1995; Benson, 2001; Duong & Seepho, 2013, 2014; Duong,

2015; Tran & Vo, 2019), (e.g., Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1995; Little, 1991; Benson, 2003). McDevitt (1997) contends that “the end product of language learning is an independent learner in every aspect of the language”. (p.34). Autonomy is described as a learning process in which learners acquire linguistic competence and learn “how to learn”. To be specific, autonomy in learning language concerns the growth of learning awareness and the acquisition of an anonymizing capacity that allows learners to gradually take control of their learning process. In order to train learners to become independent, it is necessary to consider them in all of their dimensions. This involves identifying distinct roles for both teachers and learners (Ruiz-Madrid & Sanz-Gil, 2007).

### *Learner autonomy in EMI learning*

In EMI learning, learner autonomy, "The use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (p.4) is how Dearden (2014) defines EMI. EMI is related to CLIL (content and language integrated learning), according to Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra (2011). In general, the profound purpose of EMI is the acquisition of content, academic, or subject-related knowledge. However, EMI classes can be typically challenging when students transition from an L1-construct program to an EMI program (Evans & Morrison, 2011, 2016). The difficulties of transition involve a sudden shift in the instructional language to an unfamiliar L2 and a deeper understanding and expertness in subject knowledge (Macaro, 2018).

Learner autonomy in EMI learning has not been widely delved into. There is evidence focusing on several aspects of learner autonomy in EMI classrooms. For example, to cope with the transition to EMI classes, the majority of learners autonomously carry out previews on textbooks and slides before lessons (Ding & Stapleton, 2016) and organize and make connections among knowledge taught in class. As a result, in EMI classes, learners have a level of learner autonomy in the adoption of various strategies to overcome difficulties.

### *Influencing Factors on Learner autonomy of students in EMI learning*

Several recent studies have illustrated how factors such as motivation, learning attitude and strategies, English proficiency, teachers and teaching methods, learning culture and social environment, information technology, and online learning resources can influence learner autonomy.

#### *Motivation*

“Autonomous learners are by definition motivated learners” (Ushioda in Dornyei, 2001:59). According to many researchers, motivation is significant to the growth of learner autonomy. It is believed to be the main stimulating factor affecting the autonomy of students (Dornyei, 1998) because it promotes a learner's desire in the EFL classroom. Motivation makes students look optimistic and feel more confident about their ability and success in EFL or EMI learning. Dickinson (1992) believed that inner drive is required for learner autonomy. Furthermore, according to Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan's (2002) views, students will have a great sense of class engagement if they are motivated. Learners with a strong passion are more inclined to go forward and implement their learning methods better, which demonstrates learner autonomy's fundamental qualities (Chen, 2015).

Accordingly, this study expects motivation to help students gain better learner autonomy in EMI classes.

*H1: Personal motivation, such as future career expectations, positively promotes learner autonomy in an EMI setting.*

### *English proficiency*

According to Zhang and Li (2004, p.21), it is concluded that learner autonomy is closely related to language levels. Fei (2007) also shares a similar viewpoint that students' English proficiency is significantly and positively related to their learner autonomy. This means that their English proficiency increases with their learner autonomy in EMI courses as students have to use English for every class activity and task.

Moreover, Zhang and Li's study (2004, p.22) illustrates considerable differences in the students' learner autonomy when their English proficiency is significantly different. However, the students' high or low English proficiency does not always imply that their learner autonomy will be high or low correspondingly (Fei, 2007).

Accordingly, this research expects good English skills to lead to better learner autonomy in EMI classes. Poor English skills can hinder students from improving their learner autonomy when studying EMI.

*H2: Students' poor English proficiency level negatively influences their ability to be autonomous learners in an EMI environment.*

### *Learning attitude and strategies*

Learners' attitudes influence learning efficiency (Wenden, 1991) as it is difficult for students to make the necessary effort if they do not believe they have the ability to learn. In other words, attitudes contribute to learner autonomy's growth. In support of this idea, according to Thao & Tham (2018), it is believed that learning attitude is one of the most significant aspects that need to be considered for developing learner autonomy. Owning a positive attitude means having an optimistic view, and Qin (2016) shares a similar viewpoint that the more optimistic students are, the more eagerly they learn. As a result, they will spend more time studying though they are in or out of classes. This boosts the learner's autonomy, especially in EMI courses where English explains and discusses everything. Besides, learning strategies are another factor that influences students' learner autonomy in EMI studying. The learning strategies are how students plan, set goals, and carry out learning reasonably to achieve the best results and are various. Students use a number of learning strategies flexibly in different contexts. Learning strategies are steps taken by the learner to make language learning more successful, self-directed, and enjoyable (Oxford, 1990, cited in Cook, 2008). This is further supported by Chen (2015), Zaqiri (2015), Tram and Kha (2023), who all believe that learning strategies can affect learners' ability to self-direct their learning. Ablard and Lipschultz (1998, p. 97) state that different high-achievement students apply different strategies. In other words, learning strategies influence learner autonomy, and in EMI courses, choosing and owning a suitable study strategy will help determine the effectiveness of learner autonomy.

Accordingly, learning attitudes and strategies are expected to support learner autonomy in EMI classes.

*H3: A good learning attitude and an appropriate learning strategy positively affect the learner's autonomy in EMI studying.*

### *Teachers and teaching method*

The role of teachers in the development of learner autonomy has probably become an important area of research in this field (e.g. Breen and Mann 1997; Voller 1997). This is because teacher autonomy - the teacher's decisions and work activities - is defined by the teacher's role in the classroom setting (Samuels, 1970). According to Thavenius (1990), teachers in an autonomous classroom should be willing to allow learners to take responsibility, let learners discover without

interfering with their processes, change the classroom environment to encourage more active participation from students and help every learner find his/her individual needs. According to Camilleri (1999), the teacher is responsible for helping learners be aware of alternative strategies and learning styles. Moreover, the teacher gives praise and feedback, which other learners can provide after completing the joint projects. Learners then get more personal feedback and guidance through the logbooks, a medium of communication and a tool of organization and reflection. Besides, in terms of EMI courses, students' beliefs are not stable but dynamic and can shift when students get various learning experiences (Jiang & Zhang, 2019). As a result, so as to shape their learner autonomy in EMI, it is necessary for instructors to recognize the importance of their roles in classes (Dearden, 2018).

In terms of teaching methods, there are three dominant methods, including Positivism, Constructivism, and Critical theory, which help students acquire knowledge and are related to learner autonomy (Kettani, 2014).

#### *Positivism*

This teaching method is built upon the assumption that learning can only consist when knowledge transfers from one person to another. (Benson & Voller, 1997: 20). In other words, it strongly emphasizes the value of teachers as knowledge facilitators. Consequently, students will become unmotivated to set learning objectives, make decisions, and become passive in absorbing the knowledge. This has negative impacts on learner autonomy by impeding its development (Tram & Kha, 2022).

#### *Constructivism*

In contrast to positivism, this approach facilitates students' discovery of objective knowledge and new information from their own experience and existing knowledge base (Kettani 2014). It is also believed that constructivism leads directly to the proposition that knowledge cannot be taught but only learned because knowledge is something "built up by the learner" (Glaserfeld & Smock, 1974:16, cited in Candy). Therefore, it promotes the development of learner autonomy (Tram & Kha, 2022).

#### *Critical theory*

According to Kettani (2014), this method shares a similar view with constructivism, that knowledge is constructed rather than learned. Besides, Leaver et al. (2005) also believed that analytical thinking is beneficial to learner autonomy. The approach encourages students to share their opinions, to have critiques, and to be thought of as authors of their own worlds rather than trying to comprehend and explain things. As a result, students have the ability to learn and construct their own concepts (Tram & Kha, 2022).

Accordingly, appropriate teachers and teaching methods can help students become more autonomous when EMI is applied in the educational environment.

*H4: Teacher support and teaching methods positively impact the development of learner autonomy.*

#### *Learning culture and social environment*

Culture has been the subject of some debate when promoting learner autonomy in different contexts (Benson and Voller, 1997b). "Culture" is usually defined as national/ethnic cultures such as "Western culture" or "Asian culture". There is some evidence that learner autonomy differs among societies. Hofstede (1986; 1990) classifies countries according to social-psychological dimensions, including "individualism/collectivism"; "high/low power distance".

In detail, according to Dickinson (1996) and Esch (1996), individualism has a strong connection with autonomy. In contrast, collectivism may be seen as conducive to interdependent, group-based versions of autonomy (Littlewood, 1996a; Aoki and Smith, 1999; Sinclair, 2000). Another definition of "culture" refers to the values and norms of behaving in different communities, such as a classroom or school culture. Learner autonomy has frequently been linked to these particular kinds of places; however, Benson and Voller (1997b: 12) argue that it would be more beneficial to focus on "the content of learning and relationships between students, teachers and institutions"-that is, educational components that are related to the 'culture' of specific kinds of learning environments. Therefore, all learning is "cultural" since it involves interacting with one's contexts, including objects, other people, and their words or ideas, in order to develop meanings; in this perspective, "culture and context are indivisible" (Breen, 2017c: 177).

Environmental factors, including situational and social aspects, have an important influence on learner autonomy, according to Benson (2001, p.49). Parents, siblings, relatives, friends, and teachers influence the social learning environment. However, autonomous learners typically need peer interactions because they may find it easier to collaborate in the classroom in this social setting (friends). Similarly, Vietnamese students are comfortable engaging with others through communication, it is obviously easier for them to exchange learning information and resources and discuss group assignments assigned by teachers thanks to technological advancements (Dang, 2010). Likewise, according to Kemala (2016), when students feel involved with their classmates, they have more motivation to learn since group work enables them to share ideas, learn, and motivate each other.

Accordingly, this study expects learning culture and social environment to be unimportant in learner autonomy in EMI classes.

*H5: The factors relating to learning culture and social environment do not affect the students' autonomy much.*

#### *Information technology and online learning resources*

Remarkably, the appearance of a new learning environment, the modal affordances of technology-mediated environments, typically enhances learner autonomy. The extensive range of online learning materials means that learners can select what is useful and worth doing according to a personally held criterion. In addition, educational technologies expose language learners to a digital, social environment where they can get into the real world and practice language skills. According to Thuy & Thu (2023), mobile phones have the ability to assist students in learning academic vocabulary, and also help them improve other skills, such as listening and speaking. Technologies such as video-conferencing software, namely Zoom or Microsoft Teams, make it possible to learn in real-time, even if geographically separated (Zhong, Q. M. 2018). Other related online tools such as discussion forums (YouTube collecting and sharing information) and online chat environments (Gmail, social media: Facebook, Instagram, Zalo), provide language learners with sociable, collaborative, and real-world learning experiences (Chan & Chan, 2011; Cheng, Paré, Collimore, & Joordens, 2011; Little, 2001). Recently, some innovative learning programs that promote some form of learner autonomy have been created based on the advancement of IT, such as 3D virtual learning (Yeh & Lan, 2018), Kahoot apps (Yürük, 2019); a flipped EFL instructional model (Tsai, 2019). Using ChatGPT for writing instruction could boost students' learning motivation. ChatGPT aids students in developing ideas and forming outlines for various writing assignments; moreover, students could utilize ChatGPT as a mentor to receive feedback on their written assignments and receive recommendations for improvements (Nguyen, T. T. H. 2023). Finally, according to Murray (1999), educational technology can effectively promote learner autonomy.

On the other hand, technology may present obstacles to the practice of learner autonomy (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). These obstacles may include the limitations of technological tools and their use contexts (small screens, loud environments, short durations of time for the use of mobile phones), information and media literacy (Hafner, Chik & Jones, 2015; Author & Colleague, 2018; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013; Toffolio & Perrot, 2017).

Accordingly, this study expects information technology, especially online resources, to support learner autonomy in EMI classes.

*H6: Information technology and online resources positively impact students' self-learning and autonomy.*

### *Research Questions*

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the study was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors influence the learner autonomy of English-major students in EMI learning at economics universities in Hanoi?
2. To what extent do these factors impact students' learner autonomy in an EMI environment?

## **Methodology**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The target population for this study consists of English-major students at three economics universities in Hanoi, Vietnam: National Economics University, Thuongmai University, and Foreign Trade University. In this study, the selected sample members had a special relationship with the phenomenon under investigation - learner autonomy in EMI studying of English-major students in Economics universities, sufficient and relevant study experience in the field of English and Economics. In this study, the research team also targeted Freshmen and sophomores of economics universities because there are students who already have English certificates and can change their scores as they are allowed to skip courses for English integrated skills at university. Therefore, these students can join EMI classes. A sample size of 224 students is determined based on the formula for regression analysis by Green (1991).

### *Design of the Study*

Quantitative methodology was used to gather and analyze data. Thus, according to Creswell (2012), correlations between variables that already exist can be found and explained. A questionnaire will be employed to collect quantitative data for the study. The questionnaire consists of four clusters. The items in the clusters are presented according to a 5-point Likert scale.

The study aims to find out the factors affecting learner autonomy in EMI learning of English-major students at economics universities in Hanoi. Therefore, this research was designed to identify the direction based on three issues: identify the benefits and challenges of learner autonomy among English-major students at three economics universities, identify factors affecting their learner autonomy in EMI learning, and assess the impact of these factors on their learner autonomy in EMI learning.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Quantitative methods are used to obtain comprehensive data in this research. According to Lancaster (2005), the questionnaire has been widely used and is good in data collection,

especially when involving many respondents. Therefore, a questionnaire with four sections and 61 questions is designed based on the research model. The first section consisted of four questions that inquired about the participants' demographic data to provide general information about their gender, university, years of school, and number of hours of self-study per day. The second section is divided into three parts, each with four to five questions about students' perceptions of the characteristics, benefits, and difficulties of learner autonomy in the EMI environment. The third and most significant section of the questionnaire included questions about the six factors affecting learner autonomy in EMI studying of English-major students at an economics university in Hanoi, including three internal factors and three external factors. The last section is also divided into two parts, each with seven questions about suggestions to improve students' learner autonomy in the EMI environment. The demographic questions section is designed as a closed-ended question with a multiple-choice format. The rest of the sections were evaluated using Likert-5 scale items (Scale 1: Strongly Disagree, Scale 2: Disagree, Scale 3: Neutral, Scale 4: Agree, Scale 5: Strongly Agree).

The data processing used in this study is SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Descriptive statistics are brief informational coefficients that summarize a given data set, which can represent the entire population or a sample of a population (Adam Hayes, 2023).

## Results

### *Factors affecting learner autonomy in EMI studying*

First, the findings in Table 1 showed that factors related to motivation, learning attitude, and strategies affect the learner autonomy of English-majored students in EMI studying the most. For items 3, 5, 7, and 8,  $M = 3.96, 4.04, 3.81,$  and  $3.79$ , respectively, showed that the majority of participants acknowledged their influences. It was believed that motivations, such as a desire to get better scores, gain a deeper understanding of the major, improve English skills, and an understanding of the potential benefits of doing so (better job internship opportunities), would positively affect learner autonomy of English-majored students in EMI studying more than the other factors (items 3 and 5). In addition, students' learning attitudes and strategies, especially the method of discussions with teachers and friends, have crucial impacts on their learner autonomy. Most survey participants agreed with this statement ( $M=3.81$ ), demonstrating the beneficial impact of students' preferences for discussing activities.

Second, the survey showed that teachers' support and teaching methods aided students in developing greater learner autonomy in EMI studying. Teachers were thought to have a significant influence on the learner autonomy population. Findings from numerous question items serve as evidence of this. Most students responded to the survey's items 17 and 18 ( $M = 3.76$  and  $M=3.77$ ) with the statement that their teachers encouraged their creativity and proactive self-management of learning in class and were always ready to assist whenever they needed help. Additionally, providing students with materials and encouraging them to learn about the topic on their own before the next class gave them more opportunities to decide about learning-related matters and guide their own learning (items 15  $M = 3.76$ ). The survey also revealed that poor English proficiency also negatively affected learner autonomy in EMI studying (item 12, with  $M = 3.27$ ).



**Table 1**

Factors affecting learner autonomy in EMI studying

No	Statement	n	M	S.D.
1	I self-study and review knowledge because attending EMI classes helps me remember knowledge longer.	224	3.60	1.291
2	I self-study because I want to absorb lessons better when attending EMI classes.	224	3.77	1.256
3	I self-study because I want to get better scores when taking EMI classes.	224	3.96	1.104
4	I study and prepare lessons by myself because I want to be more confident when exchanging and discussing with friends and teachers in EMI classes.	224	3.59	1.224
5	I self-study because I want to gain a deeper understanding of the major and improve my ability to use English, which will help me have better job internship opportunities.	224	4.04	1.118
6	I self-study because I enjoy learning and researching specialized knowledge on my own.	224	3.69	1.312
7	I self-study specialized knowledge through discussions with teachers and friends.	224	3.81	1.202
8	I learn knowledge by myself without discussing or sharing it with anyone.	224	3.79	1.258
9	I research and learn specialized knowledge by myself by applying classroom knowledge to practice, such as through outside specialized internships.	224	3.51	1.260
10	I have a disadvantage in understanding vocabulary, terms, and specialized concepts in lectures.	224	2.88	1.538
11	I have a disadvantage in understanding textbooks and documents written in English because of the limited vocabulary.	224	3.18	1.254
12	I have a disadvantage in taking notes during class because of the teacher's pronunciation and speaking speed.	224	3.27	1.316
13	I understand the lesson content because I am proficient in English listening skills.	224	2.92	1.465
14	I communicate effectively with teachers and express opinions clearly in English.	224	2.96	1.451
15	I was provided with materials and encouraged to learn about the topic on my own before the next class.	224	3.76	1.218
16	The teacher explains everything, and there is only one default answer.	224	3.72	1.119
17	Teachers encourage creativity and proactive self-management of learning in class.	224	3.76	1.082
18	Teachers are always ready to assist me whenever I need help.	224	3.77	1.119
19	The teacher's poor professional knowledge and ability to use English made it difficult for me to absorb the lecture.	224	3.58	1.309
20	In Vietnamese culture, I am encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility.	224	3.80	1.292
21	Schools/classrooms with a high spirit of self-study help improve my learner autonomy.	224	3.78	1.168
22	Family members, teachers, friends: My parents influenced my habit of self-study when I was young, and I still maintain this habit.	224	3.87	1.205
23	Chatting with friends in class helps me comfortably exchange	224	3.86	1.218

	information about assigned assignments.			
24	The library and self-study room are fully equipped with modern equipment and are ideal places for self-study rather than in a rented room or at home.	224	3.65	1.276
25	Actively connecting with teachers and friends via chat applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter... makes me learn more.	224	3.77	1.067
26	I actively search for relevant lecture videos on YouTube about the topic before and after class.	224	3.78	1.055
27	I self-study because I have access to all the materials (books, newspapers, magazines, CDs, DVDs...) provided by the school library.	224	3.97	.990
28	Electronic textbooks contain a lot of misleading and outdated information.	224	3.88	1.102

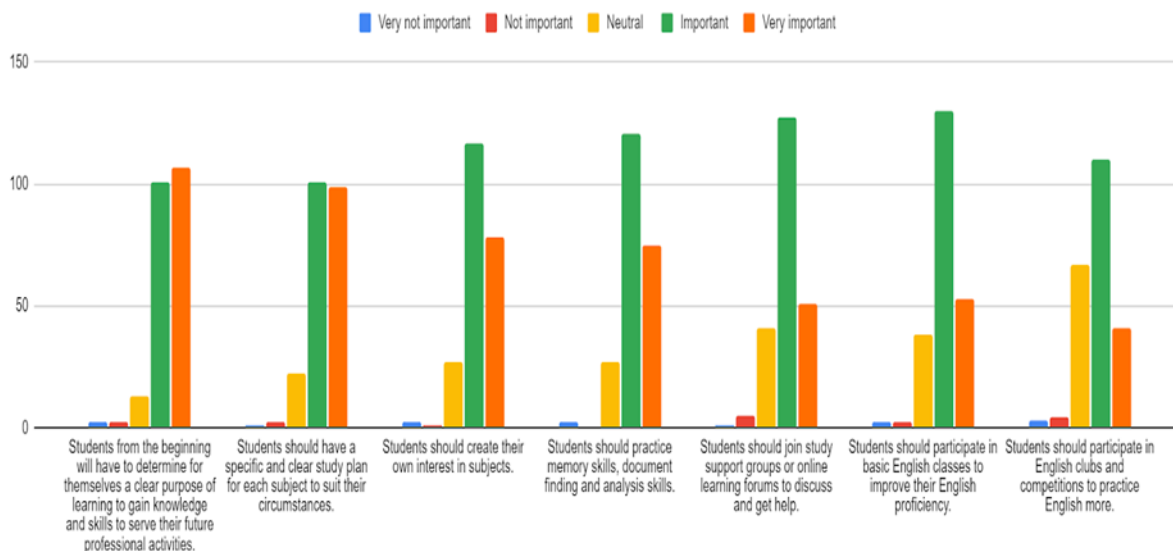
Finally, the results also showed how influential learning cultures and social environments like Vietnamese culture or family members and friends could be. This is shown by the answers to problems in items 30 and 32 with  $M = 3.8$  and  $3.87$ , respectively. Although many respondents said that electronic textbooks contain a lot of misleading and outdated information (item 28, with  $M = 3.88$ ), it was also clear that information technology and online learning resources were additional important factors influencing the development of learner autonomy. Students also said that actively connecting with teachers and friends via chat applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter... helped them learn more independently. (Item 25,  $M = 3.77$ )

### *Solutions to overcome the difficulties of learner autonomy in EMI studying*

#### *For internal difficulties*

Figure 1 shows students' perceptions of the importance of some given methods which help to overcome difficulties affecting learner autonomy in EMI studying from the internal environment. It can be seen that most students believe that the given solutions are necessary and important. However, defining clear goals for learning and having an appropriate study plan are judged to be especially important to help improve their autonomy, with approximately 100 votes for each level "very important" and "important." Besides, students should create interest in the subjects and practice to improve memory; reading, finding, and analyzing skills are also appreciated solutions. The remaining solutions related to participation in communities, such as online forums, English classes, or English competitions, also get the attention of students, but these methods are mostly assessed as important. Therefore, the results suggest that students rate methods on their own higher than participation in a community or outside interaction. In other words, students themselves are the most effective method for the internal difficulties of learner autonomy in EMI studying.

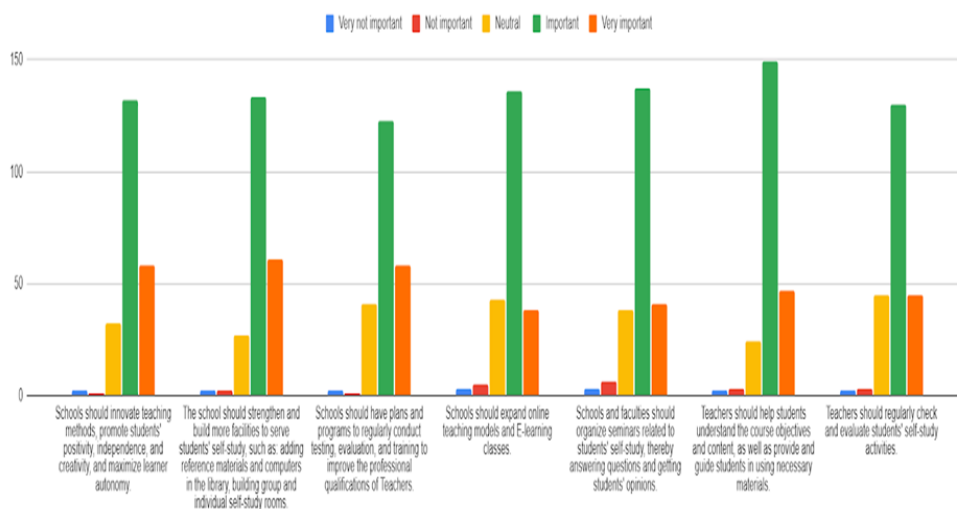
Figure 1  
Solutions to overcome internal difficulties.



*For external difficulties*

According to Figure 2, it can be seen that the majority of participants believe that the given solutions to external difficulties are important. In terms of very important level, schools should innovate teaching methods that encourage students' independence and autonomy in learning while upgrading and improving facilities and learning environment, adding more materials, and conducting surveys to get students' feedback on teaching quality are methods that receive a lot of supports, nearly 60 students give these methods the "very important" votes. In addition to the school, teachers also play an important role in helping students overcome difficulties from outside. According to the survey results, many students believe that teachers should help students understand the purpose of the course, guide students in the use of learning materials, and evaluate students' self-study regularly. These are considered as two important methods, with approximately 150 and 125 votes for important levels, respectively.

Figure 2  
Solutions to overcome external difficulties



## Discussion

### *Benefits and challenges for students when applying learner autonomy in EMI*

The findings indicate that learner autonomy offers both benefits and challenges for English-major students at economics universities.

Regarding benefits, the finding revealed that most students agreed that learner autonomy helps them better understand the lesson's knowledge and foreign language skills. Besides, the process of autonomy also gives students opportunities to improve other important skills, especially their English language and critical thinking skills.

On the other hand, there are several challenges when students come to autonomous learning. Firstly, foreign language proficiency and the allocation of self-study time significantly affect their learner autonomy in EMI learning. Specifically, over 100 students agreed, and around 30 students totally agreed that poor English proficiency is the greatest difficulty in their autonomy when participating in EMI classes. The reason is that students have to use English for all activities in the EMI classes. Besides, most students also admit that they cannot properly allocate time for self-study, which limits their autonomy in EMI studying.

### *Factors affecting learner autonomy in EMI learning*

The findings show that the listed factors significantly influence English-major students' learner autonomy at three Hanoi economics universities.

Regarding motivation, the findings revealed that learner autonomy was promoted by students' aspirations for high academic achievement, a deeper understanding of the major, and improvement of English language proficiency for future careers. Dickinson (1992) also stated these drives, saying that autonomy might be a result of motivation or a precondition for it.

Secondly, learner autonomy has benefited from student's preferred learning attitudes and strategies. Specifically, due to the enjoyment of exploring specialized knowledge and applying knowledge to practice such as internships, self-studying is considered to positively impact students' autonomy. This result indeed shares the same opinions as Qin's (2016), who stated that learners who are interested in a subject for a while adopt positive attitudes towards learning. As a result, the subject would receive more concentration, and a learning objective would be set. Moreover, although there is a trend in learning attitude and strategy, each student still has a highly individualized approach to learning and applying knowledge.

Thirdly, there is a big difference between students' English proficiency. Students find it difficult to understand vocabulary, specialized terminology, and concepts in lectures and face challenges in understanding English textbooks and materials and communicating effectively in English.

The teachers have been the most important factors. Learner autonomy was considered to be promoted by the teacher's support such as proposing or giving students further reading resources, encouraging them to come to their own conclusions, and welcoming any questions. This statement has been supported by Kemala (2016), who states that this would be advantageous in providing students with more freedom to select or use their own learning strategies. Alonazi (2017) also agreed that teachers act as supervisors, resource providers, counselors, and facilitators of learner autonomy in EMI learning. However, there is a certain level of disagreement about teachers' professional knowledge and English proficiency; as a result, some students have difficulty in acquiring knowledge. The diversity in the perceptions shows that there is a need to focus more on improving teachers' teaching quality and language proficiency to create a better learning environment.

In addition, students feel encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility in Vietnamese culture and recognize the high level of self-directed learning in the school/classroom environment. The role of family, teachers, and friends in shaping and maintaining self-study habits from a young age is highly valued. This is called the social context, which supportively develops an environment where students can interact with others, as Dang (2010) emphasized. However, there are concerns about the facilities in the library and self-study rooms. This is because they do not fully meet the optimal self-study needs of students despite being equipped with modern facilities. These evaluations reflect the diversity of students' expectations and individual experiences. This emphasized the importance of creating a diverse and supportive learning and social environment to promote students.

Finally, information technology and online learning resources play a crucial role in enhancing learner autonomy. The findings show that students actively perceive connection with teachers and friends through social networks such as Facebook and Instagram as an important part of the learning process. For example, students actively search for lecture videos on YouTube before and after classes in order to grasp the knowledge. Besides, accessing all materials provided by the library emphasizes the value of diverse and rich resources. Students can plan, plan their learning thanks to opportunities to use technological advancements in EMI learning. In this way, they can build up their prior knowledge to produce new knowledge, aligning with Begum and Chowdhury's results (2015). Additionally, the more opportunities the online learning resources give students to discover outside of the classroom, the more learner autonomy can be improved. This agrees with Harmer's (2007) and Kemala's (2016) hypotheses. However, there are concerns about the quality of e-textbooks, indicating some concerns about misinformation and outdated information, which hinder the process of learner autonomy (Kemala, 2006).

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that a variety of factors influence learner autonomy. These include motivation, learning attitude and strategies, English proficiency, teachers and teaching methods, learning culture and social environment, and information technology and online learning resources.

## Conclusion

### *Summary of the study*

In summary, our study found a variety of factors that affect autonomous ability among English-major students in EMI studying. They are motivation, learning attitude and strategies, English proficiency, teacher and teaching method, learning culture and social environment, and information technology and online learning resources. Motivation, good learning attitude and strategies, teacher support and teaching method, and technology and online learning resources have all been mentioned as variables supporting learner autonomy. The other aspects, such as students' poor English proficiency, are also identified as an obstacle to autonomous learning in EMI studying.

### *Implications for students*

It is highly recommended that students enhance their motivation and learning attitude by clarifying their own target of studying or connecting studies to their career aspirations. Besides, an effective learning strategy, which is also important to students, can be developed by creating individualized learning plans. It is also advised that English proficiency, including a good vocabulary and other skills, should be improved to develop the learner autonomy of English-

major students studying at EMI.

### *Implications for teachers*

The factors that affect the learner autonomy of English-major students in EMI studying have been identified. Teachers should adopt innovative teaching methods like encouraging active learning or fostering a positive learning environment to provide students with more opportunities to learn things on their own. Additionally, teachers significantly impact students' learner autonomy, so their roles in improving autonomous learning should be enhanced by being the learning guides, resource providers, or student progress evaluators.

### *Implications for universities*

It is highly suggested that universities should upgrade their facilities and resources, especially library resources, dedicated spaces for self-study, or computers. In addition, it is advised that universities should ensure qualified and modern teachers and a positive educational environment in a range of ways, such as regular evaluation and training or expanding online and e-learning. Moreover, it is also vital for universities to focus on first-year students' training and orientation. Strengthening cooperation among universities, including NEU, TMU, and FTU, in sharing resources and experiences in teaching EMI is also considered another way to improve learner autonomy.

Implementing these recommendations can significantly empower students, promoting autonomy and a lifelong learning mindset within EMI environments.

### *Recommendations for future research*

Building upon the findings and insights gained from the research, it is crucial to identify potential areas of improvement and further investigation. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing learner autonomy in EMI studying of English-major students, future studies should consider a particular factor analysis. By examining data more specifically, researchers can understand how the factors affect learner autonomy clearly and then have more specific solutions for each factor to improve the learner autonomy of students. Furthermore, with the diversity of major education, future studies should focus on the other potential majors that attract a large number of students but without relations to English rather than English majors. This analysis not only helps to explore the real difficulties students face in improving their learner autonomy in EMI studying but also enables a better understanding of the broader context.

## **Acknowledgments**

We are profoundly thankful to the English-major students from the National Economics University, Foreign Trade University, and Thuongmai University for their participation and contributions, which were essential to the success of our study.

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