



**STUDY ON LEARNING AUTONOMY STRATEGIES
FOR ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS OF HIGH-QUALITY
FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS, SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES,
CAN THO UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM**

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Abstract:

This study examined the challenges of self-studying English-speaking skills for first-year English studies majors at Can Tho University. The study aimed to answer questions such as: What self-study strategies can first-year students majoring in high-quality English at School of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University apply to develop speaking skills? The target audience was 96 English studies majors who have studied speaking and listening at Can Tho University. A questionnaire and an interview with 13 students were used to collect data for this study. In order to support the quantitative data, a questionnaire was used, while an interview was used for the qualitative data. This study aimed to find out the difficulties encountered by students, thereby proposing solutions to overcome them and improve the quality of their learning autonomy or self-studying English-speaking skills.

Keywords: learning autonomy, self-learning/studying, English speaking skills, first-year students, high-quality English program, learning strategies

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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Foreign languages are becoming a mandatory requirement in job searching, especially in specialized fields. Improving English speaking skills will make students more confident in communicating with international colleagues, partners, and customers. Learning foreign languages is a global trend. Particularly, listening and speaking skills are highly essential in today's world. With the development of the global economy, communicating with foreigners is becoming increasingly common and important. Furthermore, learning a foreign language helps broaden one's horizons and understanding of different cultures. When someone can speak a language fluently, they can communicate and work effectively with foreigners, especially in fields such as business, tourism, education, scientific research, and many other professions. Moreover, learning a foreign language also helps develop logical thinking, improve memory, study skills, and confidence in communication.

However, the situation of learning foreign languages is still quite complex because many people face difficulties in pronunciation, listening, and speaking. Schools and language training centers have offered many high-quality foreign language programs, but many people still lack the financial ability to participate in these courses. In addition, some people do not have enough time and effort to learn a foreign language. Another popular method of learning a foreign language is using technology, such as language learning apps on mobile phones or online language learning websites. However, this method also requires learners to be proactive and self-motivated. First-year students are the main target audience of this topic, so it will help them develop English-speaking skills from the beginning of their course and build a solid foundation for future courses.

Still, research on the difficulties that students and teachers face in teaching and learning English speaking skills has not been extensively conducted at Can Tho University, specifically, and in Vietnam, in general. Meanwhile, learning English speaking skills play a significant role in improving language knowledge and developing critical thinking for students majoring in English. To help first-year students develop English speaking skills from the beginning of the course and build a solid foundation for future courses, this topic can apply some self-learning methods and strategies to students.

Together with the desire to raise students' awareness of self-learning strategies, especially English-speaking skills, in the training program of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, the research team decided to select first-year students majoring in high-quality English language. These are students with a solid foundation in English language and a good aptitude for learning speaking skills, grammar, and vocabulary. The survey will focus on surveying the self-learning strategies of high-quality English major first-year students at Can Tho University. The results obtained will help provide solutions to improve the quality of teaching and support students in effective self-learning of English-speaking skills. That is why the research team plans to conduct research on some typical Vietnamese students of Can Tho University.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this topic are to gain a better understanding of the self-learning strategies of high-quality first-year English major students at Can Tho University's School of Foreign Languages to improve their English-speaking skills. From there, propose appropriate study guidelines to help first-year students self-improve their English-speaking skills effectively and achieve good results in their studies and future work.

1.3 Research Question

Focusing on the advantages of speaking skills, researchers would like to conduct a study with the following question:

- What autonomy strategies do first-year high-quality English major students at Can Tho University's School of Foreign Languages apply to develop their speaking skills?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

"Learning Autonomy", as defined by Oxford (1990), is a process in which individuals actively engage, with or without the help of others, in their own learning. In this process, students will set their own learning goals, determine directions, select and implement appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate their learning outcomes. Therefore, Nguyen Thanh Duc, Trinh Hong Tinh, and Huynh Minh Thu (2012) also assert that language learners, especially first-year students, always need appropriate learning strategies to adapt to the dynamic learning environment in university classrooms. Autonomy is crucial in life as it helps students develop the necessary skills and knowledge for success in both work and life. It also helps students become confident, independent, and effective problem solvers through self-determined strategies.

Similarly, learning autonomy or self-learning strategies for Speaking skills are the ultimate goal of foreign language education in general and the individual goal of students in particular. Enhancing self-learning abilities will boost motivation and proactiveness in the learning process, leading to a positive learning attitude. Furthermore, many researchers (Macaro, 1997; Reid, 1993; Stevens, 2007) have shown a supportive correlation between self-learning and individual learning goals. However, each student has a different learning style depending on their environment, especially as many universities nowadays discourage students from self-studying before attending class; therefore, working with peers allows them the opportunity to learn from each other (Blidi, 2017).

An individual with self-learning strategies for Speaking skills can work alone, in pairs, or in groups, depending on their practice needs. In addition to interacting with friends, self-learners can set learning goals, create study plans, choose appropriate learning methods and strategies, select study materials, self-evaluate their learning progress, and actively seek help when needed. According to Little (1991), students can construct their own learning program if given the autonomy to do so, which enhances

their sense of responsibility. This demonstrates that if students have the opportunity to make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning, they will become more self-directed learners, working independently and effectively with less intervention from teachers.

Self-learning also helps save time and money by allowing students to study at home or online instead of attending in-person courses. Thus, self-learning strategies are reflected in students' learning processes, especially in the Speaking skills domain. Self-learning strategies are defined as learners taking responsibility for their own learning and playing a crucial role in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Similar to Oxford's self-learning strategies (1990), they emphasize automating the learning process and becoming a self-directed learner who operates independently and effectively through six main skills: observation skills, self-assessment skills, connecting skills, language use skills, using learning tools, and promoting progress skills. By using these skills, students can create a detailed study plan that helps them achieve their learning goals efficiently.

2.1.1 Concept of Speaking Skills

According to Vygotsky's theory, speaking skills develop through interaction between the speaker and the listener, thereby constructing each individual's knowledge, thinking, and skills. Focusing on communication and practicing speaking skills will improve an individual's speaking ability. Effective speaking skills come from recognizing and controlling emotions. Those who can manage their emotions, handle difficult situations, and convey information emotionally will have better speaking skills. A speaker must meet the basic needs of the listener before conveying information. The speaker must take care of the listener's psychology by respecting them and providing support when needed. To communicate effectively, the speaker must choose words that are appropriate for the listener, use techniques to minimize noise, and use supporting tools (such as graphics) to convey information clearly.

To develop good speaking skills, users need several fundamental elements. Users must understand and use basic vocabulary related to the speaking topic. Users need to use sentences and grammar structures accurately and appropriately to convey their message. Users need to connect phrases and ideas logically to listen carefully and provide correct and accurate feedback during conversations to enhance their speaking skills. The speaking skills of learners will not be high if they cannot pronounce the words they need to use, apply appropriate grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and listen actively and provide accurate feedback during conversations. Interpersonal communication will be blocked if the speaker/listener cannot decode the information they receive.

As a language-productive skill, speaking is considered an essential skill for mastering language in communication. According to Baker and Westrup (2003), individuals who are proficient in speaking English may have more opportunities for better learning and employment, leading to career advancement. According to research by Hoang Tue and Tran Duyen, over 50% of employers believe that speaking should be practiced more. This indicates the significant importance of speaking skills. To possess

good speaking skills, students need to know how to organize their ideas and convey them clearly and engagingly. Students need to choose appropriate language to convey their message and adjust their tone and attitude to match the situation and the audience. Confidence and patience are necessary in the speaking process because there may be times when individuals face difficulties in expressing their ideas. However, if students keep trying and honing this skill, they will become more confident and proficient in conveying their ideas effectively.

2.1.2 Activities for Developing Autonomy Skills in Speaking English

Autonomy is an inevitable trend that enhances the academic performance of students, both individually and the overall educational quality of institutions. Autonomy skills are crucial for boosting students' confidence and effectiveness in their developmental journey, particularly in the field of Speaking. In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, applying self-learning strategies for students in English language teaching, especially in honing their Speaking skills to achieve confidence and proficiency in communication, has been a constant concern for educators and learners alike. Therefore, creating activities to develop self-learning skills in Speaking is essential and vital.

Theoretically, as stated by O'Grady (1996), Speaking is a cognitive activity, a psychological process where a speaker encapsulates a mental concept into a linguistic form, such as words, phrases, and sentences, to convey a message to the listener. Therefore, students need to set clear goals, make precise plans, establish effective self-planning skills, and identify the necessary knowledge blocks to allocate their time rationally. Goal identification should be followed by planning, as it serves as a motivator for better present and future learning.

Individuals with proficient Speaking skills are considered those who can synthesize various skills and knowledge to succeed in specific speaking activities. According to Burns & Joyce (1997), the research on Speaking involves aspects such as sound production, stress, rhythm, and intonation of speech, precise grammar structures, selecting appropriate vocabulary related to the discussed topic and context, and incorporating gestures or body language. During self-learning and practicing Speaking skills, students should plan periodic activities, assess, and correct their performance. Speaking is a creative skill that demands ideas, vocabulary, and consistent practice, yet often, classroom speaking activities are not adequately designed or engaging, which diminishes students' motivation in high school environments.

However, students' allocation of time for learning and practicing Speaking is quite limited; they mainly focus on completing reading and writing assignments, grammar, and vocabulary. After leaving the classroom, students often have little reason to speak English.

First, students need to define their learning goals and prepare the relevant existing knowledge to enrich themselves further. They must specify their learning goals for Speaking. Understand which skills need improvement, whether it's pronunciation, articulation, or expression. These objectives can be related to pronunciation, articulation,

and expression, and they can be considered as direct strategies. There are numerous activities to develop self-learning skills in Speaking English according to Oxford's 1990 strategy. Learning new vocabulary through techniques such as word pairing, using online vocabulary learning software, creating vocabulary lists, and studying them regularly helps in remembering both the recent lesson and the vocabulary needed to enhance Speaking skills. Additionally, listening to and repeating English sentences to improve pronunciation and Speaking skills allows students to use songs, videos, or other media to achieve this activity. According to Oxford (1990), learning strategy is the specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more adaptable to new situations.

Self-learning from online resources can make learning more interesting and enjoyable, as it allows for learning while playing, which can be seen as a strategy to control emotions. This can make students more flexible and confident when learning in a comfortable and joyful environment without the pressure of learning. Therefore, producing speech is the process of speakers transforming their mental concepts into words to convey a message to the listener in communication interactions. According to Brown (1994) and Burns & Joyce (1997), Speaking is an interaction process aimed at creating meaning related to receiving and processing information. The form and meaning of speech depend on contextual factors, including the participants themselves, their life experiences, the environment, and the purpose of speaking. Students cannot force themselves to take notes or read a book without knowing what they need and want. Finding a study partner or a teacher to practice English communication and engage in imaginative conversations or participate in online classes to improve communication skills is an excellent activity.

When students have shortcomings, studying with friends can help them eliminate some of them and absorb more good things. Besides motivating each other to study, competition in learning is also beneficial. It will help students improve more quickly and gain more confidence in interacting and expressing opinions in front of a crowd. Choosing topics of interest to read and ensuring an understanding of new words in texts, such as reading books and English newspapers, to improve vocabulary and reading comprehension skills, will be very helpful in developing Speaking skills. This is one of the ways to help students improve Speaking quickly; students can watch and then practice speaking in front of a mirror to express themselves more easily and identify their progress.

During the process of self-learning and practicing Speaking, students need to plan periodic activities, assess, and correct their performance. To determine if the results are as expected. However, periodic assessments often take place at the end of a semester or a relatively long learning period and typically involve tests. The use of periodic assessments usually does not provide complete, timely, and useful information for improving the quality of language learning and teaching through regular assessment activities (Brown, Kenedy, Fok, Chan & Yu, 2009). In the process of forming and developing self-learning capabilities, awareness of learning and cognitive motivation

plays an essential role. The quality of learning depends on the learner's efforts. Without recognizing their role in the learning process, students will never succeed in self-learning. To harness internal motivation in learning, students need to correctly identify their learning purpose and motivation. Afterward, they can organize their learning activities properly and achieve high results.

In summary, the activities mentioned above are common forms to develop self-learning skills in Speaking. However, students need awareness, study plans, enthusiasm, and perseverance to achieve their goals. If implemented fully and regularly, these activities will undoubtedly significantly improve students' Speaking skills.

2.1.3 Classification of "Language Learning Strategies"

In 1990, Oxford successfully developed a comprehensive and detailed system of language learning strategies compared to previous authors. This system consists of four main strategies: Vocabulary, Grammar, Communication, and Self-learning. Each strategy has specific areas to help learners develop their English language skills, from using vocabulary and grammar to communication and self-learning. This system has been proven effective and widely used in universities and English language centers worldwide. Therefore, the research group decided to use Oxford's classification of language learning strategies (1990) as the theoretical basis for this study.

In the book "Language Learning Strategies," Oxford (1990, p. 15) categorized self-learning strategies into two groups: Direct strategies related to the mental language acquisition process and Indirect strategies encompassing support techniques that strongly aid direct strategies in adjusting the learning process. In each group, there are three smaller groups, each with a central theme and a main goal. The direct strategies related to the mental language acquisition process can be divided into three smaller groups:

- 1) *Memory strategies*: These are techniques or methods to improve the ability to remember information. Memory strategies include organizing information, connecting new information with existing knowledge, focusing attention, creating associations, and generating interesting mental images to enhance memory retention.
- 2) *Cognitive strategies*: These are thinking skills, approaches, and information-processing procedures used to solve problems, learn, and engage in logical reasoning.
- 3) *Compensation strategies*: These are techniques used to help learners overcome difficulties in using a language they are learning. For example, using synonyms or near-synonyms to replace unfamiliar words, using body language and visual aids to explain word or sentence meanings, and using keywords to search for information online or in dictionaries.

The indirect strategy group comprises techniques and actions that do not directly relate to the process of acquiring a new language but provide strong support for the direct

strategy group in adjusting the learning process. There are three subgroups within this indirect strategy group:

- 4) *Metacognitive Strategies*: These are strategies used to control and manage one's own thinking process to enhance the effectiveness of learning behavior and information processing. These strategies include self-assessment, information organization, goal identification, self-monitoring, and feedback on one's own learning process and problem-solving.
- 5) *Affective Strategies*: These strategies address techniques and actions used to manage and regulate emotions with the aim of improving the efficiency of learning and study.
- 6) *Social Strategies*: These are approaches and social interactions used to enhance one's language skills. For example, participating in clubs or study groups, seeking opportunities to practice speaking and writing, and utilizing online learning technologies.

2.2 Related Studies

Recent years have witnessed a significant focus on the pivotal role of self-study skills and English-speaking strategies in academic research. Numerous international studies have been conducted to investigate learning approaches centered on students' autonomous learning activities and their perceptions of task performance. Universities worldwide have undertaken research on self-directed, task-based English-speaking learning.

According to S.A. Gani, D. Fajrina, & R. Hanifa (2015), an essential aspect of developing speaking skills lies in the learning strategies employed by learners. In their study, data were gathered through field research, utilizing documents, questionnaires, and interviews. The research reveals that high-achieving speaking students demonstrate a superior equilibrium in utilizing various learning strategies, encompassing memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, emotional, and social strategies, to enhance their speaking skills. Furthermore, these high-achievers consciously and aptly employ a wider array of learning strategies compared to their lower-achieving counterparts. The study's findings advocate for the need to train students to heighten their awareness of their own speaking learning strategies, fostering the deliberate, purposeful, and frequent use of appropriate language learning strategies to bolster their speaking proficiency.

The research by O'Malley and Chamot (1989) and Gu and Johnson (1996) similarly underscore that successful learners employ a combination of strategies. This notion is substantiated by Gharbavi and Mousavi's (2012) study, which indicates that learners at higher proficiency levels employ a more extensive repertoire of strategies. Consequently, this investigation endeavors to delve deeper into the language learning strategies employed by high-achieving students proficient in speaking, who are adept at honing their speaking skills. It can be deduced that the application of self-study English-speaking strategies can yield outstanding performance and recognition. Evidently, active engagement in employing self-study strategies can be enriched by adhering to the outlined strategies.

Therefore, the study conducted by Ngo Thi Thanh (2010) examined the effectiveness of self-assessment and reflection activities in fostering learner autonomy within a 15-session language learning program designed for second-year students in three non-English major classes at a Vietnamese university. The primary objective was to enhance students' listening and speaking proficiencies. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of self-assessment and reflection as articulated by Andrade and Valtcheva (2009), as well as the concept of learner autonomy proposed by Holec (1981), the study integrated practical activities into the program. These activities involved students recording conversations with native English speakers and subsequently submitting both the transcripts and video recordings for evaluation. Despite the majority of students acknowledging the challenges associated with this extracurricular task, they also recognized its value in improving their speaking abilities. As a result, Ngo Thi Thanh's study concludes that integrating self-assessment and reflection activities can serve as effective tools for cultivating students' autonomy in the learning process. However, specific outcomes and detailed findings are not provided in the given excerpt.

Drawing upon the synthesis of existing literature and empirical studies, it is evident that the cultivation of self-study English-speaking skills can be perceived as a viable approach to nurturing oral language proficiency. This approach encourages first-year students to embrace self-study speaking strategies in pursuit of their academic objectives and overall language acquisition.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Question

The study was carried out with two main objectives towards the following research question:

- What autonomy strategies do first-year high-quality English major students at Can Tho University's School of Foreign Languages apply to develop their speaking skills?

3.2 Research Design

This study employed two primary research methods, including theoretical research and survey methods. Theoretical research was the initial method used to gather scientific information based on the study of existing texts and documents. Regarding the survey method, two tools were used to collect data during the research process, namely questionnaires and individual interviews.

The questionnaire was designed to explore the self-learning strategies for English speaking skills of first-year students majoring in High-Quality English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages. After designing the questionnaire, the research team conducted interviews with five students to gain deeper insights into their self-learning strategies and propose solutions to enhance the learning quality of English major students.

3.3 Research Participants

Ninety-six first-year students majoring in English, enrolled in the high-quality program at Can Tho University, participated in this survey. And thirteen of them joined a semi-structured interview.

4. Findings and Participants

4.1 Findings from Quantitative Participants

The survey examined the self-learning strategies of first-year students majoring in High-Quality English Language for speaking skills and the extent to which first-year students practice English learning strategies. Ten primary questions for students were used in this study. Student responses related to the research objectives were collected and subsequently encoded for data analysis. Out of one hundred items, ninety-six were encoded for data analysis.

The questionnaire's reliability was assessed, and the results indicated that the reliability coefficient for the 82 items in section 2 is relatively high ($\alpha = 0.907$).

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics of Direct and Indirect Strategies

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Direct and Indirect Strategies

Paired Samples Statistics		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Direct strategies	3.789	96	.3775	.0385
	Indirect strategies	3.863	96	.3802	.0388

Table 4.1 illustrates that the mean score of direct strategies ($M=3.789$, $SD=0.3775$) was lower than the mean score of indirect strategies ($M=3.863$, $SD=0.3802$). This result indicated that students tended to apply indirect strategies more than direct strategies

Also, Table 4.1 illustrates that the average score for direct strategies ($M=3.789$, $SD=0.3775$) is lower than the average score for indirect strategies ($M=3.863$, $SD=0.3802$). This result suggests that students appear to apply indirect strategies more frequently than direct strategies.

By comparing the average scores of these two types of strategies, we can observe a trend in how students implement learner autonomy in speaking skills. The higher average score for indirect strategies implies that students tend to prefer using indirect methods, such as learning through additional study materials or participating in extracurricular activities, over direct approaches like direct language practice or interaction with native speakers. This result can provide us with a better understanding of how students approach and develop their speaking skills and may influence the development of more effective training programs or learning methods in the future.

4.1.2 Comparison Results between Strategies in Direct Strategies in Detail

Table 4.2: Results of Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Cognitive strategies – Compensation strategies	.05940	.53600	.05471	-.04920	.16800	1.086	95	.280
Pair 2	Memory strategies – Cognitive strategies	-.17634	.40973	.04182	-.25936	-.09332	-4.217	95	.000
Pair 3	Memory strategies – Compensation strategies	-.11694	.54383	.05550	-.22713	-.00675	-2.107	95	.038

As mentioned in Table 4.2, a paired sample *t*-test was run to test whether a difference in students' use of the strategies in terms of direct strategies. The result showed that the Sig value of the value *t* of pair 1 between Cognitive strategies – Compensation strategies ($p=0.280$) is higher than 0.05 ($p>0.05$). It would be claimed that there was no significant difference in participants' applying level of learner autonomy between Cognitive strategies – Compensation strategies. While the Sig value of the value *t* of pair 2 between Memory strategies – Cognitive strategies and pair 3 between Memory strategies – Compensation strategies ($p_2=0.000$, $p_3=0.038$) are lower than 0.05 (p_2 , $p_3<0.05$). As a result, there was a significant difference in participants' applying level of learner autonomy between Memory strategies – Cognitive strategies and between Memory strategies – Compensation strategies.

From these results, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the application of learner autonomy among these pairs: Memory Strategies and Interaction Strategies, as well as Memory Strategies and Compensation Strategies.

Based on the analysis results, we can draw some important insights into how participants in our study use different strategies to apply learner autonomy in speaking skills. Firstly, the non-significant difference in the use of Memory Strategies and Interaction Strategies implies that participants may have flexibility in how they approach learning and developing speaking skills. This may indicate their ability to effectively utilize both types of strategies depending on specific situations or their learning objectives.

However, when comparing Memory Strategies and Compensation Strategies, we observe a significant difference. This may suggest that participants tend to apply Compensation Strategies when they encounter difficulties or need to compensate for speaking skills, they may not feel confident about. This could be particularly relevant in real communication situations or in scenarios where they need to speak but lack confidence.

This difference highlights the importance of developing specific learning strategies and support for learners based on their learning goals and individual needs. This can help them optimize the application of learner autonomy in speaking skills and improve their learning performance based on an understanding of how different strategies are used.

4.2 Findings from Qualitative Data

As discussed in the literature review section, this study focuses on investigating the self-learning strategies employed by students to enhance their English-speaking skills as part of their independent language acquisition process, as well as their practical learning approaches. All participants demonstrated a positive awareness of their learning journeys.

Following the collection of data through questionnaires, we conducted interviews with 96 respondents, including 18 first-year students, immediately after the survey to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives regarding their self-learning journeys in English. The primary objective of this research is to identify common challenges faced by these learners and explore the strategies they employ to overcome these difficulties. These findings emphasize the importance of motivation, perseverance, and self-awareness in achieving successful self-learning. Additionally, they underscore the value of practice, feedback, and peer and native speaker support.

Moreover, this study offers profound insights into various aspects of self-learning English, including vocabulary acquisition, contextual usage, pronunciation, and intonation practice, code-switching, the use of gestures in conversation, employing synonyms, setting learning goals, self-monitoring progress, using music as a learning tool, embracing mistakes, collaborative learning, and empathetic listening. The diversity in each individual learner's approach underscores the personalized nature of self-learning English.

However, mere awareness alone is insufficient to contribute to the success of learning English speaking skills; active practice by students also requires careful consideration. This section delves deeper into the challenges that these students encounter in their learning journeys and explores the methods they have used to address these challenges. These discoveries will contribute to a deeper understanding of the self-learning experience and illuminate effective strategies for independent language acquisition.

4.2.1 Challenges in Learning Autonomy in English Speaking Skills

In this study, the research team delved into the process of self-learning English speaking skills among students and the strategies they employ to overcome challenges in their learning journey. Through student interviews, we observed several common difficulties they often encounter. Memorizing vocabulary and placing words naturally and accurately into context emerged as significant challenges for students. Nevertheless, we also found that some students applied helpful strategies to tackle these challenges.

The study revealed that self-learning English speaking skills through social media platforms come with its fair share of obstacles, including issues related to Wi-Fi connectivity, loss of concentration, and the presence of advertisements. However, learners have also employed several effective self-learning strategies, such as contextual memorization and passive listening, to develop their English-speaking skills. Students employ various strategies, including the use of vocabulary apps and websites.

For instance, Student 3 mentioned,

"I often create example sentences to apply the word to real-life situations, especially for difficult or important words."

Both Students 4 and 8 shared a similar viewpoint, stating,

"Reliable sources of word learning materials, such as textbooks, online learning resources, mobile applications, or online courses, have helped me put words into proper and natural form."

Our research team noted that naturally and accurately contextualizing words presents another challenge for students. Strategies used include learning through dialogues, songs, movies, and everyday communication situations to acquire vocabulary naturally and appropriately. By utilizing these tools, students can track their progress and apply newly acquired knowledge effectively.

Student 10 mentioned,

"Learning how to use words and structures in real-life simulations through dialogues, songs, movies, or everyday communication situations has helped me improve my ability to place words naturally and precisely."

4.2.2 Learning Autonomy Strategies Used by Students in the Process of Learning English Speaking Skills

During data collection and interviews, our research team discovered that two main strategies favored and significantly used by participants to develop their English-speaking skills are Metacognitive Strategies and Social Strategies. This section provides responses from students, highlighting how they approach and implement these strategies.

Metacognitive Strategies pertain to one's ability to monitor and regulate their own learning process. Some students shared self-monitoring methods to track their progress in English speaking. They utilize techniques such as recording their own speech, comparing it with native speakers, and participating in online or offline courses. These strategies help them assess their knowledge, identify areas for improvement, and build confidence in their speaking abilities. Students 6 and 7 use mobile apps for various learning purposes:

Student 6 stated,

"I have many mobile apps and English learning websites that offer tests, exercises, and provide information about your progress. You can track your scores, complete goal sections, and get feedback from these apps to see how you're progressing."

Student 7 said,

"I use a notebook or mobile app to record new vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures I learn. This helps me track my daily study progress and see progress over time."

Student 15 adopted a different practice,

"I follow a weekly schedule for structured language learning, including English speaking practice. I assess my progress through regular self-tests in listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. This approach helps me track and enhance my English speaking skills."

In summary, through this research, the researchers observed that students have applied effective learning strategies to overcome challenges in self-learning English speaking skills. Memorizing vocabulary and placing words in context have been addressed through learning from various contexts and passive listening. Students have also utilized reliable sources and mobile apps for appropriate learning. Different techniques have been employed to improve pronunciation and intonation, including engaging in conversations and carefully listening to native English speakers. The use of synonyms and self-monitoring was also highlighted. Thus, it is evident that self-learning English speaking skills can be achieved through the application of suitable and flexible learning strategies.

4.3 Discussion

Previous research has primarily focused on strategies to achieve overall English proficiency, setting our investigation apart from prior studies conducted by scholars such as Suwanarak (2019) and Lestari & Wahyudin (2020). Notably, earlier research often heavily relied on existing research tools. Studies on this matter also emphasize that English as a foreign language (EFL) learners need to adopt an independent learning

attitude, interact with peers and teachers as needed, and even make learning decisions without the intervention of a teacher (Little, 2009; Najeeb, 2013; Thanasoulas, 2000; Scharle & Szabó, 2000).

However, our current research differentiates itself by examining how EFL learners specifically approach English, with a strong emphasis on speaking skills. While an analysis of students' self-directed learning in formal English proficiency revealed relatively strong abilities in English speaking skills, research by Duong My Tham, Nguyen Dang Thi Cuc Huyen, Nguyen Lien Huong, Ha Thi Ngoc Thuong (2020) suggests that, although self-directed learning is considered a guiding principle for students' learning activities in the modern era, this issue has not received adequate attention in teaching and research, particularly in the research context.

This integration aligns with recommendations put forth by scholars like Gardner & Miller (1999), Littlemore (2001), and Wenden (1991), emphasizing that a self-directed learner can work independently, in pairs, or in groups depending on their needs. In addition to interacting with peers, self-directed learners can set learning goals, develop study plans, choose suitable learning methods and strategies, select study materials, self-assess their learning, and actively seek assistance when necessary. Once responsibility for learning is heightened, improvements in learning outcomes are expected (Crabbe, 1993).

4.3.1 Challenges in Learning Autonomy in English Speaking Skills

This section focuses on discussing the difficulties encountered by individuals undertaking self-study of English-speaking skills through social platforms. An investigation into six learning strategies was conducted to understand how self-learners develop their English-speaking skills. These strategies encompassed Memorization, Cognitive, Metacognitive, Compensation, Affective, and Social strategies. Results from 82 questionnaires and interviews with students indicated that all participants held a positive attitude toward these six learning strategies. This suggests their awareness of the importance of using these strategies in the learning process.

Data collected from the research confirmed that learners use self-learning strategies to enhance and improve their English language proficiency. Despite the existence of various strategies, there was consistency in their usage. Participants employed multiple language learning strategies, a finding supported not only by this study but also by previous research, including Rebecca L. Oxford's 1990 study on the Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

One of the most significant challenges faced by self-learners of English is vocabulary retention. Issues such as Wi-Fi disruptions, lack of concentration, and the presence of advertisements on social platforms were identified as additional obstacles in the learning process. Nevertheless, students found ways to overcome these challenges by utilizing effective self-learning strategies, such as using vocabulary in various contexts. Prior research by Nation (2001) also emphasized the importance of learning vocabulary

in various contexts to improve retention. Notably, self-learners demonstrated their ability to overcome these challenges through the application of effective self-learning strategies.

4.3.2 Learning Autonomy Strategies Used by Students in the Process of Learning English Speaking Skills

This research not only explores the difficulties but also assesses the extent to which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students employ self-learning strategies to develop their speaking skills, as well as their practical learning strategies. Among the six learning strategies monitored in this study, Metacognitive and Social Strategies were consistently the most frequently used. These two strategies, Metacognitive and Social, stood out and played significant roles in the students' minds, as reflected in their average scores ($M=3.923$, $SD=0.448$) (Table 4.2). This indicates that students recognized and preferred the use of these two strategies in their self-learning of English. The emphasis on these two strategies yielded promising results in improving students' English-speaking skills.

To master English speaking skills and enhance language proficiency, students often need to build a deep understanding of the language. Therefore, Metacognitive and Social Strategies play essential roles in the process of learning English. All participants in this research mentioned applying both types of strategies when learning language skills. They also tended to use different strategies for different skills they wanted to develop and improve. In fact, research participants engaged in speaking skills courses, giving them knowledge of the strategies, they preferred and that suited their learning styles.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

In this comprehensive quantitative study, we delve deep into the realm of learner autonomy among first-year high-quality English major students with the aim of developing speaking skills at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University. Through a meticulously designed survey and rigorous statistical analysis, we strive to illuminate the intricate web of self-learning strategies employed by these students. We demonstrate that the survey instrument is highly robust with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.907$. This preliminary step instils confidence in us that the data collected is trustworthy and can be relied upon for analysis.

One of the primary objectives of this research is to assess the level of students' practice of learner autonomy in developing speaking skills. The average score of the questionnaire is 3.8308, revealing this fact. This score, falling below the expected 4.0, highlights an area of concern. This discrepancy underscores the pressing need for interventions aimed at promoting learner autonomy in speaking skills among these first-year students. The data indicates that students tend to learn through supplementary materials and extracurricular activities rather than engaging in direct language practice or interaction with native speakers. This preference holds significance for teaching

methods and materials, suggesting that educators should consider adjusting their approaches to align with students' preferences.

On the other hand, the significant correlation between direct and indirect strategies indicates the complexity of strategy selection. Students appear to have some degree of adaptability, flexibly choosing strategies based on specific learning contexts they encounter. This adaptability is a valuable trait that reflects the multifaceted nature of language learning. Subsequently, the study delves into a more detailed analysis of different types of strategies within the direct and indirect categories. Among direct strategies, metacognitive and compensation strategies take precedence over memory strategies. Conversely, among indirect strategies, metacognitive and social strategies surpass effective strategies in terms of preference. These priorities offer deep insights into students' tendencies when selecting strategies. The importance of these findings becomes evident when considering potential implications for teaching practices. Educators should recognize that students can benefit from tailored instruction that aligns with their preferences for specific types of strategies. Such adjustments can enhance the effectiveness of the learning experience and enable students to realize their full potential.

Furthermore, exploring the correlations between these strategies in detail sheds light on the interplay of various strategies within each category. When students choose one type of direct strategy, they often do so in conjunction with other direct strategies. A similar pattern emerges within the realm of indirect strategies. This network of correlations suggests that students do not operate in isolation but integrate multiple strategies to navigate the complexities of their learning journeys. As we conclude our exploration, it becomes evident that learner autonomy is a dynamic and multifaceted concept. This study elucidates its manifestations among first-year students, providing a foundation for future research and pedagogical innovations. Armed with this profound understanding, the journey towards enhancing learner autonomy in speaking skills continues, offering numerous opportunities for development and improvement.

In summary, the findings of this research offer a comprehensive insight into learner autonomy among first-year high-quality English major students in the context of speaking skills. The results highlight opportunities for educators and curriculum developers to enhance the quality of English education at School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

In today's era, understanding and proficiently applying language skills are essential requirements. English is one of the most important and necessary languages for communication and integration in the international environment. Especially for first-year students majoring in high-quality English Language, mastering English speaking skills not only helps them develop communication abilities but also serves as an important tool for future work. Therefore, this topic surveys to understand the challenges and difficulties that first-year students often encounter when learning and speaking English, as well as to explore the effectiveness of the self-learning strategies applied by students.

In the English-speaking course, the strategic learning practice focuses on students' ability to successfully perform English-speaking skills without limitations in learning methods, language usage, or lesson approaches. Thus, implementing strategic learning as an appropriate method would be more beneficial for overall English-speaking progress.

Mastering and applying effective learning strategies to enhance foreign language skills helps students access information from rich specialized learning resources and improves communication proficiency. This research, by examining the effectiveness of self-learning strategies for the English-speaking skills of first-year students, aims to provide guidance and determine suitable learning methods to achieve students' learning goals and as Jones et al. (1987) have shown that teachers try to change learners' attitudes about their own abilities by teaching them that their failures are more likely to be due to lack of effective strategies than to lack of ability or laziness. So, improving English speaking skills not only helps students communicate confidently and present opinions clearly but also develops thinking, creativity, and quick information processing. Through applying appropriate learning strategies, students can practice and improve these skills, thereby enhancing future job opportunities.

Secondly, this research also helps identify the difficulties and issues that students often encounter when learning and speaking English. Difficulties can include vocabulary, grammar, expressing opinions, confidence in using English, and cultural obstacles. Furthermore, by understanding these difficulties, the research team can propose appropriate learning methods to help students overcome these challenges and develop English-speaking proficiency effectively. This could involve using suitable learning materials, receiving support from instructors, organizing practical activities in class, or even utilizing information technology to enhance self-study and English-speaking skill development.

Thirdly, fluency and accuracy are allies rather than enemies, and learning strategies supplement one another as they shape and influence each other. Effective learning strategies for English skills help facilitate effective communication and interaction. Therefore, this research also helps students develop necessary skills for academic research and language application. Additionally, creating an effective learning environment and establishing a suitable applied model helps students think creatively, gain confidence, and achieve high results when using English in academic and specialized activities. Moreover, self-study is a crucial method for developing language skills, especially speaking skills. Students can improve their speaking abilities by actively seeking learning materials, practicing, and self-evaluating. Hence, this research can provide feedback from students regarding the effectiveness of self-study, thereby offering valuable information for instructors to guide and support students in the self-learning process.

Finally, this research not only helps students develop speaking skills but also provides knowledge and effective learning methods. Through understanding and applying these learning strategies, students can grasp better job opportunities and have

more confidence in the professional working environment that requires language proficiency. Moreover, this research helps students recognize their weaknesses and develop –speaking. This brings about confidence, and comfort, and opens up many opportunities for interaction and learning from the international environment.

5.3 Limitations

Due to the limitations mentioned above, future researchers may explore new research directions from various perspectives based on the following suggestions:

Firstly, the limitation related to the study's target population should be addressed. This research exclusively focused on first-year students majoring in High-Quality English Language at a specific university. This limitation raises concerns about the representatives of the sample, as it does not reflect the diversity of students studying English speaking skills in different academic environments or geographical regions.

Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data regarding the use of self-learning strategies may not accurately reflect the reality if students are not entirely honest in their self-assessment. Instances may occur where students either overestimate or underestimate the extent to which they apply these strategies.

Thirdly, the constraint of time should be acknowledged. This study did not track the long-term development of self-learning strategies over an extended period. Consequently, it may limit our ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of changes over time or identify long-term trends.

Lastly, the research primarily focused on investigating self-learning strategies without delving deeply into assessing the actual performance of students in English speaking. This limitation may hinder our ability to provide specific evaluations of the students' English proficiency level after their self-learning endeavors.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the limitations mentioned above, future researchers can explore new aspects of their studies. Firstly, the scope of research in the future should be expanded. Currently, the target population for this study is only first-year students majoring in English High-Quality English Studies Program, School of Foreign Languages. It is recommended that future research on this topic include a larger population, including students from other majors, to explore different aspects of self-learning Speaking skills. Besides English Speaking, there are still many subjects that need innovation through English learning strategies.

Secondly, there should be a similar study that delves into a specific skill to provide a deeper understanding of the subject matter of Speaking skills for self-learners of English. In addition to English Speaking, further research should investigate the awareness and practice of self-learning strategies for vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation to gain a broader perspective on English Speaking skills. Recommendations can also include problem-solving methods or suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of self-learning Speaking skills. This could involve developing high-

quality learning programs, encouraging students to engage in discussions and group projects, or creating free online courses on Speaking skills. The final recommendation for further research is that studies should be conducted at the beginning of the academic year so that participants can benefit from the findings of the research.

In addition, the research team believes that this study can also apply to English language learners in general, as well as specifically to students studying translation and interpretation. The research team has recognized that self-learning Speaking skills is a challenge for many learners. This could be due to a lack of learning materials, a lack of real-life communication environments, or the ability to self-assess and improve vocabulary, grammar, and expressive style. Therefore, the research team recommends focusing on studying strategies and tools that support self-learning Speaking skills. Lastly, the research team suggests studying the factors that impact the effectiveness of self-learning Speaking skills in supporting translation students. Building confidence and accuracy in expressing information through practicing English Speaking skills is important for translation students.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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