

Self-Directed Learning Readiness and Academic Success Among Non-English Major University Students

Yokubbaeva Umida Abduvakhob Kizi¹

¹Associate Professor, Department of Philology, Faculty of Humanities & Pedagogy, Turan International University, Namangan, Uzbekistan. E-mail: umidayoqubbayeva@gmail.com, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0586-7964>

Abstract: The digitalization of education has made it necessary for university learners to be proactive in their language acquisition. This paper attempts to understand the connection between Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and success in academics for university students who do not major in English. This group has its particular challenges and lacks motivation. With the internationalization of universities, it has become imperative for graduates to be able to self-manage how people learn the English language, as this is vital to their success in both their studies and in the workplace. This paper employs a correlational research methodology and focuses on how the SDL subcomponents of self-management, motivation, and self-control work in tandem regarding second language (L2) achievement and resilience within the online world. Learner agency and self-regulation of learning are merged to describe how non-English majors draw on the Internet (e.g., MOOCs, social networks) to learn outside of the classroom. SDL's preliminary findings indicate a positive correlation between SDL and improvement in speaking accuracy, vocabulary proficiency, and general academic achievement. The internal, emotional self-control, self-efficacy, and external, self-directed control, instructional, and a student's readiness for autonomy are explored and described. The need to develop a self-directed SDL framework rest on the subcomponents of self-management, motivation, self-control. The global academic environment demands graduates who can be self-directed learners, and the findings support that a self-directed model needs to be incorporated.

Key Words: self-directed learning readiness, academic success, non-english majors, learner autonomy, higher education, english as a foreign language (efl), digital learning environments

(Received: 13 March 2025; Revised: 04 April 2025; Accepted: 23 May 2025; Published: 30 June 2025)

Introduction

Higher education has recently prioritized students' ownership of their own educational journeys, due to a rapid increase in hybrid and fully digital learning environments. Non-English major university students face difficulty in becoming proficient English speakers through EFL due to competing academic priorities (Lian et al., 2021). Post-COVID, students are more reliant on self-directed learning as physical classroom boundaries become defunct. Understanding Self-Directed Learning (SDL) readiness becomes critical for non-specialist students to ensure it is marketable in an academic and professional globally integrated system (Phan et al., 2022).

Achieving language proficiency for non-English majors is an academic area where students devote a lot of time and energy, yet still struggle to make progress (Alegado et al., 2023; Nishantha & Fernando, 2020). This is largely due to limited sensitive and effective instructional time. The COVID-19 pandemic also resulted in fast-tracked distance education, and students were forced to use complex systems to interact during class with unrecognized digital skills. The conditions of physical absence of the classroom can disrupt academic progress, and motivation has even more of a negative impact in academic and

motivational deficits (Wu, 2024). The presence of SDL readiness becomes necessary to ensure students can self-direct academically in a digital-focused educational system, where a defunct academic structure can lead to an educational attrition, and a lack of self-directed skills can result in decreased academic performance and a lack of success in e-learning.

This research is valuable to educators, curriculum developers, and students in understanding the impact of independent learning skills on concrete results in learning. The analysis of SDL readiness allows institutions to appraise their students and offer guidance in building self-direction and autonomy skills. SDL readiness equals professional skills and is one of the predictors of success in learning and the development of entrepreneurial skills required in the 21st-century workforce. Universities, therefore, help students achieve these competencies and provide non-major students with the skills to learn and adjust throughout their lives.

Research Questions

The objectives of this study include:

- What is the SDL readiness level of university students who are non-English majors?
- Is there a correlation between SDL readiness and success in learning the English language, and is it significant?
- What is the impact of external factors like technology and distance learning on developing SDL readiness?

Research Objectives

Regarding the research questions, the study intends to:

- Determine the baseline level of self-management, learning motivation, and self-discipline of non-English major university students.
- Establish the correlation between SDL readiness and student performance in the related standardized tests.
- Determine the relevant technology and situational factors that grant or restrict learner autonomy.
- Suggest practical ways to incorporate self-directed learning into the typical curriculum framework of English.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: In Section II, the literature concerning learner agency, the contribution of technology to SDA, and the challenges that non-major students face. Section III describes the research methodology, including the research design, demographics of the participants, and the statistical tools used. The results of the data analysis are presented in Section IV, together with a pedagogical discussion on the outcomes. Finally, Section V presents the conclusions of the research, including a brief reiteration of the findings, the implications of the findings for higher education, and directions for further research.

Literature Review

The shift to learner-centered approaches in higher education has called for more research on the processes of autonomy, especially in the context of students whose majors are not language-related. The aim of this section is to review the existing literature on the theoretical aspects of self-directed learning, the role of technology, and the difficulties encountered by non-major students in the university.

Ongoing studies have shown that learners' autonomy is one of the many important factors that contribute to positive academic performance (Gupta et al., 2024). Such autonomy allows students to take control of their own learning and exercise their self-regulation to construct their own learning experiences. With respect to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, cultivating this sense of control helps students move from the passively receiving end of the information spectrum to the actively delivering end (Hilli, 2020). When considering the interplay among the intrapersonal aspects and other contextual factors, self-directed learning (SDL) ceases to be an individual peculiarity and becomes a system- influenced phenomenon (Nishantha & Fernando, 2020). Furthermore, SDL is a relatively new, yet essential, skill attributed to the 21st-century learner, that is positively correlated to one's academic performance and level of professional engagement (Alegado et al., 2023).

Although SDL preparedness is a significant predictor of academic performance, its presence varies greatly among learners' demographics and scholarly disciplines. SDL preparedness, which also encompasses aspects of self-management and self-control, is particularly significant among secondary and tertiary level learners (Alegado et al., 2023). Many studies conducted in specialized EFL environments have shown that positive learning beliefs and self-efficacy have a considerable level of association with the readiness for learner autonomy (Duong & Nguyen, 2023; Lin & Reinders, 2019). For example, the levels of perceived self-efficacy and active instructional methods have also been proven to be among the main contributors to the development of independent learning in the case of positive readiness for flipped English learning (Luo & Gan, 2022). Yet, studies suggest that even if many learners demonstratively possess self-directed readiness, these are likely to be ineffective at the practical aspects of self-direction in the absence of sufficient support from the institution (Luo & Gan, 2022).

The pioneering role of SDL in digital globalization underscores the significance of technology in the contemporary learning landscape. Tools like YouTube have proven useful for vocabulary improvement and speaking accuracy in EFL contexts (Wu, 2024). These resources adapt to learners' unique language learning needs by providing authentic and flexible opportunities to engage with the target language, in this case, English. This is achieved through "shadowing" practices, which are rarely realistically in place in conventional classrooms. Furthermore, using Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and online training platforms demonstrates improvement in the skills needed for self-directed use of technology, provided the students have digital literacy (Zhu, 2021; Lai et al., 2016). Systematic literature reviews conducted recently have reported that undergraduates go beyond directed English learning and engage with self-directed learning activities like digital content.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a unique opportunity to measure students' and teachers' e-readiness (Zou et al., 2021; Yang & Xu, 2023). The emphasis on distance learning during this period emphasized the role of resilience and emotional intelligence in achieving academic success during this period of unprecedented disruptions (Subekti, 2021; Alrefaai & Shah, 2020). While online learning environments were perceived as providing opportunities to unlock the full learning potential, these environments also highlighted gaps in learners' technology access and self-regulation. Studies indicate that during these transitions, male and female students differ in readiness in terms of computing skills, self-efficacy, and self-directedness. Despite these challenges, a degree of improvement was noted in self-reliance and reflective practices among students who were willing to engage in remote learning.

Non-English majors perceive less value in the profession-related aspects of learning a new language, making it harder for them to acquire a new language (Madkur, 2018; Phan et al., 2022). SDL affects speaking accuracy and fluency for these students, and the effects are more pronounced (Damra, 2024; Phan et al., 2022). Research supports the fact that using SDL strategies compared to the traditional approach to

teaching speaking skills and word production has more positive effects. It is clear that the need for professional development for non-major educators and students alike calls for more participatory and action-based learning (Dounghprom et al., 2016). With the ongoing internationalization of universities, the capacity of non-major students to autodidact their way to English proficiency is a crucial element to their academic achievement and career prospects (Duong & Chua, 2016).

The reviewed studies indicate that SDL has evolved into a structural pedagogy for the increasingly digital world, rather than the supplementary learning methodology that it has previously been perceived to be. It is true that digital solutions to learning English provide the autonomy learners crave; however, these digital platforms are a double-edged sword. The absence of self-direction and self-confidence in the learner can lead to greater disempowerment than that experienced under traditional educational methodologies. This is especially true for non-English majors, for whom SDL is the only pathway to maximizing the limited contact hours, and leads to greater linguistic competitiveness and professional resilience.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative design to describe correlations. The main point is to find the type and degree of the relationship of SDL readiness to academic achievement without manipulation. In some educational frameworks, use of participatory action research to promote professional development in teaching at a distance context, however, in this case, a correlation research model seems to be more appropriate to solidify readiness predictors to academic outcomes in large populations from an empirical point of view.

Participants

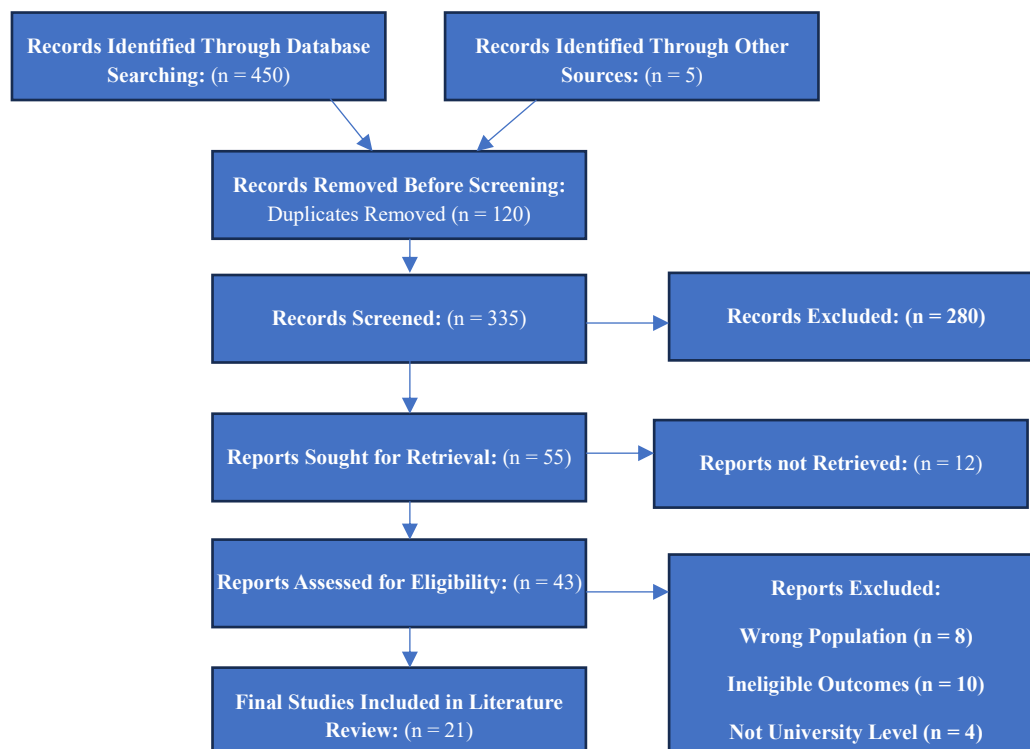


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Systematic Literature Selection

The study participants were also guided by large-scale assessments of non-major students in similar contexts. Specifically, the study analyzes a sample of 2,310 non-English major university students. These participants come from various academic branches, such as Engineering (26.23%), Administration (17.23%), and Science (9.52%). This demographic is particularly important considering that these students need to have linguistic proficiency to be promoted in their careers, which is professional even if English is not their area of study.

Figure 1 shows how much self-learning or academic literature is available. In the self-descriptive study literature, 455 records from different databases and secondary sources were sorted down into 335 after removing duplicates. 280 records were removed during the first screening because these weren't relevant in terms of title or summary. After that, 43 were fully eligible to report records. 22 were eliminated from that count because these didn't match the target study population or the study level so 21 studies were the only peer studies that met the analysis requirements based on the students' level of acceptance, technology support, and language achievement.

Instrumentation

In summary, the main tool is a constructed questionnaire and the main two-part tool is a self-directed learning readiness. The self-directed learning readiness scale (SDLRS) is the main tool and is built around self-management, self-control, and self-desire to learning. The self-directed learning self-confidence scale is then combined with the Flipped and E-Learning Readiness Measure, which is also built around self-confidence. These instruments went through multiple levels of validation, including a pilot study, so these could ensure the internal reliability of the instruments (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$) and face validity.

Data Collection

For this study, consider data collection to be a two-step process. In the first step, there is something called Survey Administration. Send out digital questionnaires through the university's learning management system. Participants provide informed consent before people respond to questions about their SDL practices and their level of technological readiness. The second step is called Academic Record Retrieval. In this step, anonymize and secure final grades from the "General English" course as an indicator of the participant's academic performance, and use this data to cross-reference and match it with the survey data.

Data Analysis

After the various records are obtained, these are analyzed with a statistical program to attempt to verify the relationships among all of the variables. First, Descriptive Statistics are calculated for the levels of preparedness for SDL to obtain the mean and standard deviation. To analyze the relationship between final grades in English and the SDL preparedness score, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) is used. To indicate which component of SDL is the best predictor for academic achievement in the sample of students, Multiple Regression Analysis is used.

Results and Discussion

The primary objective in this research was to determine the SDL readiness of the study participants. The Descriptive Statistics technique was used to analyze the results of the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS).

Descriptive Analysis of SDL Readiness

The first research objective was to assess the baseline levels of SDL readiness among participants. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to the scores derived from the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS).

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for SDL Readiness Dimensions (n=2,310)

SDL Readiness Dimension	Mean Score (1-5 Scale)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Self-Management	3.52	0.81	Moderate
Desire for Learning	4.15	0.65	High
Self-Control	3.48	0.79	Moderate
Overall SDL Readiness	3.71	0.75	Moderate

In table 1, results show that non-English major students with a strong intrinsic motivation state a 'Desire for Learning' (M=4.15, SD=0.65) with 'High' rating, still, the level of motivation drops 'Moderate' for 'Self-Management' (M=3.52) and 'Self-Control' (M=3.48) which are the constituent technical and regulatory dimensions of self-directed learning. This gap is indicative of a strong learning disposition, which may not be accompanied by self-regulation and self-control skills needed to carve their learning path. This is consistent with the pattern of observations that students demonstrate self-autonomy believe yet the execution is not as autonomous (Luo & Gan, 2022; Lin & Reinders, 2019).

Correlation and Multiple Regression

The primary aim of the analysis is to assess the impact of SDL (independent variable) and final English course grades (dependent variable) to determine the level of academic achievement.

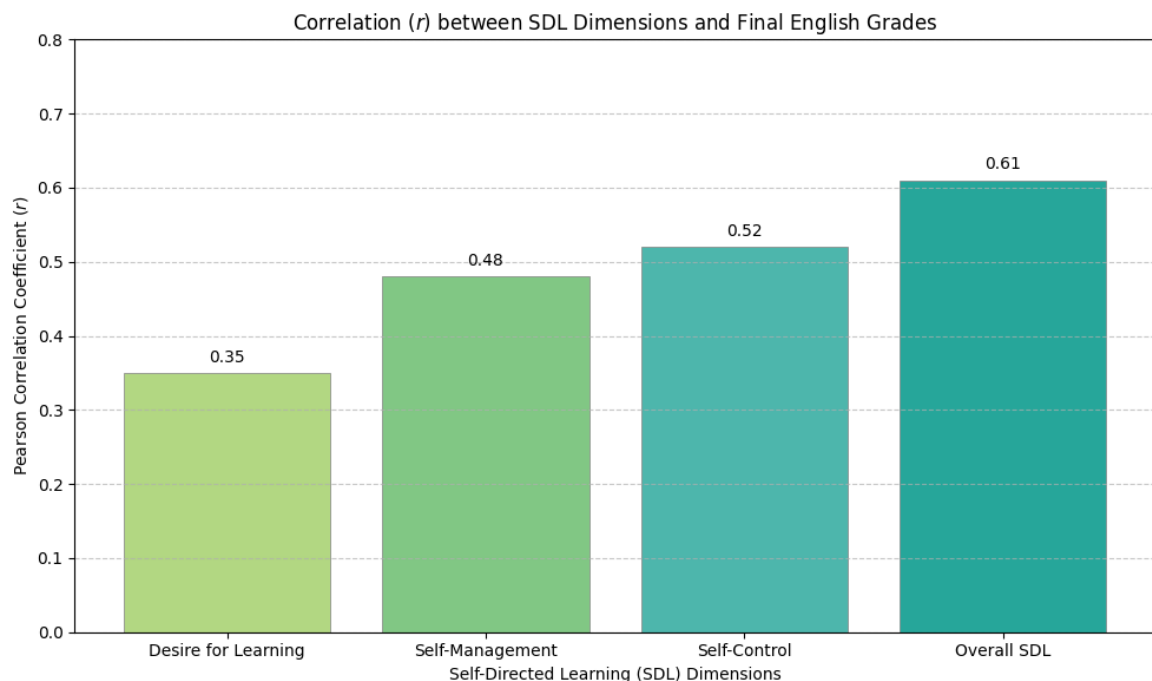


Figure 2: Pearson Correlation (r) between SDL Dimensions and Final English Grades

The illustration in figure 2 presents the relationship strength between Self-Directed Learning (SDL) constituents and the sample's final English course grades as the measure of Academic Achievement of non-English major students. The statistical analysis shows results across all constituents of Self-Directed Learning to be significantly ($p < 0.01$) and positively associated with the academic outcomes. Overall SDL

Readiness demonstrates the highest correlation with academic achievement ($r = 0.61$) signifying the likelihood of success is higher with the holistic combination of management and desire. Out of the constituent components of Self-Directed Learning, Self-Control ($r = 0.52$) and Self-Management ($r = 0.48$) had a relatively greater impact on grades compared to the Desire for Learning ($r = 0.35$). The conclusion drawn from this is intrinsic motivation, which is quite positive, however, the technical skill of regulating and managing one's studying is evidently more associated with higher language proficiency as well as better final scores and assessments.

The Influence of External Factors (Technology and Distance Learning)

The final objective was to examine the impact of external factors (access to technology and distance learning) on SDL readiness (Almomani et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2016). When analyzed as mediating variables in the multiple regression, students who had greater confidence in technology use had significantly higher scores in SDL readiness, particularly in the 'Self-Management' dimension ($t = 4.5$, $p < 0.01$). On the contrary, students who considered themselves ready for the distance learning situations reported significantly lower 'Self-Control' scores ($t = -3.1$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that the technical e-readiness is linked with the exercise of autonomous behavior in the digital age (Zou et al., 2021; Yang & Xu, 2023).

Discussion

The observed overall moderate SDL readiness levels ($M = 3.71$) is indicative that even though universities have developed a digital infrastructure, the complementary internal student readiness structures that are necessary to fully utilize the digital output remain to be developed (Lai et al., 2016). The correlation of SDL and grades ($r = 0.61$) indicates that developing autonomous learning attributes in students is necessary and shows it is for the non-English major's academic improvement.

Students who see English teaching as less important when you compare it to other teaching disciplines requires a specific high SDL skill set called 'Self-Control' and 'Self-Management.' This allows them the ability to put in the effort and engage in learning activities across the subject boundaries and outside the classroom to a high degree unique (Madkur, 2018; Phan et al., 2022). This is consistent with other studies that have noted high autonomy in the learners as one of the various factors that help deal with the challenges of learning a foreign language and help achieve good outcomes when learning a foreign language remotely (Subekti, 2021; Duong & Chua, 2016).

Conclusion

This study investigates the SDL preparedness of 2,310 non-English major university students. My study confirms that learner autonomy is a strong predictor of learner's success in the digital age. While students possessed the intrinsic motivation to learn English, the self-control and self-management skills capable of sustaining the SDL process in the learners, were noted to be at a low level, thus, the SDL process was at a low level. The high correlation ($r = 0.61$), in SDL readiness and English language proficiency, indicates the importance of learner autonomy in self-directing the learning process. The control and management, of self-learning, were of greater importance to help live up to the expectations of the students than the intrinsic motivation of the students supply. In most modern learning environments, self-directed learning allows students to regulate their learning and learning tasks more readily than ever, especially when in an international setting where non major graduates have a good level of skill and ability. Future studies in SDL should include longitudinal arms of educational interventions so as to be able to have an impact and improve SDL through the use of AI self-managed systems as one of the means to easily self-regulate the learning tasks. Future work shows that, it would be helpful to conduct comparative

research on SDL across various educational systems or cultures to discover optimal practices for cultivating SDL in particular contexts. Additionally, it would be beneficial to incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to capture students' perspectives on SDL to gain insights into the barriers SDL presents so as to better improve pedagogical practices aimed at enhancing learner autonomy.

References

- Alegado, E. S., Navarro, E. M. A., Roxas, P. J., & Monteza, A. M. M. (2023). Self-directed learning among secondary education students specializing in English at UM Digos College, Philippines. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 10(8). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i8.4908>
- Almomani, L. M., Halalsheh, N., Al-Dreabi, H., Al-Hyari, L., & Al-Quraan, R. (2023). Self-directed learning skills and motivation during distance learning in the COVID-19 pandemic (case study: The university of Jordan). *Heliyon*, 9(9). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e20018>
- Alrefaai, I., & Shah, S. A. (2020). The role of emotional intelligence in the EFL classroom: reflections of EFL teachers. *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region*, 6(1), 110-118.
- Damra, H. M. (2024). The Effectiveness of Self-Directed Learning on Enhancing Speaking Accuracy of EFL Learners. *Jordanian Educational Journal*, 9(4), 1-22.
- Doungprom, U., Phusee-on, S., & Prachanant, N. (2016). The Development Desire of Non-English Major Teachers in Small Rural Primary Schools in Thailand: Participatory Action Research. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 11(16), 1612-1621.
- Duong, M. T., & Nguyen, T. V. (2023). The students' readiness for learner autonomy in English language learning. *VNU Journal of Science: Education Research*, 39(4). <https://doi.org/10.25073/2588-1159/vnuer.4727>
- Duong, V. A., & Chua, C. S. (2016). English as a symbol of internationalization in higher education: A case study of Vietnam. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(4), 669-683. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1137876>
- Gupta, N., Ali, K., Jiang, D., Fink, T., & Du, X. (2024). Beyond autonomy: unpacking self-regulated and self-directed learning through the lens of learner agency-a scoping review. *BMC medical education*, 24(1), 1519. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06476-x>
- Hilli, C. (2020). Distance teaching in small rural primary schools: a participatory action research project. *Educational Action Research*, 28(1), 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2018.1526695>
- Lai, C., Shum, M., & Tian, Y. (2016). Enhancing learners' self-directed use of technology for language learning: the effectiveness of an online training platform. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(1), 40-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2014.889714>
- Lian, J., Chai, C. S., Zheng, C., & Liang, J. C. (2021). Modelling the relationship between Chinese university students' authentic language learning and their English self-efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 30(3), 217-228. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-021-00571-z>
- Lin, L., & Reinders, H. (2019). Students' and teachers' readiness for autonomy: Beliefs and practices in developing autonomy in the Chinese context. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 20(1), 69-89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-018-9564-3>

- Luo, S., & Gan, Z. (2022). Validation of a measure of flipped English learning readiness and examination of its relationships with instructional practices, learning self-efficacy, and learning beliefs. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 846781. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.846781>
- Madkur, A. (2018). The non-English major lecturers speak English: The barriers encountered by adult learners. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 8(1), 39-56. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jeffl.v8i1.584>
- Nishantha, B., & Fernando, M. S. J. (2020). Role of self-directed learning readiness in developing entrepreneurial behaviors. *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*, 16(4), 28-38. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajeba/2020/v16i430246>
- Phan, T. N. T., Van Ho, D., & Nguyen, T. H. L. (2022). Improving non-majored freshmen's speaking fluency in the e-learning environment through the Ms-teams. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 2(1), 251-271. <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.222116>
- Subekti, A. S. (2021). Indonesian learners' self-directed learning and resilience in online English classes: Assessing interaction with L2 achievement. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 1(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v1i1.20681>
- Wu, C. P. (2024). Enhancing Vocabulary Proficiency and Self-Directed Learning through YouTube: A Study in an EFL Context. *English Language Teaching*, 17(7), 109. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v17n7p109>
- Yang, C., & Xu, D. (2023). Predicting student and instructor e-readiness and promoting e-learning success in online EFL class during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case from China. *Plos one*, 18(5), e0284334. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0284334>
- Zhu, M. (2021). Enhancing MOOC learners' skills for self-directed learning. *Distance Education*, 42(3), 441-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2021.1956302>
- Zou, C., Li, P., & Jin, L. (2021). Online college English education in Wuhan against the COVID-19 pandemic: Student and teacher readiness, challenges and implications. *PloS one*, 16(10), e0258137. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0258137>