



NON-ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON SELF-STUDY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES IN THE INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAM AT CAN THO UNIVERSITY

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Abstract:

This descriptive quantitative study addressed two main research questions: (1) How do non-English majored students perceive self-study support activities in the Intensive English Program at Can Tho University? and (2) What are the main challenges that non-English majored students face when engaging with self-study support activities? To answer these questions, data were collected from 624 non-English majored freshmen across disciplines through a 34-item Vietnamese Likert-scale questionnaire and were quantitatively analyzed. The descriptive statistical results showed that students reported overall positive experiences with self-study support activities ($M = 4.19$), a high level of satisfaction ($M = 4.34$), and high perceived effectiveness ($M = 4.26$). Challenges were identified at a moderate level ($M = 3.45$), mainly involving motivation maintenance, technical issues, progress tracking, strategy and resource use, and time constraints. The findings highlight the need for intensive English programs to provide more systematic self-study support by integrating effective learning resources, explicit strategy guidance, and sustained teacher scaffolding to foster students' autonomous learning capacity.

Keywords: intensive English program, non-English majored students, self-study support

1. Introduction and Literature Review

English proficiency is increasingly important for higher education, employability, and participation in global academic and professional communication (Köylü & Tracy-Ventura, 2022; Phan *et al.*, 2022; Ting *et al.*, 2017). Vietnamese English language education has been shaped by national reforms, including the National Foreign Languages Project and its extension, the CEFR-V proficiency framework, and the recent orientation toward making English a second language in schools (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014;

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Nguyen & Hamid, 2021; Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2008, 2017, 2025). At Can Tho University, non-English-major students in advanced and high-quality programs are required to reach CEFR-V Level 4, equivalent to B2 (Can Tho University, 2023).

Within this context, Can Tho University has implemented an Intensive English Program (IEP), also referred to as the English Foundation Program, to support non-English-major students in advanced and high-quality programs across disciplines (Phuong *et al.*, 2018, 2019). The program combines classroom instruction with self-study support through online platforms, supplementary materials, and out-of-class practice opportunities (Le *et al.*, 2023). Because classroom contact hours alone may not ensure the expected proficiency outcomes, self-study support is central to helping students sustain English learning beyond class.

Theoretically, self-study support can be understood as a scaffolded learning process. From sociocultural perspectives, learners gradually move from assisted to more independent performance when they receive appropriate mediation from teachers, peers, strategies, and tools (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; van Lier, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). Self-study support is also closely connected with self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, and learner autonomy. These perspectives emphasize learners' ability to set goals, select strategies, monitor progress, maintain motivation, and evaluate learning outcomes (Benson, 2013; Garrison, 1997; Pintrich, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002).

In Vietnamese EFL contexts, however, learners may recognize the value of autonomy while still needing teacher guidance, strategy instruction, and institutional support to learn independently with confidence (Bui, 2018; Duong, 2021; Nguyen & Habók, 2020, 2022). This issue is particularly important for non-English-major students, whose English learning is often compulsory and who may have varied levels of prior preparation. Accordingly, effective self-study support should not simply provide resources; it should also help students understand how to use those resources strategically.

In IEPs, self-study support connects classroom learning with independent practice through supplementary exercises, self-access materials, teacher-guided tasks, online platforms, peer learning, consultations, and extracurricular English activities (Ammigan & Bentahar, 2024; Lai & Gu, 2011; Reinders & Benson, 2017; Thompson, 2013). Previous research suggests that technology-enhanced learning tools could support vocabulary learning, practice, feedback, and progress monitoring (Chen, 2024; Duong *et al.*, 2021). The effectiveness of such support depends on whether students perceive resources as useful, accessible, relevant, and aligned with their needs (Gardner & Miller, 1999; Henry & Liu, 2024). In Vietnamese tertiary contexts, students may still engage inconsistently in self-study because of limited strategic knowledge, time pressure, or insufficient confidence in independent learning (Le *et al.*, 2024; Tran & Duong, 2020; Tran & Vuong, 2023).

Although learner autonomy, self-regulation, and intensive English programs have been widely discussed, large-scale quantitative evidence on non-English-major students' perceptions of institutional self-study support in Vietnamese regional universities

remains limited (Le & Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen & Habók, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). This gap is important in the Mekong Delta context, where students' experiences can inform more responsive support design.

To address this gap, the current study investigates non-English majored students' perspectives on self-study support activities in the Intensive English Program at Can Tho University. Specifically, the study aims to examine students' experiences with, satisfaction toward, and perceived effectiveness of self-study support activities, as well as to identify the main challenges students encounter when engaging with these activities. The study is guided by two main research questions.

- 1) How do non-English majored students perceive self-study support activities in the Intensive English Program at Can Tho University?
- 2) What are the main challenges that non-English majored students face when engaging with self-study support activities?

By examining these questions, the study contributes evidence on self-study support in a Vietnamese IEP and offers practical implications for strengthening teacher scaffolding, strategy instruction, resource pathways, and progress-monitoring support.

2. Material and Methods

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to measure non-English-major students' perspectives on self-study support activities at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). The design was appropriate for identifying patterns across the four dimensions (i.e., experiences, satisfaction, perceived effectiveness, and challenges), and for ranking the most commonly reported challenges. The study used convenience and purposive sampling to recruit consenting non-English-majored freshmen enrolled in the IEP at Can Tho University during Semester 1 of the 2025-2026 academic year. In total, there were 624 participants aged between 17 and 20, comprising 340 males and 284 females. With respect to daily hours of self-study, 173 students reported spending less than one hour per day, 336 allocated 1-2 hours to independent learning, 93 devoted 3-4 hours, and only 22 exceeded 5 hours of self-study per day.

The primary instrument was a 34-item Vietnamese-language questionnaire developed specifically for this study to minimize language barriers and maximize response accuracy. Part 1 collected demographic information involving age, gender, academic major, and daily self-study hours. Part 2 measured students' perspectives through 34 items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) across four dimensions, namely experiences (10 items), satisfaction (10 items), perceived effectiveness (7 items), and challenges (7 items). The questionnaire items were developed from literature on learner autonomy, self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, and self-study support in intensive English programs (Ammigan & Bentahar, 2024; Benson, 2013; Garrison, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002). They

were then reviewed by two TESOL experts to ensure content validity, clarity, and appropriateness.

To assess reliability, validity, and clarity, the questionnaire was piloted with 35 non-English-major students who represented the target population but were excluded from the main sample. SPSS 27.0 analysis showed good reliability for the full 34-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .972$) and for the four subscales, including experiences ($\alpha = .928$), satisfaction ($\alpha = .965$), effectiveness ($\alpha = .958$), and challenges ($\alpha = .900$). These values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70 for scale reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Minor wording and layout revisions were made before the main data collection.

Two weeks after the pilot study, the main questionnaire was administered in paper format to all study participants in their classrooms to maximize response rates and ensure standardized administration conditions across all class sections. The questionnaire required no more than 15 minutes to complete. Before commencing, students were provided with a clear explanation of the research's purpose and detailed instructions on how to respond. All the collected data were subsequently subjected to quantitative analysis through SPSS to fully address the research questions.

3. Results

Table 1 summarizes the composite descriptive statistics for the four dimensions of students' perspectives on self-study support activities, including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages of agreement.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Students' Perspectives on Self-Study Support Activities

Dimensions	M	SD	% Agree
Experiences with self-study support activities	4.19	.615	80.5%
Satisfaction with self-study support activities	4.34	.613	85.8%
Perceived effectiveness of self-study support activities	4.26	.643	83.8%
Challenges in engaging with self-study support activities	3.45	.953	48.1%

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Overall, students reported positive perspectives on self-study support activities. Satisfaction received the highest score ($M = 4.34$, $SD = .613$; 85.8% agreement), followed by perceived effectiveness ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .643$; 83.8%) and experiences ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .615$; 80.5%). Challenges were moderate ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .953$; 48.1%), indicating that students valued the support activities while still experiencing some barriers.

In terms of students' experiences with self-study support activities, Table 2 offers detailed information about the students' stances through the descriptive analysis of the ten questionnaire items.

Table 2: Students' Experiences with Self-Study Support Activities

Students' experiences	M	SD	% Agree
Supplementary practice exercises (workbooks/online resources)	4.12	.823	79.5%
Technology tools (e.g., ELSA Speak, e-learning platforms)	4.34	.746	89.3%
Teacher-introduced resources and self-study strategies	4.43	.700	89.5%
Peer study groups outside class	4.05	.920	72.9%
Extracurricular activities/ English clubs	3.75	1.030	59.6%
Model answers and self-study video materials	4.20	.797	81.7%
Academic consultation/ online tutorials	4.18	.855	80.1%
Peer feedback used for self-adjustment	4.13	.871	78.2%
Teacher feedback used for self-adjustment	4.47	.660	91.8%
Use of teacher-introduced self-study strategies to track progress	4.23	.803	81.9%
Overall	4.19	.820	80.5%

It is clear from Table 2 that students showed high engagement overall ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .820$; 80.5%). The highest-rated items were teacher feedback for self-adjustment ($M = 4.47$; 91.8%), teacher-introduced resources and strategies ($M = 4.43$; 89.5%), and technology tools such as ELSA Speak and e-learning platforms ($M = 4.34$; 89.3%). Extracurricular activities and English clubs received the lowest rating ($M = 3.75$; 59.6%), suggesting students' less frequent or less consistent use of these opportunities.

With regard to students' satisfaction with self-study support activities, Table 3 further clarifies their viewpoints through the descriptive analysis of the ten questionnaire items.

Table 3: Students' Satisfaction with Self-Study Support Activities

Students' satisfaction	M	SD	% Agree
Physical facilities and study spaces	4.40	.710	88.6%
Updated, diverse, and sufficient materials	4.35	.717	87.7%
Reliable and accessible resources	4.36	.724	87.5%
Clear information provision	4.28	.747	84.6%
Timely teacher feedback	4.37	.701	88.1%
Responsiveness to student feedback on self-study activities	4.27	.773	82.0%
Confidence in using provided self-study resources	4.23	.831	80.4%
Teacher expertise, enthusiasm, and helpfulness	4.52	.668	91.5%
Alignment of self-study resources with learners' needs	4.35	.742	85.9%
Flexible options matching schedules	4.28	.782	82.0%
Overall	4.34	.740	85.8%

As can be seen from Table 3, students were highly satisfied overall ($M = 4.34$, $SD = .740$; 85.8%). The strongest areas were teacher expertise, enthusiasm, and helpfulness ($M = 4.52$; 91.5%), physical facilities and study spaces ($M = 4.40$; 88.6%), timely teacher feedback ($M = 4.37$; 88.1%), and reliable and accessible resources ($M = 4.36$; 87.5%). Confidence in using resources ($M = 4.23$; $SD = .831$; 80.4%), and responsiveness to student feedback ($M = 4.27$; $SD = .773$; 82.0%) were lower, but still positive.

In reference to the students' perceived effectiveness of self-study support activities, Table 4 provides more insights into the participants' specific perspectives through the descriptive analysis of the seven questionnaire items.

Table 4: Students' Perceived Effectiveness of Self-Study Support Activities

Perceived effectiveness	M	SD	% Agree
More practice opportunities beyond class	4.29	.756	85.3%
Improved English skills	4.31	.730	86.9%
Increased confidence in using English	4.18	.798	79.0%
Identifying personal strengths and weaknesses	4.29	.730	85.2%
Soft skills development	4.28	.735	84.7%
Enhanced learning motivation	4.21	.781	81.5%
Autonomous learning development	4.28	.742	83.8%
Overall	4.26	.753	83.8%

As shown in Table 4, students rated the activities as highly effective overall ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .753$; 83.8%). They especially perceived benefits for improving English skills ($M = 4.31$; 86.9%), increasing practice beyond class ($M = 4.29$; 85.3%), and identifying personal strengths and weaknesses ($M = 4.29$; 85.2%). Confidence in using English was the lowest-rated item in this dimension ($M = 4.18$; 79.0%), though it remained positive.

Regarding students' challenges in engaging with self-study support activities, Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the seven questionnaire items, including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages of agreement.

Table 5: Students' Challenges in Engaging with Self-Study Support Activities

Students' challenges	M	SD	% Agree
Technical issues (slow internet, limited device access)	3.58	1.126	54.8%
Not knowing how to use strategies/ resources effectively	3.41	1.148	46.8%
Difficulty tracking one's own learning progress	3.54	1.120	51.5%
Difficulty maintaining motivation consistently	3.72	1.093	58.8%
Insufficient time to complete self-study activities	3.44	1.150	47.6%
Activities not matching current proficiency level	3.28	1.186	40.9%
Activities not fully meeting individual learning needs	3.18	1.178	36.3%
Overall	3.45	1.143	48.1%

As evidenced in Table 5, students reported a moderate level of difficulty overall ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.143$; 48.1%). The most common challenge was maintaining motivation ($M = 3.72$; 58.8%), followed by technical issues ($M = 3.58$; 54.8%) and difficulty tracking learning progress ($M = 3.54$; 51.5%). Time constraints ($M = 3.44$; 47.6%) and uncertainty about how to use strategies or resources effectively ($M = 3.41$; 46.8%) were also notable. Resource mismatch with proficiency level ($M = 3.28$; 40.9%), and individual learning needs ($M = 3.18$; 36.3%) received lower agreement, indicating that these were less widespread concerns.

4. Discussion

4.1 Students' Perspectives on Self-study Support Activities

The high scores for experiences ($M = 4.19$), satisfaction ($M = 4.34$), and perceived effectiveness ($M = 4.26$) suggest that CTU's IEP provides a generally effective self-study support system. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that IEP support could extend classroom learning through online platforms, supplementary materials, teacher-guided tasks, and out-of-class practice (Ammigan & Bentahar, 2024; Lai & Gu, 2011; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

Teacher-related support emerged as the strongest feature of the program. Students highly valued teacher feedback for self-adjustment ($M = 4.47$; 91.8%) and teacher-introduced resources and strategies ($M = 4.43$; 89.5%), suggesting that technology and resources are most effective when accompanied by explicit scaffolding. This aligns with sociocultural and learner-autonomy perspectives that emphasize guided movement toward independent learning (Benson, 2013; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; van Lier, 2004). Additionally, technology-mediated activities also received strong endorsement, especially ELSA Speak and e-learning platforms ($M = 4.34$; 89.3%). These findings support the value of digital tools for extended practice, feedback, and progress information in self-regulated language learning (Chen, 2024; Pan *et al.*, 2025).

However, extracurricular activities and English clubs received the lowest experience rating ($M = 3.75$; 59.6%). This underscores that social learning opportunities may need stronger integration with course goals, teacher guidance, and students' routines. Similar concerns have been reported in Vietnamese EFL contexts, where learners might value autonomy but engage inconsistently without sufficient strategy support (Le *et al.*, 2024; Nguyen & Habók, 2020).

Regarding satisfaction, teacher expertise and enthusiasm ($M = 4.52$; 91.5%), physical facilities and study space ($M = 4.40$; 88.6%), reliable and accessible resources ($M = 4.36$; 87.5%), along with resource alignment with learners' needs ($M = 4.35$; 85.9%) were the highest-rated aspects, reflecting students' appreciation of instructor support and relevant materials. This is in line with the earlier studies disclosing that the effectiveness of self-study support depends not only on resource availability but also on whether resources are useful, accessible, relevant, and aligned with learners' needs (Alzahrani & Wright, 2016; Henry & Liu, 2024; Nguyen & Habók, 2020). However, confidence in using self-study resources ($M = 4.23$; 80.4%) and responsiveness to student feedback ($M = 4.27$; 82.0%) were comparatively lower, suggesting room to strengthen students' ownership and participation.

In terms of perceived effectiveness, students rated self-study activities highly for improving English skills ($M = 4.31$; 86.9%), providing additional practice opportunities ($M = 4.29$; 85.3%), enhancing soft skills ($M = 4.28$; 84.7%), and developing autonomous learning ($M = 4.28$; 83.8%), but increased confidence in using English received the lowest effectiveness rating ($M = 4.18$; 79.0%). Thus, although students have recognized the practical value of support activities, some might still need explicit guidance to transfer

practice into confident independent language use. This aligns with learner autonomy and self-regulated learning perspectives, which emphasize goal setting, strategy selection, monitoring, self-evaluation, as well as scaffolding, and institutional support (Benson, 2013; Bui, 2018; Duong, 2021; Nguyen & Habók, 2022; Pintrich, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002).

4.2 Students' Challenges in Engaging with Self-study Support Activities

The moderate overall difficulty rating ($M = 3.45$), alongside high perceived effectiveness ($M = 4.26$) suggests that CTU's IEP students generally value self-study support activities but still encounter barriers when using them independently. This accords with earlier research showing that self-study support could enhance language learning, motivation, and autonomous learning capacity, while non-English majored students may face challenges related to self-regulation, strategy use, motivation, time management, and resource alignment (Duong *et al.*, 2021; Le & Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen & Habók, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Phuong *et al.*, 2019).

Difficulty maintaining motivation consistently emerged as the highest-rated challenge ($M = 3.72$; 58.8%). This finding corresponds to self-directed and self-regulated learning perspectives, where motivation is central to learners' ability to plan, sustain, monitor, and evaluate independent learning (Garrison, 1997; Pintrich, 2000, 2004; Zimmerman, 2000, 2002). It also supports prior studies unveiling that learners might struggle with long-term motivation and effort in autonomous learning contexts (Yang, 2023; Zhang & Zou, 2024). Technical issues were also notable ($M = 3.58$; 54.8%), highlighting that accessibility remains important.

Not knowing how to use strategies or resources effectively ($M = 3.41$; 46.8%) and difficulty tracking one's own learning progress ($M = 3.54$; 51.5%) point to metacognitive and self-regulatory challenges. Effective self-study depends not only on available resources, but also on learners' ability to set goals, select strategies, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes (Benson, 2013; Pintrich, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002). These findings reinforce the need for explicit strategy instruction, scaffolding, and progress-monitoring support to develop learner autonomy (Duong & Nguyen, 2023; Nguyen & Habók, 2022). Insufficient time to complete self-study activities was reported by nearly half of the students ($M = 3.44$; 47.6%), suggesting that time management remains a practical barrier rather than a purely individual weakness. This finding is consistent with previous studies underlining that learners often face difficulties in goal-setting, time management, self-evaluation, and contextual constraints such as limited time, resources, and institutional support (Ngo, 2019; Shen *et al.*, 2023; Yang, 2023; Zhang & Zou, 2024). Therefore, self-study tasks should be realistically paced and clearly connected to course outcomes.

Resource alignment challenges were less strongly endorsed but still meaningful, namely activities not matching current proficiency levels ($M = 3.28$; 40.9%) and activities not fully meeting individual learning needs ($M = 3.18$; 36.3%). These findings suggest that the IEP's self-study provision is generally useful but may not fully address all students' diverse needs and proficiency profiles. This is in accordance with the previous research emphasizing that self-study support is effective when resources are useful, accessible,

relevant, and aligned with learners' needs and proficiency levels (Alzahrani & Wright, 2016; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Henry & Liu, 2024; Nguyen & Habók, 2020). Overall, the findings indicate that students' difficulties are interconnected motivational, technological, metacognitive, temporal, and resource-related barriers that require better scaffolding, strategy guidance, and flexible support design.

5. Limitations and Recommendations

Despite careful research design and implementation, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional survey design, which captures students' perspectives at a single point in time, but cannot establish causal relationships between self-study support activities and language learning outcomes. Longitudinal designs would be necessary to track how perspectives and self-study behaviors evolve across the students' study program and to assess the long-term impact of self-study support on language proficiency development. Second, the sample was drawn from a single institution, namely Can Tho University, using convenient and purposive sampling, which limits the generalizability of findings to other Vietnamese universities in other regional or national contexts. Last but not least, the quantitative survey design could hardly capture the nuanced, contextual, and experiential dimensions of students' engagement with self-study support activities that qualitative approaches could illuminate.

Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal mixed-methods designs that combine quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, focus groups, or learning journals to capture the complexity and depth of students' self-study experiences over time. Comparative studies examining perspectives across different Vietnamese universities, different year levels, and different disciplinary backgrounds would further enhance the generalizability of findings. Future research should further investigate the relationship between students' perspectives on self-study support activities and their actual language proficiency gains. Also, experimental or quasi-experimental studies examining the effects of specific pedagogical interventions such as explicit metacognitive strategy instruction or differentiated self-study pathways on students' self-study engagement and language outcomes would provide stronger evidence for evidence-based program improvement.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated non-English majored students' perspectives on self-study support activities in the Intensive English Program at Can Tho University, Vietnam, addressing two research questions concerning students' perceptions and challenges. The findings revealed that students held consistently positive views across all three dimensions of experiences ($M = 4.19$), satisfaction ($M = 4.34$), and perceived effectiveness ($M = 4.26$), indicating that CTU's IEP has established a broadly effective self-study

support infrastructure. Teacher-related variables, including teacher feedback, teacher-introduced resources, and teacher expertise-consistently emerged as the most highly valued elements of self-study support, underscoring the central role of instructor-mediated scaffolding in fostering autonomous learning among non-English majored students in Vietnamese provincial higher education. Technology-mediated tools, particularly ELSA Speak and e-learning platforms, also received strong endorsement, reflecting broader global trends in technology-assisted language learning.

Simultaneously, the study identified several significant challenges constraining effective self-study engagement, including motivation maintenance, technical issues, progress tracking, strategy and resource use, and time restrictions. The coexistence of high positive perceptions and moderate difficulty ratings indicates that students value and appreciate self-study support activities but still face a few constraints that limit their capacity to maximize the benefits of these resources. An autonomy gap was also identified, whereby students perceived self-study activities as highly effective for skill improvement but expressed comparatively lower confidence in their capacity for independent language application, suggesting that resource provision alone is insufficient to develop genuine learner autonomy without accompanying metacognitive instruction and explicit attention to self-directedness (Benson, 2013; Zimmerman, 2002).

Overall, the study contributes context-specific evidence from a regional Vietnamese IEP and reframes self-study support as a multi-layered system of provision. Program improvement should therefore focus on explicit strategy guidance, coherent resource pathways, progress-monitoring support, and responsive teacher scaffolding. By foregrounding Mekong Delta non-English-major students' perspectives, this study highlights the importance of context-specific, student-centered support that fosters learner agency and autonomous English learning during and beyond university.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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