INFLUENCES OF STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING ON THEIR GRADES IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SUBJECT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

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Abstract

The research aimed to clarify the role of self-directed learning in the learning process of English learners at the University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. There were 539 students participating in this research. Within this research, the self-directed learning scale by Bhrati et al (2020) was administrated and the English grades were evaluated by participants. The results revealed that most of the students were at a good level in learning English according to their self-record. Self-directed learning explained 43.9% of changes in English learning grades, which means the higher students practice self-directed learning in learning English, the more chances their English learning grades could be changed. Especially, planning and deploying learning activities, a factor of self-directed learning, contribute mainly to changes in the English grades of students. As the results, the research suggests that lecturers and school managers should introduce and equip students with good planning and deploying learning activities skills to improve English grades and English learning outcomes in general. Moreover, the study also indicated that family social economic status could be a factor contributing to improving students' self-directed learning and English learning grades. It could imply that social policymakers could reference for further consideration social impacts resulting in improving community education outcomes.

Keywords

Self-Directed Learning; English Learning Grades; University Students

Introduction

Learning English and its related topics have not been an unfamiliar research trend. Most researchers investigating factors impacting English learning are improving their teaching methods and enhancing students understanding of English in their countries' contexts where English was not an official language. According to research on factors impacting late-graduation students' learning grades by Nguyen Van Tuong et al (2021), English was found as a barrier to students from graduating on time at the University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. Nguyen Van Tuong et al (2021) pointed out that university students had difficulties learning English. Besides that, self-directed learning is a familiar topic relating to research trends on learning grades, and the learning processes in university students or adult education. According to Deng Xiaojia, Wang Chuang, and Xu Jianzhong (2022), students with a high level of self-directed learning introduced excellent academic records. In Vietnam, self-directed learning was conceived as one of the most important learning goals of the new national education program issued by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in 2018. However, according to Nguyen Van Tuong et al (2021), students who attained good self-directed learning still performed academically low in learning English which resulted in being late for graduation. This research was aimed at learning the degrees of influence of university students' self-directed learning on English learning grades at the University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City in general. The results of this research could be a reference for Vietnam university's lecturers and school managers in improving

students' learning grades, especially in English as a foreign language subject. To discuss the relationship between self-directed learning and English learning grades, Bai, B., & Wang, J. (2020) with a study on the roles of psychological variables impacting academic records of learning English found that self-directed learning attributed greatly to English learning grades of students. On the other hand, in a study on the relationship between the concept of assessment and self-directed learning in the process of learning a second language, which is English, of university students, Cho, H. J., Young, M., & Levesque-Bristol, C. (2020) and Xiao, Y., & Yang, M. (2019) point out that self-directed learning has been experimentally proven to have a positive relationship with motivation and foreign language learning grades. Moreover, Cheng, A., & Lee, C. (2018) in the study of the factors affecting the persistence of learning English in the process of actively learning the language showed that self-directed learning played the role of consolidating knowledge and helping learners have better English learning results. According to Cheng, A., & Lee, C. (2018), students with higher motivation will practice more self-directed learning and have better results in learning English.

Theory Framework

Self-directed learning
The term "Self-directed learning" was first coined as an adult learning process by Knowles (1975). At first, the theory only focused on a man's action in learning by himself. Further development attributed by (Long,1991), (Candy, 1991) and (Garrison, 1997), the theory was fully stated about a man' both internal and external actions in quest of learning by himself. Self-directed learning, according to Knowles (1975), is an active individual process, with or without the help of others, in understanding one's own learning needs, self-identifying relevant resources, and self-directed learning. learning, self-selecting and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and self-assessing learning grades; is psychological control in which the individual psychological impact includes psychological self-control, motivational needs, and strategic resource identification (Long,1991); is the ability to self-direct, does not necessarily take place in the classroom environment, self-study does not take place equally in all situations, at all times (Candy, 1991); is the ability to self-manage, self-monitor, and self-motivated from within (Garrison, 1997).

Students self-reported English grades with English as a foreign language subject
According to Young et al. (2003), learning is the acquisition of knowledge through the processing of perceived information from society and individual thinking processes. Besides that, Young et al. (2003) defined the effectiveness of learning as coming from learners' self-assessment of the overall knowledge gained, their skills and abilities developed, and the effort they put in. Within this research, the English grades were self-reported grades conducted by students of the University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City.

Sample

Sample and Instruments
The total number of students at the University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City was approximately 14.000 students according to statistical data for the academic year 2022-2023. According to Watson (2001), the proper number of students for sampling would be varied from 385 to 390 The official sample of this research is 539 students, 156 male students and 383 female students. The sample would be briefly introduced in the table as follows.

Sample	Quantity		Ratio (%)
Gender	Male	156	28.9
	Female	383	71.1
	Advantage	179	33.2
Families 'social economic status	Good	247	45.8
	Disadvantage	71	13.2
	Extreme disadvantage	42	7.8
Total		539	100%

Table 1: Description of research sample at University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City

Instrument
Within this research, the self-directed learning scale developed by Bhrati et al (2020) was administrated as the main measure for University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City's self-directed learning. The scale combined 20 items representing 3 factors: Learning motivation; Planning and

deploying learning activities; Interpersonal skills. The scale was a 5-point Likert scale: level 1 (total disagree – 5 total agree). According to Duong Minh Quang et al (2018), if the scale is a 5-point Likert scale, each level would be defined as (n-1)/n) = 0.8. The more students agree with the statement about their actual practice with self-directed learning skills, the better their self-directed learning skills. In this case, the value and meanings of each level would be as follows.

- 1,00 - 1,80: responders totally disagree with the statement about their actual practice with self- directed learning skills.
- 1,81 - 2,60: responders disagree with the statement about their actual practice with self-directed learning skills.
- 2,61 - 3,40: responders either disagree or agree with the statement about their actual practice with self-directed learning skills.
- 3,41 - 4,20: responders agree with the statement about their actual practice with self-directed learning skills.
- 4,21 - 5,00: responders totally agree with the statement about their actual practice with self- directed learning skills.

In terms of English grades, participants would self-report their grade according to 5 levels: Level 1 - Very Good (average grade equivalent or higher to 8.0); Level 2 - Good (average grade from 6.5 to 7.9); Level 3 - Average (average grade from 5.0 to 6.4); Level 4 - Weak (average grade from 3.5 to 4.9) and Level 5 - Not Pass (average grade below 4.9).

Cronbach's Alpha and Exploratory Factors Analysis

With 539 students as the official sample, the scale of self-directed learning introduced the Cronbach Alpha index for factors, respectively: 0.880 (Learning motivation); 0.882 (Planning and deploying learning activities); 0.823 (Interpersonal skills). Exploratory Factors Analysis for the scale of self-directed learning indicated that the KMO index was 0. 884 (>0.05), (Sig= 0.000 <0.05), and the total variance explained of 59.33> 50%. Besides that, the Exploratory Factors Analysis showed that there were 3 factors extracted, and factor loading varied from 0.55 to 0.83 (>0.5).

| No | Self-directed learning scale | No of items | Cronbach's Alpha | | | Exploratory Factors Analysis | | |
			Cronbach's Alpha index	Variable correlation variable total	-	KMO index	Eigenvalues index and Total Variance quoted	Factors loading
1	**Self-directed learning scale (19 items)***							
1.1	Learning motivation	6	0.88	0.56-0.74				
1.2	Planning and deploying learning activities	9	0.882	0.48-0.70		0.884 (Sig. =0.000)	2.08 - 59.33%	3 factors, factors loading from 0.55 to 0.83
1.3	Interpersonal skills	4	0.823	0.55-0.72				

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha and Exploratory Factors Analysis of Self-directed learning scale
* This scale has one item excluded due to lower total variable correlation 0.3

Results

Students' English grades at the University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City

According to table 3, the research results indicated that University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University's students was at a good level in learning English with their self-reported grades quite high (M= 6.72; SD = 1.18). Besides that, it is interesting that the higher students' evaluation of their family social economic status is, the higher the scores are recorded. It could be accounted as the students coming from families with social economic status from Good to Advantage level, then their English grades were higher than others.

Families' Social Economic Status	Mean (SD)	Levene Statistic (sig.)	F (sig.) or Welch (sig.)	Post Hoc Tests (sig.)
Advantage	6.91 (1.12)			M1>M3 (0.015)
Good	6.77 (1.13)	2.190	F (7.415)	M1>M4 (0.000)
Disadvantage	6.51 (1.25)	(0.088)	sig.=0.000	M2>M4 (0.000)
Extreme disadvantage	6.03 (1.33)	>0.05		M3>M4 (0.034)
Total	6.72 (1.18)			

Table 3: University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University's students' English grades in theacademic year 2021 - 2022.

Students' self-directed learning at University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City

According to the table 4, students' self-directed learning skill at a good level with a high degree in agreement in stating about their self-directed learning (M = 3.74; SD = 0.44). Self-directed learning skill combines 3 factors: Learning Motivation; Planning and Deploying learning activities; and Interpersonal skills. Within these factors, students reported that they had less practice planning and deploying learning activities (M = 3.70; SD = 0.56). Moreover, the figures also revealed that there were significant differences in self-reported self-directed learning skills between students coming from different families social economic statuses. At glance, students coming from good family social economic status reported more agreeing with the statements on self-directed learning than others. It could be accounted as the higher the family's economic status the students attained, the better their self-directed learning skills. To be more specific, planning and deploying learning activities are factors describing the difference between students with distinguishing family backgrounds. Students with good or advantages in family social economic status are better at planning and deploying learning activities on their own than others.

Family Social Economic Status								
Self-directedlearning	**M1** Mean (SD)	**M2** Mean (SD)	**M3** Mean (SD)	**M4** Mean (SD)	**Total** Mean (SD)	**Levene Statistic** (sig.)	**F** (sig.) or **Welch** (sig.)	**Post Hoc Tests** (sig.)
Learning motivation	3.75 (0.65)	3.78 (0.64)	3.71 (0.76)	3.59 (0.80)	3.75 (0.67)	.224	F (1.059) sig. (.366)	sig.>0.05
Planning anddeploying learning activities	3.69 (0.6)	3.78 (0.5)	3.59 (0.54)	3.52 (0.63)	3.70 (0.56)	.004	Welch(.008)	M2>M3(sig.=0.009) M2>M4 (sig.=0.006)
Interpersonalskills	3.74 (0.59)	3.80 (0.61)	3.65 (0.57)	3.76 (0.64)	3.76 (0.60)	.770	F (1.230) sig. (.298)	sig.>0.05
Total	3.73 (0.45)	3.79 (0.43)	3.65 (0.41)	3.62 (0.52)	3.74 (0.44)	.124	F (2.929) sig. (.033)	M2>M3 (sig.=0.020) M2>M4 (sig.=0.029)

Table 4: University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University's students' self-directed learning skill

Note: M1: Advantage; M2: Good; M3: Disadvantage; M4: Extreme Disadvantage

Influences of Students' self-directed learning on Their English grades at the University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City

According to Table 5, the result revealed that students' self-directed learning correlated positively with students' English grades. Especially, students' self-directed learning correlated strongly with English grades within Planning and deploying learning activities. It could be understood as the better students could make planning and deploy their learning activities, the better their English grades would be.

No	Self-directed learning (Independent)	English grade (Dependent)	
		r	**R2 (F)**
1	Learning motivation	0.285**	0.079*** (47.349)
2	Planning and deploying learning activities	0.350**	0.121*** (75.193)
3	Interpersonal skills	0.333**	0.109*** (66.779)
	Self-directed learning	0.439**	0.191*** (128.228)

Table 5: The correlation between University of Social Science and Humanities Vietnam NationalUniversity's students' self-directed learning skill and their English grades

Note: (**) p<0.05; (***) p < 0.001

Discussion

The results of this research are familiar with previous research about self-directed learning and English learning outcomes. According to Le Thi Cam Nhung and Vu Van Thang (2018) in studying university students' self-directed learning at Thai Nguyen University, there were 21.9% of students reported that they were lack of experience in planning and deploying learning activities on their own learning and 72.4% of students reported that they would conduct self-study better if they were guided properly from lecturers. University students faced difficulties in conducting learning on their own without support and guidance from lecturers. The same results could be found with Phi Dinh Khuong and Lam Thuy Duong (2020) in Evaluating the situation of self-studying activities of Thai Nguyen University students. Phi Dinh Khuong and Lam Thuy Duong (2020) pointed out that students lacked experience in deploying self-directed learning which leads to low academic performance. The more students practice their self-directed learning, the better the English learning outcomes will be. However, it is interesting in this research that students who perceive their family social economic status as good or advantageous would practice their self-directed learning better than others. It could explain that students with good support from family (family social economic status is high) would focus more on learning activities than others.

Conclusion

The research results imply that school managers and lecturers should pay more attention to guiding students on how to make an effective learning plan and deploy those efficiently. Since there is a statistically significant difference in English grades between students who could make plans for their study and deploy them with others. School managers and lecturers could improve the English grades of students and equalize students' condition by teaching all the students with good planning skills and good practicing those plans. Besides that, it also implies that the next research should focus on how family variables including parenting styles, and family support could impact students' academic performance. It would be a good reference for policymakers and educators to help students and families understand their roles in their children's learning.

Acknowledgements

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