An Investigation into Foreign Language Self-Study Methods of English-Majored Students at HUFI

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Abstract: Learning foreign languages such as English, Chinese, French, Japanese, German, and so on has been popular in Vietnam. This has become a must-have condition for Vietnamese people to integrate with other countries and have a stable job. Therefore, except for learning language in school or center, learners have applied and created numerous ways to learn as well as improve the language better. This paper aims to study on how English-majored students at HUFI (Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry) self-study language effectively. The author tested 100 students on an Internet survey and directly interviewed 10 students with questions related to the topic of foreign language self-study. The results showed that students used a combination of various learning methods. In addition, they also develop their own appropriate learning styles for themselves. Most students believe that the "immersive method" including watching movies, listening to music or the radio is the most general way to learn languages. However, some students still waste a lot of time and have not found effective learning methods as expected.

Keywords: self- study, foreign language learning, autonomy methods

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, foreign language becomes a vital thing within the life, study, and work of the public, particularly students who still attempt to learn a language every day to pass the exam, expand the opportunities for future jobs, and a few other reasons. Thus, the demand for learning foreign languages is additionally increasing. The public often learns foreign languages in class, in centers, directly or indirectly online with tutors, and so on. Besides these ways of learning, self-study also plays a really important role in helping learners acquire foreign language knowledge as well as develop their abilities under the guidance of teachers. Learners must learn by themselves and self-study documents to create solid information for his or her. Nonetheless, in reality, self-study activities are still limited, within which students have not spent much time on self-study and have not built and trained self-study skills for themselves. Moreover, the most important problem is that they cannot have appropriate ways to find out the language. Lindsay Williams (2016) once said that there is nothing worse than not knowing where to begin. As soon as learners take the step from classroom to self-study, this can be one of the most important struggles they face. Therefore, self-study can make learners feel depressed, overwhelmed, lonely, and simply hand over. This survey is carefully designed to reason about foreign language self-study and to fill gaps in today's foreign language self-study methods. Then, it finds out the foremost popular ways to find out the language of scholars, particularly English- majored students from the University of Food

Industry. Besides, it helps learners supplement alternative ways to be told foreign languages and choose effective self-study methods for themselves. Hopefully, the findings from this survey will arouse learners' interest. Furthermore, this investigation can function as an instruction for those fascinated by introducing effective language self-learning strategies into their classrooms, and may also help teachers guide students to check reception in a better way.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical basis and context of self-study

The person laying the foundations for this sense of self-study was the Czechoslovakian educator John Amos Comenius (1952). Comenius said let the main goal of this, our Didactic, be to search out and discover a method of instruction that allows teachers to teach less while learners learn more (1907). Educators Pestalozzi (1876) paid much attention to the intellectual development, activeness, and creative independence of students (Pestalozzi World). The term self-learning strictly refers to learning oneself in a reflexive act, in the same way that the automobile is the one that moves likewise, and self-learning carried out by oneself, it is more appropriate to use the term autonomous learning (Manuel, 1998, Nghi, 2020). Also, according to Oldster, self-study is that the most difficult learning methodology and there are rife with dangerous pretensions, but also the foremost fruitful (2016). Talking about self-study, Vietnamese professors have considered self-study because of the golden key of education within the age of knowledge explosion. Professors Dang Vu Hoat and Ha Thi Duc have defined that self-study is one basic kind of teaching in university, which is one cognitive sort of the individual to master the system knowledge and skills are conducted by learners themselves within the classroom or outside the classroom, by or without chapter curriculum and textbooks are prescribed (2013).

Knowles (1975) said that self-directed learning is a process in which individuals take the initiative to diagnose learning requirements, define goals for achieving those needs, identify resources and tactics to make learning happen, and evaluate the process. Furthermore, Merriam and Bierema (2013) argue that autonomy is equivalent to self-direction. According to Oxford (2016, 20017), learner autonomy refers to a learner's reliance on processes to take responsibility for their learning.

2.2. Learning strategies

Chamot and O'Malley (1994) mentioned that learning strategies are defined as ideas or activities that help to improve learning results. Strategies, by definition, are likely to be conducted with awareness; otherwise, they would not be strategic; but, the same mental operations can be conducted without awareness once they are proceduralized and have the same advantageous consequences of learning. Also, Oxford (1990) and Nghi (2016) states that learning strategies are specific actions used by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more autonomous, more productive, and easier.

There are many research papers and surveys on effective language learning methods around the world to help learners develop their language. For example, Gender, academic major, and vocabulary learning strategies of Chinese EFL learners (Gu, 2002); Language learning strategies and its training model (Liu, 2010); Language learning strategy use of bilingual foreign language learners in Singapore (Wharton, 2000), etc.

Oxford in 1990 successfully developed a system of language learning strategies that was easier to understand and detailed than previous authors. Therefore, the classification of language learning strategies of Oxford was decided to use by the authors as a theoretical basis for the study.

The book "Language learning strategies" (1990) classified strategies into two groups: direct strategic groups and indirect strategic groups.

First, the direct strategic group that deals with the mental linguistic process, divided into three subgroups: (1) Memory strategy groups are used to memorize new foreign language knowledge and evoke old knowledge to use, helping learners to combine what they are learning in the target language with known information. (2) Cognitive strategy group helps learners use language through reasoning, analyzing, taking notes, summarizing, synthesizing, sketching, organizing information, practicing in a real communication environment, practicing structure and pronunciation in a standard way. (3) Compensation strategy helps learners make up for the missing knowledge. For example, learners guess meaning based on context while learning to listen and reading skills or using synonyms, discussing unknown words to support speaking and writing skills, etc.

Second, the indirect strategic group does not have a direct attachment to the acquisition of a new language, consisting of the following three sub-groups: (1) Metacognitive strategy group helps learners plan, self-manage, and self-evaluate the learning process. (2) Effective strategies help learners control the emotions that affect the learning process. (3) Social strategy group enables learners to communicate with others and understand the target culture and language.

2.3. Self-learning methods

According to Bowen (2008), there are 5 popular methods to help people self-study foreign language: (1) the vocabulary-based approach learning words with pictures, specific subjects. (2) Double translation includes combining reading books and dictionaries, then rewriting translations. (3) The grammar-based approach is memorizing grammar and do practice exercises. (4) The communicative approach is communicating with foreigners, friends, etc. (5) the immersion method consists of listening to music, watching radio, watching TV programs, movies, traveling, and so on.

In summary, studies have demonstrated that learning strategies are tools that predict how learning tasks are performed and what difficulties learners have during language learning. If language learners use a variety of learning strategies, their language skills will be enhanced. Thus, as learners develop skills in the cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective aspects, they are in control of their learning.

3. Materials and Methods

This thesis sought to investigate students' self-study methods for foreign languages from the past to the present. Furthermore, the thesis investigates the most popular language self-study methods used by students, as well as the challenges that students face during the self-study process. The researcher hopes that these findings will help students find a suitable method to improve their self-study of foreign languages and solve their problems in learning languages.

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews (recorded on the phone) and the creation of an online survey form (Google Form) with 9 questions about personal information and the topic of foreign language self-study methods. The online survey has a two-week response time and is posted on the researcher's Facebook page as well as the Yalo class group. Furthermore, the researcher conducted direct interviews with 10 students from the English language department, asking four main questions (including questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 in the online survey but without the hints) about the topic in the classroom or on school grounds, with a time limit of 4 minutes for each interview.

This mixed-methods study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. The researcher specifically used an online survey and an interview to collect both

quantitative and qualitative data. Separate quantitative and qualitative analyses were carried out, and the results were then combined to assess the overall interpretation.

3.1. Participants

The participants were 110 students from various undergraduate English language departments at the University of Food Industry in Ho Chi Minh City (HUFH) of the year 2021, including freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. The medium of instruction was English, and the exams were held in English. They are also learning Chinese and some other language. These students will have more experience with self-learning the language because they are language students. As a result, the results are slightly more accurate and general.

3.2. Assessments and Measures

One of the important goals of this research is to search out ways to self-study foreign languages effectively. What self-study methods may well be appropriate for the attitudes and learning sorts of English language students? Designed supported the characteristics, style, and nature of current student learning methods (based on popular methods of Bowen (2008)). The remaining questions, interview information, along with inquiry to seek out answers to the present research question.

To assess the difficulties and problems that students face while self-studying, the author developed survey questions based on Lindsay Williams's research paper (2016), which included issues such as depression, disorientation, a lack of goals, and not knowing where to begin. In addition, students may bring up any other issues they may be experiencing.

To solve the problem of foreign language self-study, the author employs essay questions, which allow students to express their own opinions more accurately without relying on suggestions from other research articles.

However, because it is an online survey, the survey has some minor drawbacks, such as limiting the number of students surveyed. The author solved the problem by distributing the survey to large student groups and sending it to each student individually. Furthermore, when conducting face-to-face interviews, many students are afraid to speak or understand the survey issues; therefore, the author has to suggest and support them.

4. Results and Discussion

The quantitative data are provided first, followed by the qualitative results. Descriptive statistics were used in the quantitative analyses. The chart present descriptive statistics for the data derived from the replies used in the analysis. Finally, the focus group interview analysis is presented.

4.1. Quantitative data analysis

4.1.1. Number of students participating in online survey.

Figure 1: The percentage of different school year students

It is clear that 100 English language students participated in the online survey, which includes 15 percent of freshmen, 7 percent of sophomores, 74 percent of juniors, and 4 percent of seniors. As a result, the majority of the study's findings will be based on the perspectives of third-year students. However, because it is not possible to aggregate many of the opinions of freshmen, sophomores, and seniors, the results may not be as diverse.

4.1.2. The correlation between different school year students and how much time they spent on self-learning foreign languages.

Figure 2: The proportion of different school year students' choice about the time period for self-studying foreign languages.

The second graph depicts the students' selections for the amount of time they spent on self-study. To begin, 33.33 percent of freshmen spent 1-2 hours on self-study, 26.67 percent of students chose 2-3 hours, and the proportion of students spent less than 1 hour or more than 3 hours learning a foreign language is both 20 percent. Second, 57.14 percent of sophomores took 1-2 hours to learn, with other alternatives including less than an hour, 2-3 hours, and more than 3 hours all having a 14.29 percent selection rate. In addition, the percentage of third-year students for options including less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours and more than 3 hours is 25.68 percent, 47.3 percent, 18.91 percent, and 8.11 percent respectively. Finally, given the four selections above, the fourth-year students had equal choices, all at 25 percent. Based on the data shown above, the author concludes that the majority of students spent 1-2 hours self-learning foreign languages as well as a few students took more than 3 hours on this.

4.1.3. The correlation between different school year students and how many times a week they self-study.

Figure 3: The percentage of different school year students' selection of the number of self-study times per week.

The third graph illustrates the students' selections for how many times a week they self-study foreign languages. Firstly, 60 percent of freshmen had 4 times per week for self-study, 20 percent of students chose 3 times, 13 percent of students gave different

suggestions, 7 percent of them spent 1 time, and there was no choice for 2 times. Secondly, 43 percent of sophomores preferred to learn 3 times per week, 29 percent of students chose 1 time, 0 percent of them selected 4 times, and the proportion of students picked 2 times or other ideas are the same, at 14 percent. Thirdly, the rate of third-year students for options consisting of 1 time, 2 times, 3 times, 4 times, and other is 11 percent, 24 percent, 28 percent, 23 percent, and 14 percent, respectively. Furthermore, 4 times is selected by 50 percent of seniors, 1 time and 2 times are both picked by 25 percent of students, and none of them chose 3 times or had alternative thoughts. As a result, most freshmen and seniors spent 4 times a week on self-learning, whereas 3 times a week is the highest selection of sophomores and juniors.

4.1.4. The strategies are being utilized by different school year students and effective approaches helping them acquire foreign languages the best.

Figure 4: The proportion of students' choice about a method they are using and the best effective one.

Figure 4 shows that the changes result from the students' decisions on the ways they use to self-study foreign languages and the approaches they believe are the most successful and supportive. For the methods students are applying for self-study, the immersion method had the highest rate of 65 percent, the grammar-based approach was the second with 10 percent, the double translation method which accounted for 8 percent ranked the third position, followed by 7 percent of the vocabulary-based approach, 6 percent of the tech and apps, and 4 percent of the communicative approach. Nevertheless, the student's choice of the most useful method differed from the approach they were utilizing. In particular, 49 percent of students said that immersion was the most effective strategy, while 20 percent of them chose the communicative strategy, 13 percent of them selected the grammar-based approach, and 11 percent of students picked the

vocabulary-based strategy, whereas double translation and tech and applications accounted for 5 percent and 2 percent, respectively. Based on the data presented above, it is possible to conclude that the immersion method was commonly used by students and regarded as the most effective. Second, the communicative approach was employed the least, although ranking second among effective methods. Third, learners rated technology and applications as the least effective method. Furthermore, the percentages of other methods, such as vocabulary-based approach, double translation, and grammar-based approach, did not differ significantly across the two survey items.

4.1.5. The obstacles that students frequently confront during self-learning foreign languages, as well as how they overcome them.

Figure 5: Difficulties that students often encounter during self-learning foreign languages (%)

Figure 5 deals with the obstacles that students have while self-studying foreign languages. According to the pie chart data, most students are overwhelmed, do not even know where to begin learning, and are bored when studying alone. Both of these issues account for 29 percent of the total. Also, 26 percent of students felt disoriented, 7 percent felt they had no reason to continue, and 9 percent had different opinions. Specifically, other issues that students encountered included remembering a significant quantity of vocabulary, not having a guide to rectify mistakes, not knowing how to pronounce words, and limitations in some basic skills, and so on. Furthermore, the results of this survey question are similar to William's comments (2016) regarding the difficulties that self-study students frequently confront.

Following the inquiry regarding the problems that students faced when learning foreign languages on their own, the researcher posed an essay question regarding students' thoughts on overcoming these obstacles. The table below highlights students' perspectives on this topic.

Students' opinions on resolving these difficulties	
–	Setting a goal, making plans
–	Having much time to look up all mistakes and knowledge that misunderstood
–	Looking for what things are really interested in
–	Finding out many sources that suit level in order to not losing motivations
–	Identifying preferred learning style
–	Choosing favorite topics to enhance concentration
–	Finding motivations
–	Finding a person who can lead and orientate me
–	Bringing together practice and theory
–	Picking the best time and place to study to minimize boredom, exhaustion, and distractions from learning
–	Generating interest in self-learning
–	Finding knowledge that we desire to learn
–	Dividing knowledge into little parts to make studying easier day by day
–	Combining learning English with listening to English music
–	Be proactive in self-study and find a big enough reason to stick with self-study.
–	Trying best and be patient
–	There are specific rewards and punishments for yourself
–	Talking to someone who has self-study experience
–	Concentrating
–	Not using phone while studying
–	Completing the teacher's homework

Among the 100 perspectives of students from various school years, the most frequently expressed notion is to create a study plan and choose a study approach that is appropriate for each individual. Second, students believe that they must select their favorite topics and languages to be more interested and not give up easily. Third, creating self-motivation is a key aspect of self-study. There are also some additional possibilities, such as creating their rewards and punishments, finding someone with experience to guide them, finding friends to learn alongside, and so on.

4.2. Qualitative data analysis

After the completion of an online survey, the researcher concentrated on conducting direct interviews with ten students studying in various years of English language major. These students were interviewed using four survey-style questions (6, 7,

8, and 9) without hints. The following are the students' responses, as well as the author's analysis of the interview.

4.2.1. What method students are applying when self-learning a foreign language and which effective one helps them acknowledge foreign languages the best.

In the interviews, many respondents confirmed that they are using the immersion method in the process of self-studying foreign languages. Take the interviewee 1, 6 and 7 as examples,

"I usually watch English videos on YouTube to listen and review translation to understand better." (Interviewee 1)

"I like listening to music and watching English movies, I often watch some movies which I prefer with English subtitles." (Interviewee 6)

"I buy self-study lessons online and watch YouTube and TikTok videos." (Interviewee 7)

There are a few respondents about other methods, as interviewee 4 shared:

"I often listen to foreign pronunciation videos and read bilingual books, or communicate with a foreigner."

Also, on the question of which method is most effective and helps students to absorb best, the majority of the students talked about the immersion method. It can be recognized, however, that there is a slight difference between the selection of method students are using and the method that is claimed to be effective. Still take the respondents 1, 6, and 7 for comparison,

"In my opinion, I frequently utilize the vocabulary strategy to learn by memory by posting a sheet of paper with the word on the wall." (Interviewee 1)

"I think the effective method is watching movies because when you watch movies, you can enhance listening and reading ability" (Interviewee 6)

"In my opinion, listening and learning according to the teacher's pronunciation on TikTok." (Interviewee 7)

The findings of the interviews seemed to be consistent with the findings of the questionnaire. The majority of students used the immersion strategy (viewing movies, listening to music, etc.) and thought it was the most beneficial. Some students choose other approaches, although they are few. Furthermore, the findings of the students' choice suggest that many students do not use the most effective strategy and have not discovered a good self-study approach.

4.2.2. Problems students confront during self-learning and some ways to overcome it.

During the direct interview, two difficulties were frequently mentioned by students. Most students admitted that they had difficulty with learning a large amount of vocabulary as well as grammar and structure in a foreign language. Besides, some other students said that self-study makes them feel bored and give up easily. As interviewee 5 and 6 shared,

"There are too much vocabulary, sentence structure, and word arrangement different from Vietnamese." (Interviewee 5)

"I am bored when there is no one to study with, especially, when learning to communicate without a friend, it will be very easy to get bored and frustrated." (Interviewee 6)

When asking students about how to overcome difficulties during self-study, only a few students shared their experiences while most students were confused and could not find a solution for themselves. Interviewee 3 said,

“I think a way of helping me resolve the problem is self-motivation. If you want to learn and love that foreign language, you can absorb it well.”

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to look into the self-study strategies of English majors at HUFI. Based on the survey results, the author explores the most effective learning methods used by students, investigates the challenges that students experience in self-study, and finds optimal solutions to these problems. To begin, most students in different school years spent 1-2 hours on a foreign language self-study session, with only a few students spending more than 3 hours. This is understandable given that students must make time to study other topics, participate in social activities, and work part-time. Second, most students did self-study 3-4 times a week. Freshmen and seniors, on the other hand, had more self-study time per week than sophomores and juniors. This finding demonstrates that students are aware of the importance of improving foreign languages through self-study and self-exploration. Third, more than half of the students use immersion, and they believe it is the most successful and supportive technique of learning a foreign language. Furthermore, many students do not use the way they believe is best, but rather another way. Fourth, there are three key challenges that students confront during the self-study process: overwhelm, boredom, and disorientation. Last but not least, the students devised some solutions to these issues, such as developing precise plans and goals, selecting favored topics to study well, self-motivation, and so on. Nonetheless, some students have yet to discover the best strategy to overcome these challenges.

Based on the survey results, the researcher concluded that students should experiment with various self-study ways to identify the best one for them. The author also expects that this study will aid students in self-learning and assist teachers in understanding students' real-world situations and providing better instruction to them. Moreover, the author discovered various constraints during the study process, such as the fact that the number of students in each year is not equal and third-year students make up the majority. This leads to the outcome may not be diverse and objective. As a result, the author hopes that the following researchers will be able to overcome this limitation.

6. Patents

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

Appendix

Survey question for investigating into foreign language self-study methods of English-majored students at HUFI

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- 364 1. Full name:
- 365 2. Email:
- 366 3. Which year are you in?
- 367 A. Freshman
- 368 B. Sophomore
- 369 C. Junior
- 370 D. Senior
- 371 4. How much time do you spend on self-learning foreign languages?
- 372 A. Less than an hour
- 373 B. 1-2 hours
- 374 C. More than 3 hours
- 375 5. How many times a week do you self-study?
- 376 A. 1
- 377 B. 2
- 378 C. 3
- 379 D. 4
- 380 E. Other
- 381 6. What method are you applying when learning a foreign language by yourself?
- 382 A. The vocabulary-based approach
- 383 B. Double translation
- 384 C. The grammar-based approach
- 385 D. The communicative approach
- 386 E. The immersion method
- 387 F. Tech & Apps
- 388 G. Other
- 389 7. In your view, which method is effective and helps you absorb foreign languages
- 390 the best?
- 391 A. The vocabulary-based approach
- 392 B. Double translation
- 393 C. The grammar-based approach
- 394 D. The communicative approach
- 395 E. The immersion method
- 396 F. Tech & Apps
- 397 G. Other
- 398 8. What difficulties do you often encounter when learning foreign languages by
- 399 yourself?
- 400 A. Overwhelmed, do not know where to start
- 401 B. Boredom
- 402 C. Disorientation
- 403 D. Lack of reasons
- 404 E. Other
- 405 9. In your opinion, how to overcome these difficulties?

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