

Developing Self-study Skills on Learning English Vocabulary for Non-English-majored Students at IUH

Hoai Nguyen Vu Manh, MA¹, Trần Ngọc Thảo Lam², Trần Thế Sang³ & Nguyễn Thị Hồng Yến⁴

¹ Instructor at Faculty of Foreign Languages, Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City.

^{2,3,4} Students at Faculty of Foreign Languages, Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City,

Corresponding Author: Hoai Nguyen Vu Manh E-mail: nguyenhoai060269@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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As the need to study English in recent life is developing, English is becoming popularized, and vocabulary is the key to a language. Therefore, non-English-majored students also need to study English, whether for academic goals or personal goals; they struggle to pick up the language. It is necessary to identify more about the vocabulary self-learning in this group of students. This analysis aimed to find out students' difficulties and recommend helpful learning strategies with great help from technology. Quantitative and qualitative research was chosen as the methodology, and a questionnaire was given to 150 non-English-major students at IUH. The results showed the challenges students faced when they learning vocabulary on their own is the meaning. However, research has also found appropriate methods and technology to help students overcome these challenges. After the study, learners will have a clear understanding of what is holding them back and solutions to study vocabulary on their own more effectively.

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

English has grown into a global language over time, often relized as the world's "second language". It is widely used in research, communication, jobs, and education. Crystal (2003) put it well in English as a Global Language: "English is the go-to language in over 70 countries". Knowing English, especially its vocabulary, can unlock a ton of opportunities, from learning new things to landing better jobs or connecting with people worldwide. However, for students who are not majoring in English, picking up vocabulary can be challenging. Limited practice, a lack of confidence, and ineffective study habits often hinder their progress. Without the right approach, building a solid word bank for speaking, writing, or even understanding what they hear and read can feel like an uphill battle.

Benson (2011) emphasized in Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning when he said, "Learning on your own helps you really get the language and remember it for the long haul". Since self-study is such a big deal for mastering vocabulary, we decided to dive into this topic: "Developing self-study skills on learning English vocabulary for non-English-majored students at Industrial University at Ho Chi Minh City". Our goal is to figure out practical, step-by-step ways that help these students enhance their vocabulary on their own and gain more confidence in using English.

1.2 Research Objectives

There will be three primary goals for this research. Firstly, the study finds out the obstacles that non-English-majored students at IUH could face when learning vocabulary. Secondly, the study looks for efficient self-study strategies to support non-English-majored students at IUH in learning English vocabulary. Lastly, this study will examine the role of learning resources and technology in fostering independent English vocabulary learning.

1.3 Research Questions

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1. What's holding non-English-majored students back when they try to learn vocabulary on their own?
2. What tips or strategies can help them get better at studying vocabulary by themselves?
3. How can technology make it easier for them to improve their vocabulary through self-study?

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the self-study practices of non-English-majored students at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City (IUH) in learning English vocabulary. It aims to explore the challenges these students face, effective self-study strategies, and the role of digital tools in vocabulary acquisition. The research will involve observing and analyzing students' study habits over several months assessing the effectiveness of various self-directed learning techniques, including digital applications, reading strategies, and vocabulary retention methods. The study is limited to non-English-majored students and does not include English majors or professional language learners, as their vocabulary acquisition needs and study approaches differ significantly. Additionally, the research will not focus on broader aspects of language learning, such as grammar, pronunciation, or writing skills, but will specifically address vocabulary acquisition. The findings will be based on qualitative and quantitative data collected through surveys and observation within the given timeframe.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of key terms

2.1.1 Self-study

The definition of self-study generally revolves around the idea of independent learning, where individuals take responsibility for their own education without direct supervision from a teacher. It involves self-assessment, reflection, and various learning strategies (including selecting study materials and making plans) to achieve personal or academic goals.

Although there are a lot of ways to define self-study, the University of Edinburgh describes self-study as a form of practitioner research that focuses more on the individual's beliefs, understandings, and feelings than on the practice itself. It is often undertaken with the intention to improve as a practitioner and can serve as a starting point for action research. Additionally, IGI Global defines self-study as a research method for systematically studying one's own practice, teaching, or other phenomena. As Luu Xuân Mới (2000), "Self-study is a form of individual cognitive activity aimed at mastering a system of knowledge and skills, carried out by students both in and outside the classroom, either following or independent of prescribed curricula and textbooks. It is a fundamental method of learning in higher education, characterized by a high degree of independence and strong personal engagement". We can acknowledge that the definition of self-study is wide, but it is all about the process of learning something on your own. It requires discipline and independence.

A study by Ngo Thi Thanh (2019) described how learner autonomy was promoted through self-assessment and reflection activities. As the self-assessment related to self-study was mentioned, her study investigated the relationship between self-assessment and reflection and how they could enhance learner autonomy. Students engaged in self-assessment and reflection activities developed greater independence in their learning processes, particularly in improving listening and speaking skills. Through these practices, learners became more aware of their strengths and areas needing improvement, enabling them to set more targeted learning objectives. Participants exhibited increased motivation and a more proactive approach toward their language learning endeavors.

Forms of self-study can be categorized into three types: self-study in class with the organization, supervision, and guidance of instructors; self-study outside the classroom under the organization and supervision of instructors; and self-study outside the classroom without any organization or supervision from instructors. The first two forms are aimed at fulfilling the requirements of the academic curriculum, while the third form demonstrates the learner's self-motivation to expand and enhance their knowledge and skills, driven by their personal curiosity and desire for understanding. (Nguyễn Đức Giang, 2021)

As Cambridge Dictionary defines, self-study skill as "an ability to do an activity or job well, especially because you have practiced it". So, self-study skills are required for the learners to complete the educational mission. Self-study skills refer to the ability to effectively carry out one or a set of self-learning actions by applying acquired knowledge and experience in a manner appropriate to given conditions. (Nguyễn Cảnh Toàn, 1999)

2.1.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. According to Steven Stahl (2005), having vocabulary knowledge means more than just knowing a word's definition; it also involves understanding how the word relates to real-world contexts. Similarly, Nation (2001) defines vocabulary as the complete collection of words in a language, encompassing their meanings, structural components (morphology), and appropriate usage in various situations.

Paul Nation, a leading researcher in vocabulary studies, categorized vocabulary into four types based on language skills (2001):

- Listening vocabulary – words recognized while listening.
- Speaking vocabulary – words used in speech.
- Reading vocabulary – words recognized in written texts.
- Writing vocabulary – words actively used in writing.

Hatch and Brown (1995) indicate two kinds of vocabulary, namely receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary.

- Receptive Vocabulary – words that a learner can recognize and understand when reading or listening but may not use actively.
- Productive Vocabulary – words that a learner can actively use in speaking and writing.

Each classification emphasizes different aspects of vocabulary learning and acquisition, demonstrating that vocabulary is not just about knowing words but also about their practical use in communication. Mastery of vocabulary involves not only knowing individual words but also understanding how they function within language structures, how they relate to other words, and how they contribute to fluent and meaningful interactions.

2.2 Results of previous studies

2.2.1 Importance of self-study

Several studies have emphasized the importance of self-study in learning English vocabulary, highlighting its impact on retention, comprehension, and overall language proficiency. Since vocabulary learning is a continuous process that extends beyond the classroom, self-study provides students with flexibility, autonomy, and deeper retention of words through consistent exposure and practice.

Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) indicate that deeper cognitive engagement in self-study activities, such as creating sentences with new words or engaging in spaced repetition, leads to better retention. Benson (2001) emphasizes that autonomy plays a crucial role in enhancing motivation, critical thinking, and long-term language retention. He argues that autonomous learners take greater responsibility for their own learning, becoming more engaged and proactive in the process. When students choose their own resources and methods, they become more motivated and engaged in the learning process, which enhances their ability to retain and recall vocabulary effectively. Additionally, autonomy equips learners with the ability to acquire new languages beyond formal education, fostering lifelong learning and adaptability in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Besides the traditional method of self-study through books, tasks, or assignments, which has been practiced through many generations. The role of technology in self-study has also been widely researched. Research by Chacón-Beltrán (2017) suggests that utilizing digital tools and mobile applications for self-study can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition by offering interactive and engaging learning experiences. This aligns with findings from a systematic literature review, which indicates that mobile applications are effective, useful, and appropriate tools for retaining and practicing new vocabulary. Additionally, studies have shown that technology-assisted vocabulary learning (TAVL) tools positively influence learners' vocabulary acquisition, motivation, flow, and engagement. These insights underscore the potential of digital platforms to support and enrich vocabulary learning in self-directed contexts.

Overall, previous studies highlight that self-study is a crucial factor in successful English vocabulary acquisition, enabling learners to personalize their learning, reinforce word knowledge, and become more autonomous in language development. Self-study is a powerful tool for vocabulary learning. By incorporating effective strategies and digital resources, learners can actively build their vocabulary in a way that aligns with their interests and goals. In an increasingly globalized world, developing strong vocabulary skills through self-study is essential for effective communication, academic success, and professional growth.

2.2.2 Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of language learning. Without sufficient vocabulary, communication becomes difficult, even if a learner has a strong grasp of grammar. According to Zhihong Bai (2018), vocabulary is one of the three key elements of language, serving as the building material and foundation of language. To communicate fluently with others, the first prerequisite is to have a certain amount of vocabulary. Moreover, Schmitt (2000) also emphasizes that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language”.

In English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), learning vocabulary items plays a vital role in all language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (I.S.P Nation, 2011).

2.2.2.1 Listening – Speaking

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in both listening and speaking, as it directly impacts a learner’s ability to understand and communicate effectively. Learning vocabulary through listening is one type of learning through meaning-focused input; learners need at least 95 percent coverage of the running words (around 3,000-word families). In informal spoken input, it is important to gain reasonable comprehension and to have reasonable success at guessing unknown vocabulary from context clues (I.S.P Nation, 2001). This means that without sufficient vocabulary, listeners may struggle to follow conversations, miss key details, or misinterpret meanings.

In listening, a strong vocabulary helps individuals recognize words quickly, comprehend spoken messages, and follow conversations without constantly translating in their minds. It enables them to grasp meaning from context and respond appropriately. When learners understand a greater percentage of spoken language, they can focus more on tone, intonation, and implied meanings rather than just decoding words; a strong and wide vocabulary will balance the situation. Similarly, in speaking, vocabulary is essential for expressing thoughts clearly and fluently. A rich vocabulary allows speakers to choose the right words, avoid hesitation, and convey their ideas with precision. When speakers have rich lexis, they do not have too much concern about the way they convey ideas, and they will have more opportunities to adjust appropriate expressions and engage in discussions and dialogue more fluently.

A well-balanced listening and speaking course includes opportunities to learn through listening to monologues and interactive communication, opportunities to learn from speaking and interacting with others, the deliberate study of pronunciation, vocabulary and multiword units, and grammar, and opportunities to become fluent in listening and speaking (Nation, 2001). At the same time, vocabulary expansion enables them to communicate more effectively. Multiword units, such as collocations, idioms, and fixed expressions, enhance fluency by allowing learners to use language in chunks rather than processing each word separately.

2.2.2.2 Reading – Writing

Vocabulary size is directly related to reading comprehension, as a larger vocabulary allows learners to understand a greater percentage of the text without relying too much on dictionaries. When readers encounter unfamiliar words, their ability to recognize word families and analyze word parts (morphology) helps them make educated guesses about the meaning, improving reading efficiency. This skill is especially useful when dealing with academic texts, literature, and technical materials, where complex vocabulary is common.

For example:

We have a base word, “act,” which means “to behave in the stated way”, its word family includes:

- Noun: action, actor
- Verb: react, enact
- Adjective: active, inactive
- Adverb: actively

All of the word forms of the act have the meaning of the original word “act”. Through this, a learner who knows the base word (here is “act”) can easily understand the other forms without having to memorize each word separately. Learning the word families when learning vocabulary will help you to comprehend reading paragraphs more easily.

Similarly, the word structure (morphology) helps readers deal with advanced words. For example, the suffix “-escent” indicates a process of becoming. The word “adolescent” means in the process of developing into adulthood (with the root “adol-” means

“to mature”). Another example of this is the word “luminescent,” which is the process of emitting light (with the root “lumine-” meaning “light”).

By mastering word families and morphology in the process of learning vocabulary, learners develop the ability to deconstruct complex words, enhance academic performance, and refine their reading comprehension skills.

In academic writing, a richer vocabulary enables more precise and sophisticated writing, allowing writers to convey ideas clearly and persuasively. Strong vocabulary skills help learners avoid repetition, use varied sentence structures, and create more engaging and coherent texts. Specialized vocabulary and knowledge of word collocations are essential for producing well-structured essays, reports, and research papers. Writers need to understand the appropriate use of formal expressions, transitions, and discipline-specific terminology to communicate their ideas effectively.

According to *Beyond the Breadth of Vocabulary*, the depth of word knowledge by Binder, Cote, Lee, Bessette, and Vu (2017), including understanding multiple meanings, connotations, and usage contexts, significantly contributes to reading proficiency. This depth allows readers to navigate complex texts and discern subtle differences in meaning, thereby enhancing comprehension. A well-rounded vocabulary, including both a large number of known words and an in-depth understanding of their meanings, is crucial for improving reading comprehension. Therefore, vocabulary instruction should focus on not just learning more words but also understanding their multiple meanings, usage, and connections to other words.

2.2.3 Methods for improving vocabulary (inside - outside the classroom)

Vocabulary is one of the three key elements of language, serving as the building material and foundation of language. To communicate fluently with others, the first prerequisite is to have a certain amount of vocabulary. Faced with the large number of words to learn, understanding vocabulary learning strategies is essential (Zhihong Bai). This article primarily studies methods for self-learning English vocabulary both inside and outside the classroom. First, it introduces the importance of self-learning. Second, it highlights the importance of vocabulary. Third, it discusses methods to enhance vocabulary (both inside and outside the classroom). Finally, it presents specific self-learning vocabulary strategies and offers some opinions on these strategies. It is hoped that this article can be helpful in students’ English vocabulary learning and expand their vocabulary. Moreover, it may improve students’ interest in vocabulary learning and make vocabulary acquisition easier.

2.2.3.1 Inside the Classroom

It is believed that the ability of students to make decisions about their education in cooperative and encouraging settings is a crucial component in the development of autonomy. According to Allwright (1988), teachers can promote autonomy by reevaluating the choices they often make and determining whether students should also participate in decision-making about the organization of class activities and the evaluation of their results.

The ultimate goal is to encourage learner autonomy to prepare and equip individuals with the skills for lifelong learning. That is why the processes within the classroom must contribute to developing self-awareness and skills on an individual basis, which will encourage autonomous learning. The provision of responsibility for learners, based on a shared understanding of the learner as an individual (teacher awareness) and self as a learner (learner awareness), leads to a collaborative relationship between learner autonomy and differentiated learning. The key principle here is that giving students a degree of choice in the activities they engage in can be an effective way to provide learners in large language classes with adequate learning experience.

Evaluation of classroom learning involves considering objectives, learning exercises, and suitable evaluation standards. Four key advantages of formal self-assessment for independent learners were noted by Oscarson (1989). First, it assists students in evaluating the quality of their communication. Second, it helps students become more conscious of the learning process and challenges them to think critically about the material and evaluation techniques. Thirdly, it helps them comprehend the range of potential objectives in language learning. Finally, it expands the scope of evaluation criteria to encompass domains where students exhibit remarkable proficiency. Self-evaluation increases students’ motivation. A variety of instruments, such as portfolios, progress cards, self-rating scales, and self-marked tests, have been created for self-evaluation. Self-assessment methods that promote formative self-monitoring and a cyclical approach to reevaluating objectives and plans, rather than just focusing on competency or ability, seem particularly crucial from an autonomy standpoint.

Classroom-based approaches aim to promote self-study learning by involving learners in decision-making processes related to the daily management of their learning. This capacity is developed more effectively within the classroom, where learners can easily cooperate with their peers and seek support from teachers. Flexibility in the guidelines for implementing the curriculum often creates spaces where teachers can allow learners a degree of control over aspects of their classroom learning. If the curriculum lacks flexibility, the degree of self-directed learning developed by the learner will be correspondingly constrained.

2.2.3.2 Outside the Classroom

Language learners typically see in-class and out-of-class learning as having distinct but complementary purposes, and they believe that out-of-class learning is crucial for successful language acquisition. While independent learners benefit from additional language input from out-of-class learning, in-class learning is especially crucial for fulfilling the metalinguistic function of language production and for fostering the growth of productive abilities like speaking and writing.

Bailly (2011) lists three imperative components for autonomous language learning beyond the classroom necessary for success in learner autonomy development: motivation, learning resources, and learning skills. Learners' out-of-class engagement with technological resources for learning is subject to their will, interest, and motivation, their perception of the affordances of technological resources and interrelated activities, and their ability to make efficient use of the resources.

To strengthen learners' determination and ability to engage in autonomous language learning outside the classroom, it is essential to help them recognize the connection between in-class learning and out-of-class learning. Teachers play an important role in helping students connect their in-class learning experiences with out-of-class learning. Teachers should align the course objectives, curriculum, and academic work with tasks that help students apply what they have learned in class to other aspects of life to enhance out-of-class learning. It is recommended to explain to students the parts of the curriculum related to out-of-class learning to help them identify the links between what they do inside the classroom and what they do outside the classroom. Teachers should show appreciation for materials prepared by learners and use language samples that learners have prepared and gathered from outside the class. The diversity of in-class topics, activities, and resources should enrich the learners' out-of-class learning repertoire.

Designing and choosing self-study learning resources and tools requires taking into account both the advantages and disadvantages of self-directed learning and studying outside of the classroom, in addition to the materials' quality in terms of language potential. According to Tomlinson (2010), the diversity and authenticity of language exposure and use, the possibility of emotional and cognitive engagement, the mechanisms that elicit noticing, and the provision of learning benefits that extend beyond language acquisition are all essential components of high-quality language learning materials.

According to Tomlinson (2010), a variety of text genres and types pertaining to subjects, themes, and situations should be included in self-study language materials. Collaboration, publication, new forms of representation and expression through digital artifacts, and inquiry are the four primary aspects of the learner experience that technology facilitates. Laurillard (2002) highlights how several new media forms-such as interactive or multimedia resources, narrative media (non-interactive materials), adaptive or computer-based media, communicative media, and productive media-can be used to engage students in learning with technological resources.

The authenticity of the task or the reflection of the actual language and activities used in a target community; the modern use of the text's denticity or the material's origin. He thinks that a broader definition of authenticity is required. The limited focus on the authenticity of texts, artifacts, and educational resources must be expanded to take into account how learners perceive authenticity when interacting with the language. He requests genuine resources related to invention, creativity, and discovery, as well as chances for individual expression.

Methods for causing notice include presenting information in ways that highlight the significance of linguistic elements and involving students in a range of exploratory and learning exercises. The significance of linguistic elements is increased by textual enhancement, input flood, and audio input, as well as by involving students in a variety of experiential learning activities.

2.2.4 Self-study Vocabulary Methods

Studies in this field have found several ways to help in learning vocabulary. This part will look at popular methods for self-study on learning vocabulary that are often used and proven to work.

2.2.4.1 Spaced Repetition System (SRS)

Spaced repetition is a proof-based way to learn that often uses flashcards. New and tougher flashcards are shown more often, while older and easier ones are shown less often to take advantage of the mind's spacing effect. Using space repetition has been shown to boost how fast someone learns (Webb 2020).

2.2.4.2 *Vocabulary in context learning*

Using meaningful contexts for learning vocabulary forces the learner to use the words in a real-world setting and apply their knowledge instead of sounding out words on a flashcard. Nagy and Herman (1986) showed that learners retained better by drawing the vocabulary in context-rich materials, demonstrating the utility of contextual learning.

2.2.4.3 *Keyword method*

Creating associations between new vocabulary and the learner's native language to help memorize these visuals or sounds from their primary language is called the Keyword Method. This technique has been introduced by Atkinson (1975), who leverages imagery and mnemonic cues to promote the learning of vocabulary in no time. Pressley et al. (1982) provide further support for this strategy, suggesting that it is especially beneficial to language learners since they often attempt to acquire only a few hundred words before giving up.

2.2.4.4 *Mind Mapping and Our Vocabulary List*

Shuffling vocabulary by topic or into mind maps assists the learner in identifying relationships between words, ultimately cementing memorization. Oxford (1990) says that categorizing vocabulary helps students to organize the information better. Schmitt (1995) builds on this by stating that mind maps not only improve memory but also raise problem-solving skills when learning words.

2.2.4.5 *Gamification in Vocabulary Learning*

Incorporating game-like elements into vocabulary learning has been shown to boost motivation and learning outcomes. Nation and Webb (2011) highlight that gamified approaches increase the speed of memorization and prolong the memory of vocabulary items. Apps such as Duolingo, Kahoot, and Wordwall exemplify this approach, making vocabulary acquisition a more engaging and less monotonous experience, as demonstrated by Godwin-Jones (2018).

2.2.4.6 *Practice through Speaking and Writing*

Active use of vocabulary in everyday communication is one of the most effective strategies for memorization. Ellis (1997) highlights that using new words in activities such as journaling, conversations, or presentations enhances learners' ability to absorb and apply them. Webb (2005) reinforces this view, noting that regularly integrating vocabulary into writing or speaking improves retention and adaptability in a variety of contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Research context*

This study takes place at the Faculty of Foreign Languages (FFL) of the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City (IUH). IUH is one of the universities that aims to provide high-quality human resources to contribute to the economic development of Vietnam. IUH currently has three campuses, and the campus we want to survey is located at 12 Nguyen Van Bao, Ward 4, Go Vap District. This campus includes a large area with 800 large classrooms, 120 modern workshops, and more than 400 different types of laboratories. The university places great emphasis on the development of its teaching programs and learning materials. Since its establishment, the university has recruited experienced young scientists and engineers to teach the staff. The goal of this study is to investigate the development of English vocabulary self-learning skills for non-English-majored students at IUH. In order to offer useful suggestions for improving self-learning techniques so students can enhance their English language proficiency.

3.2 *Participants*

The participants in this study are non-English-majored students at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City. Students will be selected from different majors at IUH to ensure diversity. With their interest and ability in self-directed learning, they are ideal candidates to assess the effectiveness of applications in supporting autonomous learning. Their feedback will provide valuable insights into how these tools and self-motivated learning can help non-English-majored students enhance their language skills through independent study.

3.3 *Research Approach*

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The reason for choosing this approach is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting self-study vocabulary among non-English-majored students at IUH and to propose effective solutions. The quantitative aspect helps in collecting statistical data on

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students' self-study habits and challenges, while the qualitative aspect provides deeper insights into their experiences, motivations, and difficulties.

The quantitative method of this research provides measurable data on students' self-study vocabulary habits, challenges, and the effectiveness of various study techniques. The qualitative method, on the other hand, allows for a deeper exploration of students' personal experiences, motivations, and difficulties related to learning vocabulary on their own. Through open-ended questions and observations, the study aims to uncover the underlying reasons behind students' self-study vocabulary habits and the challenges they encounter. The combination of these two methodologies is justified by the need to provide both breadth and depth in the research findings.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

To collect relevant data, this study utilizes the following research methods:

1. Survey (Quantitative method)

The survey method is used for collecting quantitative data from non-English-majored students at IUH. A questionnaire consists of 20 structured questions aimed at understanding students' general information, self-study habits, and challenges. There are 3 main sections related to the aim of the questionnaire: challenges faced in the self-directed learning process, self-study vocabulary methods, and helpful technology for self-study vocabulary. The survey is presented to a sample of 150 students from different majors at IUH to ensure diversity. The respondents complete the questionnaire anonymously to encourage honest responses. The gathered data is then analyzed using statistical methods to identify common trends among students' vocabulary self-study behaviors, allowing for an objective conclusion.

2. Open-ended (Qualitative method)

To complement the quantitative data, open-ended questions at the end of the survey allow participants to freely share their personal thoughts. These questions provide deeper insights into students' personal vocabulary, self-study experiences, motivations, and recommendations. The respondents are able to choose whether they are willing or not to answer these questions in order to share their experiences and represent a diverse range of academic backgrounds.

3. Observations (Qualitative method)

Classroom and library observations are conducted to examine students' self-study behaviors in real-life settings. These observations aim to assess how students engage with learning resources, manage distractions, and interact with their study environment. Key aspects of observation include the types of study materials used (e.g., books, online resources), levels of concentration, and common distractions faced (e.g., mobile phones, social interactions). Participant observations, observing from the viewpoint of a member, provide unbiased insights into how students approach self-study in practice and findings through firsthand experiences. This method adds another layer of depth to the study, ensuring that the final recommendations are grounded in actual student behavior rather than just perceptions or opinions.

3.5 Procedures

The procedure of this study follows a structured sequence to ensure a systematic and organized approach to data collection and analysis. First, the study begins with the identification of key definitions, research objectives, and outlines. Next, the survey to 150 students will complete the survey; then, responses will be collected and analyzed. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns in students' self-study vocabulary habits and challenges. Following the survey, observations are conducted in study environments such as classrooms or libraries in order to seek real-world evidence to support the survey. By employing a mixed-methods approach, we aimed to capture a comprehensive view of habits and difficulties encountered by non-English-majored students in their vocabulary self-learning process in English, ultimately contributing to the improvement of vocabulary self-study skills through method and technology.

3.6 Data analysis

Following the completion of the questionnaire data collection procedure, the researcher will carry out crucial actions such as sorting the survey forms, categorizing the questions, evaluating the data, using chart kinds to present the data, and exporting information from Google Forms. To clearly show the survey's objectives and findings, the data will be displayed using charts, including pie charts, column charts, and bar charts. An essential step in the sequence of procedures for analyzing survey data is exporting data from Google Forms. A feature in Google Forms makes it simple for users to move all the data they have gathered into a Google Sheets spreadsheet. Researchers can select to export data to Google Sheets from the "Responses" section of Google Forms when the survey is completed. Once all the survey data has been automatically entered into a new spreadsheet, the researcher will do the data analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Findings

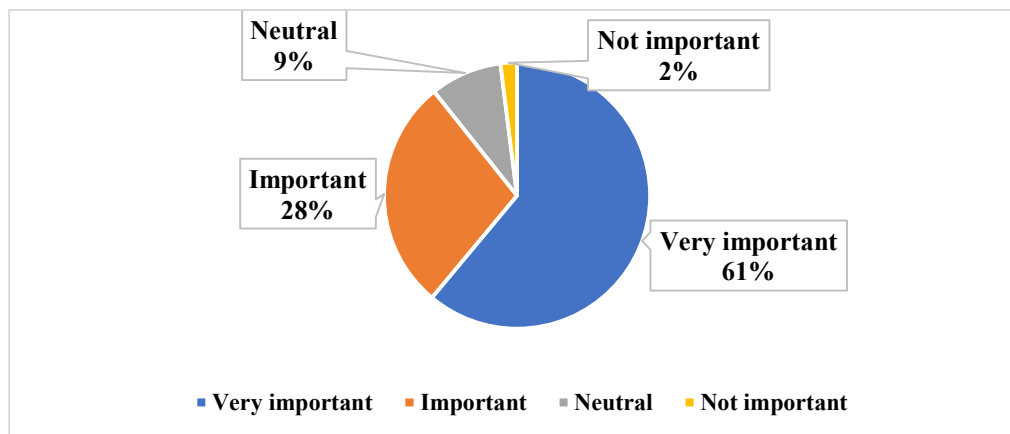


Figure 4.1 Importance of vocabulary

This pie chart shows the opinion of students on the importance of self-learning vocabulary for their English efficiency. Most respondents, 61%, consider it "Very important", highlighting that most of the students identify vocabulary as an important factor in the development of language. Additionally, 28% of students consider it as "Important", strengthening the idea that an important part sees it as beneficial. Meanwhile, 9% remain "Neutral," and only 2% consider it to be "Not important", indicating that almost all respondents have accepted self-learning vocabulary as a valuable practice. This finding suggests that having a strong vocabulary is an important aspect of the process of studying English. This leads to some factors surrounding self-study English vocabulary, including challenges learners face, effective methods, and the role of technology in this.

4.1.1 Challenges in self-studying English vocabulary

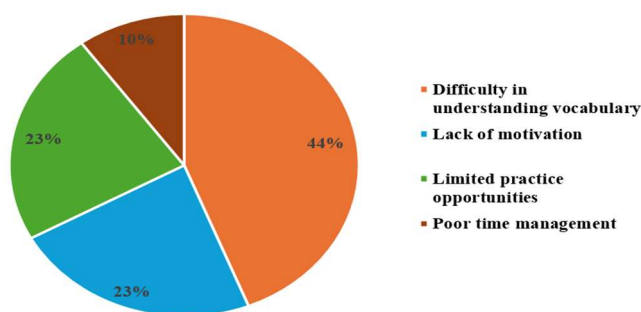


Figure 4.1.1.1 Challenges faced by students when self-study English vocabulary

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This pie chart shows the main challenges of students in learning English vocabulary. 44% of the most important difficulty reported by students was understanding the vocabulary, showing that about half of the respondents struggle with understanding and retention of the word. 23% of students cite Lack of motivation as a major obstacle, making it difficult for them to be committed to expand their vocabulary. Meanwhile, 23% conflict with limited practice opportunities, especially for non-English-majored students who need to apply for English in their major. Finally, 10% of students find time management challenging, as they struggle to allocate adequate study time to other subjects. These findings highlight the difficulty of students understanding the vocabulary when studying vocabulary on their own.

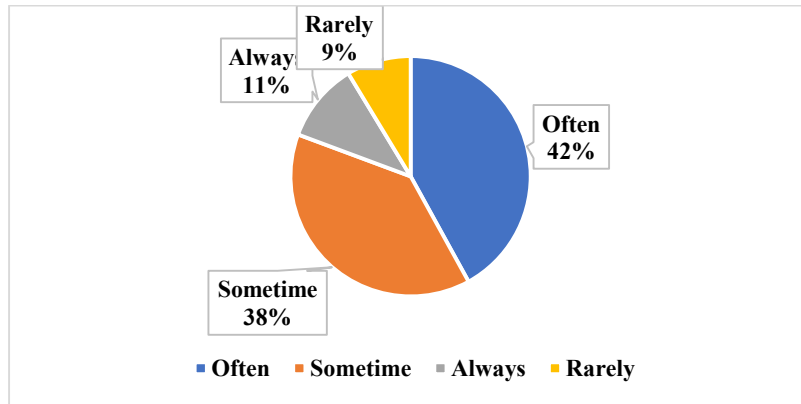


Figure 4.1.1.2 Maintain self-study vocabulary routine.

This pie chart illustrates how frequently students follow a vocabulary self-study routine. Based on the data, 42% of students reported that they often engage in this practice, which suggests a relatively strong effort to improve vocabulary independently. Around 38% said they sometimes study vocabulary on their own, indicating a moderate level of consistency. 11% of the students said they always keep up this habit, which reflects a small but consistent group. On the other hand, 9% shared that they rarely study vocabulary on their own, possibly because of time limitations or low motivation. These results suggest that students are struggling to maintain steady self-study habits when it comes to learning vocabulary.

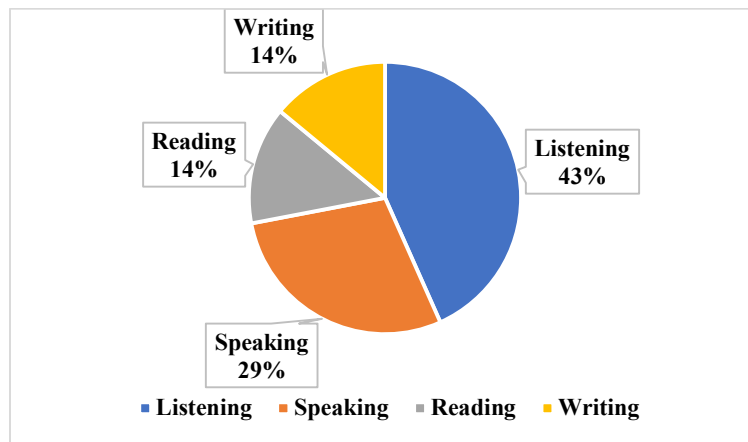


Figure 4.1.1.3 Aspect affected by vocabulary

This pie chart shows which language aspect is affected by vocabulary due to students' opinions. 43% of students report that listening is the most challenging skill, making it the most important area of difficulty. 29% conflict with Speaking, which shows that about a quarter of students find it difficult to practice oral communication regularly. Reading and writing are often quoted

as issues, and 14% of students, respectively, report difficulties in these areas. This data shows that vocabulary affects listening and speaking a lot.

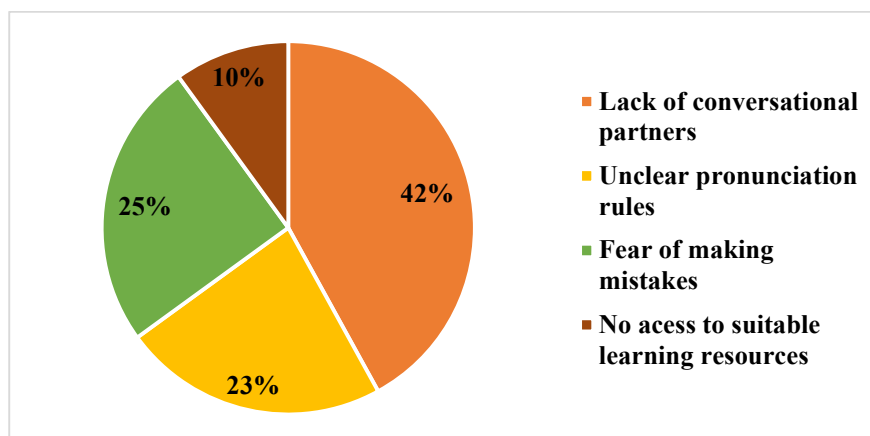


Figure 4.1.1.4 Obstacle of practice speaking.

This pie chart examines the major obstacles that prevent students from practicing their English speaking skills. The most prominent issue is that there is a Lack of conversational partners (42%), showing that about half of the respondents struggle with real-life practice opportunities. Additionally, 23% of students cite Unclear pronunciation rules as a challenge. Fear of making mistakes (25%) is another major factor, showing that confidence plays an important role in the ability to speak. Finally, 10% of the students mentioned that they have no access to appropriate teaching resources and limited their ability to practice. These findings emphasize the need for structured speaking opportunities, pronunciation workshops, and confidence-making activities to help students remove these obstacles and improve their spoken English.

4.1.2 Effective methods and approaches for self-study English vocabulary

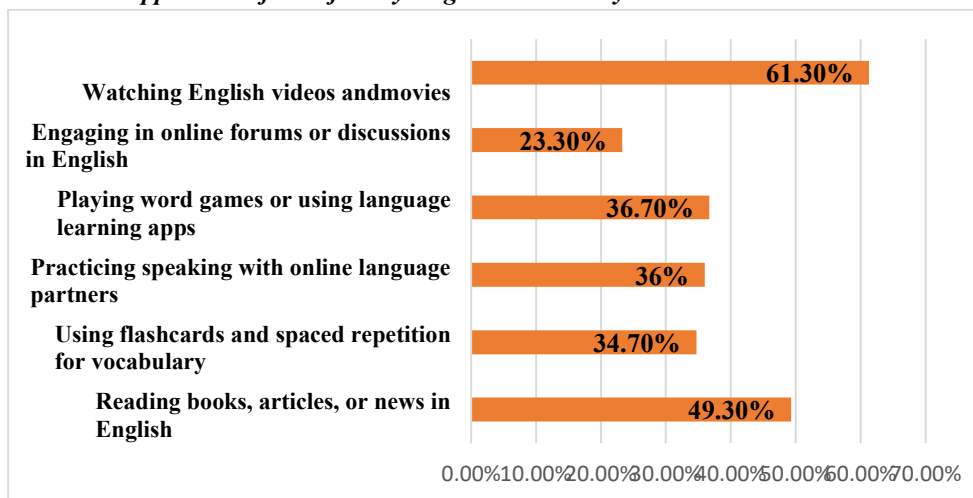


Figure 4.1.2.1 Effective methods for improving vocabulary

From the chart, we can see that the most popular self-study method is watching English videos and movies, with 61.3% choosing this option. This indicates that learning vocabulary through listening and real-life context is widely preferred. Reading books, articles, or news in English at 49.3%. Reading helps learners acquire new vocabulary in various natural contexts. Using flashcards and spaced repetition for vocabulary was also quite popular, with 34.7% showing that active memorization techniques remain highly effective. Practicing speaking with online language partners reached 36%, proving that many learners find communication practice beneficial for improving vocabulary and boosting confidence when speaking in public or in daily conversations at work.

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Playing word games or using language learning apps (36.7%) demonstrates the effectiveness of gamified learning and technology in vocabulary acquisition. Engaging in online forums or discussions in English had the lowest selection (23.3%). This suggests that it is less popular than other approaches, possibly because learners lack confidence, have a limited vocabulary for writing, or find it challenging to participate in in-depth discussions. In conclusion, strategies like watching English-language films are popular among students.

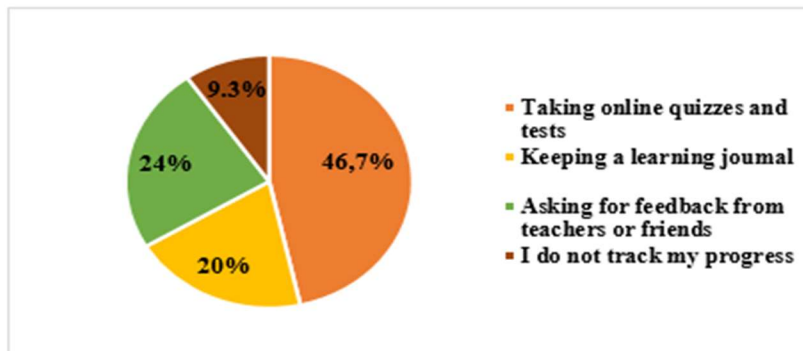


Figure 4.1.2.2 Assess English learning progress.

According to the pie chart, 46,7% of respondents selected “Taking online quizzes and tests,” making this the most popular way for students to gauge their progress in learning English. This suggests that controlled assessments are the best method for monitoring development and improving students’ critical thinking abilities. As evidenced by the 20% of respondents who said they “Keep a learning journal,” self-evaluation and personal tracking are also useful. 24% of respondents selected “Asking for feedback from teachers or friends,” indicating that many students actively seek feedback in order to assess and gauge their progress. “I do not track my progress,” which was chosen by 9.3% of respondents, is the least popular approach, suggesting that a small percentage of students do not actively measure their learning progress. In summary, learners' progress is mainly in taking online quizzes and tests, which account for the highest number.

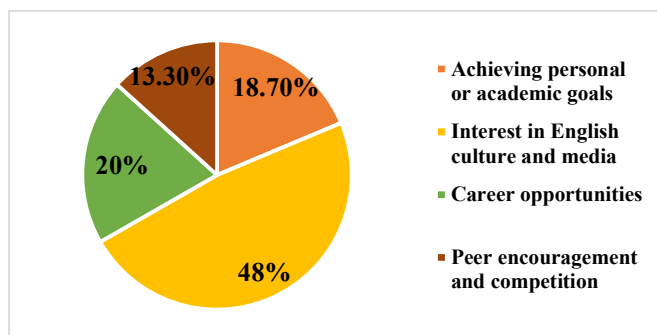
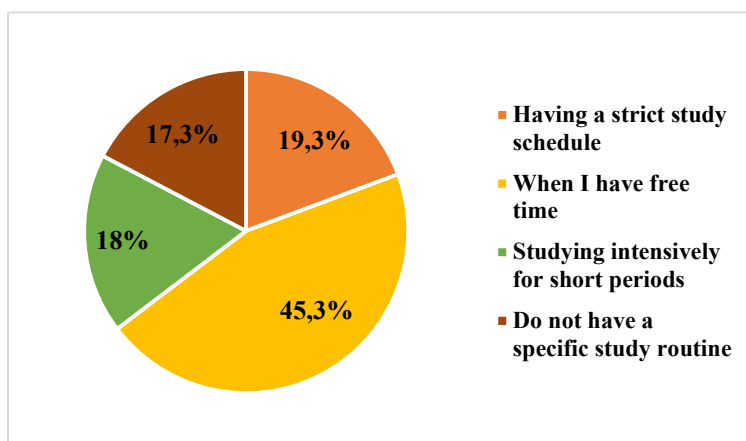


Figure 4.1.2.3 Motivation when learning English independently

The chart illustrates the factors that motivate learners to study English independently. It is evident that students' interest in English culture and media accounts for the highest percentage, reaching 48 %, indicating that most learners are attracted to content such as movies, music, and books in English. “Career opportunities” rank second with 20%, reflecting the fact that many learners study English to improve their job prospects. “Achieving personal or academic goals” constitutes 18,7%, suggesting that some learners are motivated by the desire to enhance their personal and academic achievements. Finally, “Peer encouragement and competition” holds the lowest proportion (13,3%), indicating that social factors have less influence compared to personal and

professional reasons. Overall, interest in English culture and media was the most popular choice as most learners like to learn about culture and other media.

Figure 4.1.2.4 Self-study time



The pie chart illustrates how students structure their self-study time. “When I have free time,” 45,3% of students choose this method, making it the most common approach. This indicates that the majority of students study whenever they have spare time, without a specific plan. “Having a strict study schedule” accounts for 19,3% of students choosing this method, meaning that only a small proportion of students follow a rigorous study routine. This suggests that planned studying exists but is not significant, which could affect learning efficiency. “Do not have a specific study routine” accounts for 17,3%, which is nearly the same proportion as those with a strict schedule. This reflects that a portion of students lack a fixed study method. “Studying intensively for short periods” accounts for 18%. Students in this group focus on studying intensively for brief periods, possibly due to pressure from assignments or exams. Overall, the chart shows that many students could benefit from building a more structured and consistent study habit to improve long-term learning outcomes.

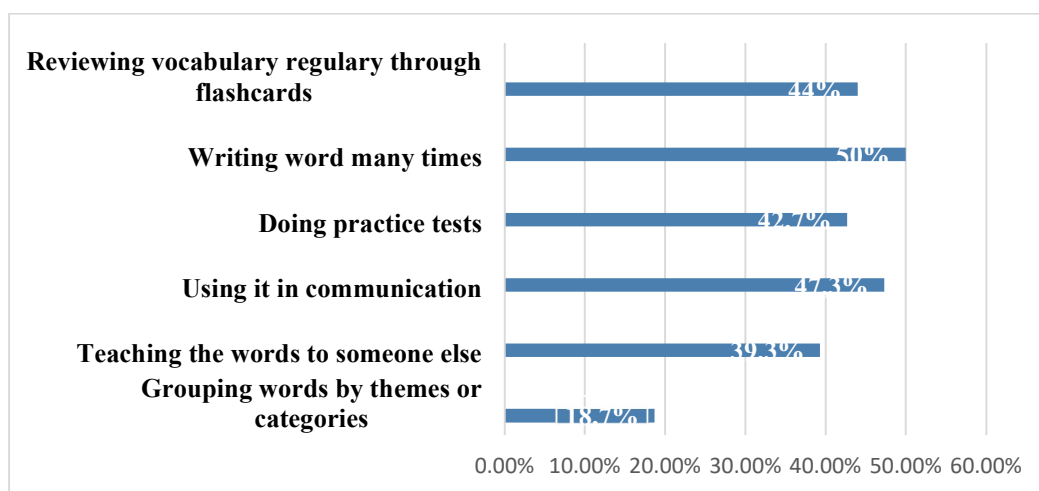


Figure 4.1.2.5 Methods help students remember vocabulary longer.

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The bar chart illustrates the methods students use to learn vocabulary. “Writing words many times” (50%) is the most popular method. Repeatedly writing words reflects a traditional approach to memorizing vocabulary. “Using it in communication” (47,3%) is the second most common method, indicating that students prioritize applying vocabulary in real-life situations to retain it more effectively. “Reviewing vocabulary regularly through flashcards” (44%) and “Teaching the words to someone else” (39,3%). These two methods have relatively similar percentages, showing that many students find flashcards and teaching others effective for learning vocabulary. “Doing practice tests” (42.7%), some students use practice tests to reinforce their vocabulary knowledge, but this method is not as commonly used as others. “Grouping words by themes or categories” (18,7%) is the least used method, possibly because students are not familiar with it or do not find it immediately effective. In short, writing words many times is the choice chosen the most by students when studying vocabulary.

4.1.3 Role of Technology in Self-Study Vocabulary

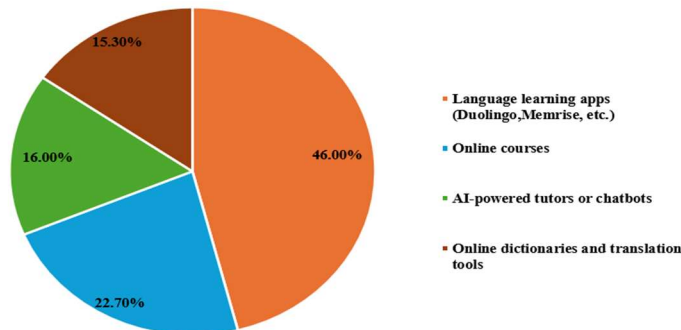


Figure 4.1.3.1 Popular digital tools for self-study English vocabulary

The pie chart shows data on the preferred digital tools for self-studying English vocabulary. The dominance of language learning apps was 46%, and a small amount respondents used online dictionaries and translation with 15.3%. The largest portion of respondents rely on language learning apps like Duolingo, Memrise, etc. These apps offer gamified learning, spaced repetition, and interactive exercises, which make them engaging effectively. The high percentage suggests that learners prefer structured and self-paced routines. There is a moderate use of online courses at 22.7%. This indicates that learners also prefer structured lessons with deep explanations. AI-powered tutors or chatbots are also quite popular among students, with 16% as the third digital tool used. The preference for this method highlights the trust in AI-based interactive learning, which provides learners with personalized responses and conversational practice. The use of online dictionaries and translation tools, such as Google Translate, Oxford Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary, etc., is the least used (15.3%). This category provides a quick translation but is not a priority when it comes to self-studying English vocabulary. In conclusion, almost half of students prefer using language learning apps.

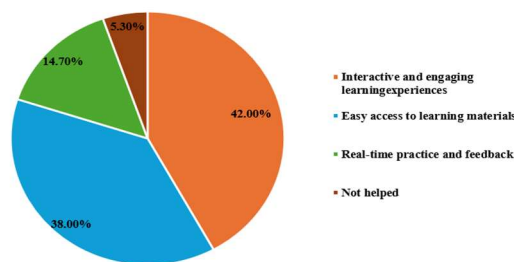


Figure 4.1.3.2 Benefit of using technology to improve learning English vocabulary

This pie chart illustrates how technology helps students in improving English vocabulary. The largest portion of students find technology useful for creating interactive and engaging learning experiences (42%), and a very small number of students consider

technology not helpful (5.3%). The large population at 42% in the category of interactive and engaging learning experiences highlights the need for interactive and gamified approaches among students recently. The second largest category is using technology to help students access learning materials easily at 38%, which highlights the convenience of technology in providing quick and diverse access to educational resources. A smaller but notable percentage of students find real-time practice and feedback from technology helpful in improving their English vocabulary (14.7%). A minority of students reported that technology does not help them improve their English, indicating that they prefer the traditional method and paper material more than the technology method, which is only 5.3%. To conclude, technology does help students improve their English vocabulary while studying on their own, with remarkable benefits in providing an interactive learning environment and quick access to learning materials.

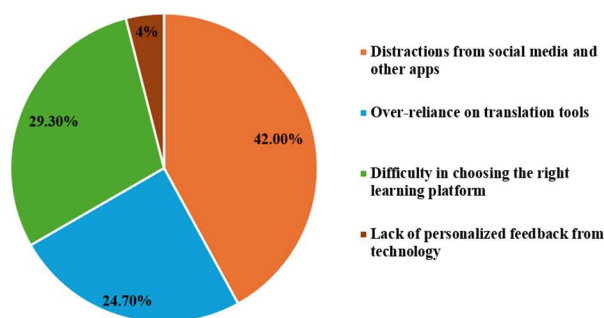


Figure 4.1.3.3 Challenges of using technology to improve learning English vocabulary

This pie chart highlights the biggest challenge students experience while using technology to study English vocabulary on their own. The biggest challenge is distractions from social media and other apps while using technology for studying (42%), and the least affected challenge is the lack of personalized feedback from technology (4%). The challenge that has the largest portion and is very common among students while using technology for study is clearly the distractions of using social media and other apps, which reach 42%. This shows that technology has its own benefits, but it is also quite hard to keep students focused. The second and third big challenges also have a notable number reported by students, which are difficulty in choosing the right learning platform (29.3%) and over-reliance on translation tools (24.7%). This number highlights there has been a wide range of learning courses and apps recently, along with the increase of worrying issues about humans depending on tools as it is quicker. The smallest challenge reported by respondents is the lack of personalized feedback from technology (4%), which shows that students still rely very heavily on real teachers' feedback. In conclusion, the biggest challenge reported by students in using technology for self-study English vocabulary is the distractions from other apps.

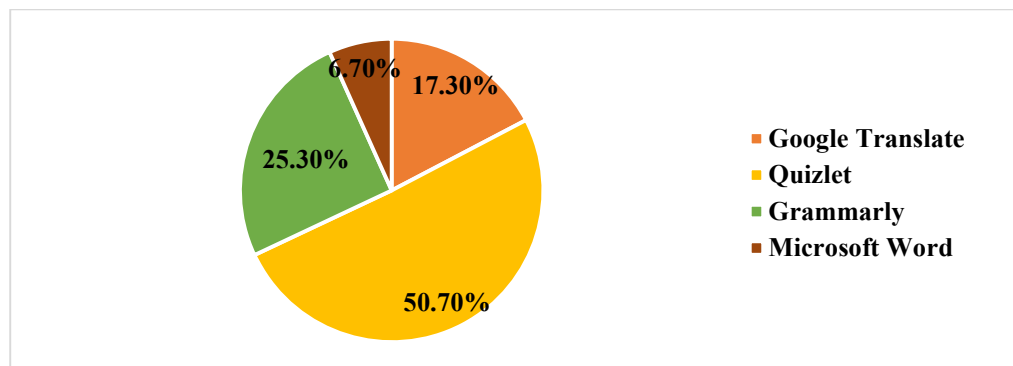


Figure 4.1.3.4 SRS in learning vocabulary

This pie chart shows the tool used by students the most for the spaced repetition method in learning vocabulary. The number of people using Quizlet is 50.7%, and Microsoft Word is the least used at 6.7%. The most popular tool that is best used for the

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spaced repetition method in learning vocabulary is Quizlet, with 50.7%. This shows the effectiveness of Quizlet in helping students remember vocabulary, and is widely used in study environments. Next is the use of Grammarly at 25.3%, Google Translate at 17.3%, and Microsoft Word at only 6.7%. To conclude, depending on each student's needs, they will find the tool that matches their needs, but the popularity of Quizlet among students is remarkable through numbers.

Through the open-ended question, we collected various opinions from learners' views to recommend the most effective apps in their opinion. Here are all the apps recommended by learners:

- Language Learning App
 1. Duolingo – a famous learning platform that offers lessons through gamified activities with the signature Green Owl.
 2. Memrise – a learning app that focuses on vocabulary, phrases, and speaking practice
 3. Cake – a language app focused on learning English through conversations and video content
 4. 4english – allow learners to read foreign news with translation, games, videos
 5. Elsa Speak – a pronunciation-focused app aimed at improving English speaking skills
 6. Voice Tube – focuses on improving English listening and speaking skills through video
- Flashcards and Study Aids
 1. Quizlet – a flashcard-based learning platform and, through the record, learners are able to remember 600 words in a week by using Quizlet
- Online courses app
 1. ZIM Helper
 2. Prep
- Dictionary and Translation tools
 1. Oxford Dictionary
 2. Cambridge Dictionary
 3. TFlat Dictionary
 4. Longman Dictionary
 5. Google Translate
- AI-based tools
 1. Gemini
 2. Chat GPT

In conclusion, there is a wide range of options for learners to choose from in order to fit their needs and study methods.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Challenges faced during self-study English vocabulary process

The challenges while learning vocabulary during the process of self-study had been pointed out properly through numbers. The previous study of I.S.P Nation (2001) shows the impact on how students perform in speaking, listening, writing, and reading. This point has also been brought to the attention of this research since the non-English-majored students at IUH determined that having a weak vocabulary resource will struggle, especially in listening, and a high number of speaking is also reported. Moreover, speaking is the way to actually use new words, as the main goal of the language is communicating; we are finding what holds them back from practicing is the lack of conversational partners and real-life practice opportunities. In another aspect, maintaining a logical, stable, and regular self-study routine is an important factor in gaining effective results for enhancing English vocabulary. Through the survey, many non-English-majored students reported that they often struggle to maintain a consistent self-study routine, as a large number of students chose to study only when they had free time. On the other hand, a new light was pointed out in this survey. Students find it hard to learn new words as they have difficulties understanding the

vocabulary meaning. Even when technology helps students in the process of self-study, students admitted that technology also distracts them from learning with social media and other apps.

4.2.2 Method and technology

Through this survey besides difficulties students might face when studying vocabulary on their own, the goal of this part is to identify helpful solutions, methods, and effective use of technology. The previous study by Stuart Webb (2020) and colleagues found that spaced repetition had a medium-to-large effect on language learning outcomes. Non-English-majored students reported that they use the Quizlet with Space Repetition System (SRS) method to learn vocabulary, which is amazingly effective. This point emphasizes the effect of SRS on learning vocabulary, which is being used widely among students with the innovation of technology such as Quizlet, Anki, Memrise, etc.

On the other hand, some new perspectives have been found. First, the motivation for non-English-majored students to learn English is surprising. Many students admitted their interest in English culture and media rather than achieve academic goals, which shows how interesting the language is to students at IUH and not simply because of passing a course. Moreover, watching English movies, videos, and music was chosen the most when they wanted to improve their vocabulary on their own. As culture will be expressed the most through movies, and this is an appropriate way to learn vocabulary.

Besides, many students reported the use of Duolingo for learning English. Duolingo provides both interactive, gamified learning approaches and materials that are easily accessible. Duolingo also incorporates elements of spaced repetition. In addition, Duolingo's visual and audio cues cater to different learning styles; Duolingo serves as a convenient and self-directed method to improve their language skills outside the classroom environment.

5. Conclusion

The study examined the self-study of English vocabulary among non-English-majored students at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City. Through questionnaires and comments, the research raised awareness about the importance of students' vocabulary, their learning strategies, the role of technology, and many major challenges. The findings revealed that most students are aware of how important vocabulary is in mastering English skills. To support their learning, many of them make use of mobile applications, online games, and even social media content, which adds flexibility and makes the learning process more engaging. Despite these advantages, students still face notable challenges, including a lack of motivation, frequent distractions from technology, and difficulty maintaining consistent study habits over time. This study offers both scientific and practical contributions by linking existing research on autonomous language learning with the current use of modern digital tools. It highlights how platforms like Duolingo, Quizlet, and YouTube can be effectively integrated to support learners in developing greater independence in their language study. In practice, it offers recommendations to students and teachers to improve vocabulary self-study, such as selecting appropriate equipment and constantly making learning habits. In summary, vocabulary is essential and obtainable, and the correct strategies and support from self-study are needed. Success depends not only on the equipment used but also on students' motivation, discipline, and ability to choose effective methods.

5.1 Recommendations

5.1.1 Overcome the difficulty of understanding vocabulary during self-study

Learning vocabulary will be more effective if students know how to put words into real-life contexts, such as writing sentences, writing short paragraphs, or using them in English conversations with friends and native speakers. Studying with friends or joining an English club at school is an effective way to practice vocabulary naturally. This is also an environment that helps students maintain motivation and share learning experiences with each other.

Using vocabulary lists related to the major and learning vocabulary by topics related to the major, such as business, tourism, or hospitality, helps non-English-majored students easily remember and apply it naturally in practice. This way of learning supports understanding academic documents and also prepares for the future working environment. Vocabulary lists provided by lecturers or extracted from specialized documents are useful resources, helping students to study with direction and increase motivation in the self-study process.

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5.1.2 Recommend self-study methods, helpful technology

Many students have difficulty recalling and understanding new words during self-study. To address this problem, techniques such as visual association, spaced repetition for vocabulary, and grouping words by themes or categories make memorization easier. Students can detect pronunciation mistakes and enhance their speaking abilities by recording themselves while they read chapters or pronounce new words.

To help students see and hear new words in authentic settings, encourage them to read English-language articles, watch YouTube videos, or listen to English-language podcasts. Transcripts and subtitles might help in learning new words and taking notes. Students should be encouraged to follow English vocabulary-learning pages on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Learning vocabulary will be made easy every day with brief, memorable, and current content.

Tools like ChatGPT, TFlat, and Cambridge Dictionary can help students explain the meaning of words, create examples, make sentences, or check how words are used in context. Students can take advantage of these applications to practice vocabulary every day.

5.2 Limitations of the study

Although this study offers meaningful insights into students' vocabulary self-study habits, it still has certain limitations. A major barrier is the limited sample size. The research was conducted at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City with only 150 non-English major students, who cannot be a representative of a large number of students. Furthermore, due to time constraints, the research was conducted over a short period, which made it difficult to observe long-term changes in students' vocabulary learning progress. These limitations should be considered when applying the findings to other contexts or planning future research.

5.3 Suggestions for further study

In the future, other researchers might want to focus on conducting research with a large number of students from different departments at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City. That way, the results could be more balanced and show a fuller picture. It's also a good idea to look at how students' self-study habits in learning vocabulary change if the study lasts longer. Short-term results may miss something important. In addition, future research might want to look more closely at how certain educational websites or apps, like ChatGPT, Grammarly, or ELSA Speak, affect learning. These tools can make learning feel more personal and practical, which might encourage students to study on their own more effectively. It could also be useful to explore how teachers play a role in helping students become more independent, especially when it comes to improving their academic vocabulary.

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