AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SITUATION OF USING WEB SITES TO DEVELOP ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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Abstract. Lifelong learning is an essential skill that every student needs to develop. Students whose univeresity major is English are no exception since language is changing all the time. They need to update their knowledge so as to keep up with the world. With the development of technology nowadays, students can access many webpages through the internet to improve their language proficiency. This research is carried out in order to understand the situation of how the seniors at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City (abbreviated to IUH) whose major is English use web sites to learn English, identify their advantages and disadvantages, and then give some suggestions on how to overcome these disadvantages. Data is collected through the use of closed-ended and open-questions in the questionaire which is published on the Google Form gadget. The paper finishes with the students' reflection based on their practical experience and its author's suggestions for better usage of web sites to improve the students' language competence in an autonomous way.
Keywords. learning languages, web sites

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Language

According to Grunert (2008), "lifelong learning – including communication, critical thinking, and team-building skill - is a virtual necessity for all members of the workforce today." In Vietnam, students have become accustomed to the traditional way of learning English for a long time in which teachers prepare lesson plans and students listen to lectures and take notes in class. However, this traditional way of learning English is no longer suitable for some students. To keep up with the changes of language, students need to develop themselves day by day. As the requirements of their study, students now have to access the web sites frequently to do some research as well as to improve their competence. However, it is still unclear if the time that the students spending on the web sites is effective and helpful for their study. The study done fore and reported in this paper tries to explore how web sites are employed by the seniors at the Indusrtial University of Ho Chi Minh City (abbreviated to IUH) whose are major is English. We will take into consideration both the advantages and the disadvantages of employing the webpages to improve the students' learning process.

In order to achieve the general goal, three specific objectives could be described as follows:

(1) Firstly, explore how the students use the web sites to learn English in more details such as what web sites to use, how much time they spend on these pages,etc.

(2) Secondly, explore the advantages and disadvantages of adopting the websites learning in the students'perspectives.

(3)Thirdly, recommend some suggestions to overcome those drawbacks.

1.2 Research questions

This study is going to answer the following research questions:

(1)   How do the students use web sites for learning English?

(2)   What are some advantages and disadvantages of using a web site to learn English?

(3)   What are the proposed solutions to overcome those drawbacks?

1.3 Significant of the study

This study will provide information regarding the web sites used for learning English, the advantages and disadvantages. Through the students' reflection based on their practical experience, the study will foster

new ways of enhancing knowledge and skills of English. Data gathered will also help the students improve their self-study behavior on websites.

1.4 Scope of the study

This study focuses on the situation of how IUH English-majored seniors use the websites to improve their language competence. Then the result is aplicable to these participants only and cannot be relevant to other types of students.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of key terms

Website: After you enter an online address (a URL, e.g. https://login.1und1.de/) into a web browser, a web page will show up. Christensson (2016) explains that Web sites are what make up the World Wide Web. These documents are written in HTML (hypertext markup language) and are translated by your Web browser. Web sites can either be static or dynamic. Static pages show the same content each time they are viewed. Dynamic pages have content that can change each time they are accessed.

2.2 Review of related research

Cavallaro and Krishnan (2007) conducted a study about using webpage as a tool for improving English proficiency. The research aimed at promoting authentic use of the English language through the use of motivating and engaging environment of web page. Students, under the instructions of tutors, had to work in groups of 3 or 4 and were given 5 broad topics. They had to decide which topic to work on. Their jobs also involved designing and publishing a website on their chosen topic. Once all the group members had finished their parts (generating ideas, searching for references, free writing…), they had to work together and piece the various parts so as to put them on the website. The web site had to include a home page, at least three linked web sites that reflected each aspect conveyed in the group members' essays, and additional information other than those in the essays. The URL of their website as soon as the Home page should be provided. In this way, the tutor and the rest of the class could keep track of the website as it was built. Feedback on the web sites was welcomed at any stage and students provided their contact details on the web site for other students and tutors to e-mail them their views., The students then were evaluated based on their web project. At the end of the project, the tutors were asked what they thought of the job and whether they would like to continue with the task. All tutors felt that the project did have a positive impact as well as motivating the majority of the students. The most significant aspect of this study can be seen in the negative comments of the students and the tutors. The survey highlighted that the task was both challenging as well as useful to many but at the same time it was seen as an unnecessary load by some.

Dongling (2012) conducted a research about autonomous vocabulary self-study system aided by the web sites. The research aimed at finding out which aspects (among listening, speaking, reading, grammar, or vocabulary) are most important, and if using web sites could improve self-learning in learning English. A survey was conducted on the question "What is the most overwhelming element that influences your motivation and interest in learning English, listening, speaking, reading, grammar, or vocabulary?" The interviews of 123 students were conducted by research to determine the emphasis on teaching in those aspects. The results showed that the majority of the participants (48.12%) thought that vocabulary affected their motivation and interest in English study. Therefore, it was necessary to expand the vocabulary of students to promote their ability to apply foreign languages. The researcher then designed an autonomous vocabulary-learning system supported by the web to help the students to grasp more words promoting their ability of foreign language application. Although the assessment of the design still needed to be argued, there was some improvements on the side of the learners such as: expansion on English vocabulary of subjects, promoting students' ability to apply the language.

Yao (2016) focused on on Web-based Autonomous English Learning of Engineering Students. Because of the development of computer and internet technologies, web-based, autonomous learning was rapidly becoming a basic part of learning for college students. In order to train engineering students for their potential employment and lifetime study, this paper was to examine in particular the present situation of web-based autonomous English learning of engineering students, and existing problems in their learning

method. Questionnaires and interviews were used for data collection. Nearly 160 engineering-major undergraduates from the Luoyang Institute of Science and Technology (LIT) participated in this research. For these, 156 students (consisted of 38 females and 118 males in their second year of study at the College of English) answered their questionnaires validly, with an answer rate of 97.5 per cent. A total of 15 students was selected to engage in interviews to help researchers gain a better understanding of the web-based autonomous English learning of students. Part 1 was mainly a questionnaire to collect comprehensive data to explain the existing situation of web-based autonomous English learning for engineering students and the difficulties they faced throughout the learning process. The questionaire consisted of two parts. Part 2 emphasized the face to face interviews. The interview contained three questions with 15 randomly engineering students to conducted qualitative for the goal of gathering in-depth knowledge. The interview queries were applied to the issues in the questionnaire. Data review is a summary of the data gathered, as well as a method through which researchers have their understanding of the data. This provides a general description of the actual state of the web-based autonomous English learning of students and current difficulties in the learning process. The result indicated that *c*ollege students utilized the Internet for a broad range of uses, such as sports, schoolwork, chatting, online shopping, general internet browsing, English learning, and other uses. Just 26.9 per cent of students reported using the Web for English learning, while 76.9 per cent reported using the Web for general web browsing. The figures showed that students in the survey had little ability to learn English autonomy on the Internet. In addition, their objectives when study English were mainly to get a good score on the test, just a few students study English on autonomy. In addition, the participants in the interview mentioned studying English by chatting to friends in English on a daily basis via the social network and checking new vocabulary through web sites and other electronic translation resources. Many students who gave a negative response to this question claimed that the only reason for them to learn English is to pass the exam. In short, it can be noted that most engineering students got acquainted with some English learning techniques, such as logging on English-language blogs, watching English videos, talking to friends via social networks in English, utilizing online translation software, and so on. However, they had a positive view of web-based, autonomous English learning, and felt that it was necessary to study English autonomously.

Zeng (2018) did a research with a particular focus on the use of Web 2.0 technologies. In order to explore Chinese undergraduates' use and/or lack of use of the current web for their out-of class English learning, the research aimed at answering the following three questions: (1) Are Internet tools used by most of the participants for English-learning-related purposes outside the classroom? If so, how are Internet tools mainly used? (2) Does the use of technology facilitate a different approach to learning English as a foreign language? (3) How does such a use or lack of use relate to the wider context of language learning? Self-completion questionnaires were chosen for the survey phase which involves 2307 students. After that, the qualitative phase was conducted to expand and explore the patterns derived from the survey phase, while seeking explanation of these behaviors from learner perspectives. In particular, the results of the questionnaires would be used to determine which participants would be selected for the qualitative phase and to design the protocols for qualitative data collection. The qualitative phase with the open-ended interview questions were mainly about students' opinions regarding: the features of English education at university; the features of English learning after class; the features of learning experiences with online technology; the reasons for their technology use or/and lack of use; the role of online technology in English learning. These themes guided the interviews with the students. The aim was to elicit students' perspectives on interactive English learning and the role of online technology in this process. The research concluded that the web was often taken by many of the students as the means to complete their academic tasks rather than a platform that provides different and communicative L2 opportunities. The students' use of technology was mostly instrumental and not very interesting. However, a small group of the interviewees engage with the current web differently. When it came to learning English, they were generally reluctant users of the web. In addition, it was found that such resistance is intimately associated with students' wider context of language learning. This includes the social, material and discursive resources that are available to the students. Unsurprisingly, Internet access and quality were reported as influential elements of technology use.

Cong-lem (2018) did a secondary research about web-based language learning (WBLL) for enhancing L2 speaking performance, with the aims to examine empirical studies that use web-based technology to assist

L2 learners to acquire speaking. The findings of this review were intended to inform readers of the overview of how web resources were used in foreign language research and education. This research reviewed 31 empirical studies investigating the use of web-based technology. In the process of searching documents reviewed in this study, many journal and paper search engines were used, ie Google Scholar, Google, Eric, Scopus, and Web of Science. A variety of search terms have been used, for example, " Web-based language learning", "L2 oral performance", "Internet-based language teaching", "Web 2.0 tools", and "EFL students' speaking skill". A number of criteria have been set for the studies included in this literature review. The findings indicated that general, web-based language learning (WBLL) can be classified into five main groups: general websites that provide language input, blog platforms, communication tools, learning tools. After reviewing 31 empirical studies, it could be confirmed that web-based language learning, in general, had a positive impact on learners' level of L2 speaking as well as their emotional factors. Teachers should play an active role in providing feedback and monitoring of language learners. Web-Based Language Learning was also found to reduce the anxiety of L2 learners while making them more active, more motivated language learners. In addition, the role of a language instructor in the deployment of web-based technology was also considered very important, for example, monitoring L2 learners learning progress and providing feedback.

Bui (2019) conducted a research about the use of Facebook of English major students of Nha Trang University for learning the English Language. The goal of this research was to analyze how much time students access Facebook and how using Facebook could help students develop their English skills. The methods used in this study were questionnaires, interviews, and class results. The participants were 64 students of the English-major students that studied Writing 3, Business Writing. They were about 18 and 20 years old. After investigating some ways to use Facebook to learn English effectively, a survey of 9 questions was created. Students conducted an online survey and 10 students were asked randomly to find out what problems they had while they were using Facebook. In order to implement the results of the study, the teacher evaluated the outcomes of students in the Writing 3 class, Company Learning. Throughout the beginning of the lesson, the teacher saw a mini-test to evaluate the students 'standard of writing. Next, weekly, students were required to post writing business letters on Facebook. Their friends and teachers would submit suggestions and made corrections to the Facebook post. Students even posted creative writing frameworks for business letters or their writing concepts so that other students could read and contribute them to their writing. The students had the mid-term and final test papers at the end of the semester. Two teachers provided scores to the students and their outcomes were compared to those of the first examination to see whether working on Facebook could enhance the writing skills of the learners. The survey found out that using Facebook would help learners connect with other people and develop a number of English skills, like writing skills. From the survey, the interviewee suggested they liked using Facebook for studying English because they could share materials and had a feeling of learning in a community and there were a lot of information, blogs, videos of helpful realistic topics. Approximately 80 percent of all students felt that their Listening Skills, Reading Skills, Grammar, and Speaking skills were enhanced thanks to using Facebook. But only 19 percent of students claimed that their Writing skills were improved. From the survey, there were several problems and difficulties when using Facebook to study English. Firstly, using Facebook was always frustrating as there were announcements or comments from friends when learners are studying. Also, it took time for learners to start changing their learning habits through books, notebooks, and pens. Thirdly, a huge amount of information on Facebook might be inaccurate, and learners would have trouble finding the right information.

This current study is somewhat similar to the above mentioned studies in the sense that they all try to explore the benefits of the web sites. If Cavallaro, Krishnan and Sun invented a web page to promote the learners'development, the other three authors and the current research explore the use of available webpages. Except for the secondary research from Ngo, which reviewed the use of web for enhancing L2 speaking performance, the other 5 studies used both quantitative and qualitative. However, there were some differences about research purposes. Cavallaro and Krishnan (2007) wanted to study to promote the use of authentic English language in a dynamic and engaging environment whereas Bui (2019) wanted to test the effectiveness of commonly used websites to assist foreign language learners in acquiring their ability to learn foreign languages. In this research, we would like to figure out how IUH English-majored seniors use the web sites to learn English in more details: finding out the benefits and challenges of adopting web-

site learning due to the learners' evaluation so as to give some suggestions to overcome those drawbacks and learn English on the web more actively.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research methodology and methods

This research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology. Data is collected through the use of closed-ended and open-questions in the questionaire which is published on the Google Form gadget. These closed-ended questions serve the study's purpose which is to find out how popular the web sites are, what the advantages and disadvantages the students may encounter whereas the open-ended questions help to explore the participants'deeper thoughts.

3.2 Participants

The study's participants are 200 IUH English-majored seniors from 21 - 23 years of age. These students are believed to have more experience in learning, especially in their self-study. Through many activities given by their lecturers at IUH. Since they have been through many different courses, they may know various web sites and have successfully applied appropriate strategies of learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

3.3 Procedure of data collection

The questionaire is distributed online via Google Form tools to collect the participants' opinions. The questionnaire is written, satisfying the criteria: easy-to-understand and non-misleading words about ideas. That is, the questions are not duplicated, the structure and number of logical questions are conducted to collect data. There are 19 questions in the questionaire: questions 1-4 answer the research question 1, which is about the preference of the participants on using web page; question 5- 15 answer the 2nd research questions; question 16-19 look for the participants' recommendation on using web sites to promote learners'atutonomy.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from google form will be transferred into data in an excel file. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the characteristics of data collected from a survey, providing an overview of the sample and scales. According to Bhandari (2021), descriptive statistics summarize and organize the characteristics of a data set, a collection of responses or observations from a sample or entire population. Included in this paper are (i) statistics about the students' commonly used websites as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using the websites to learn the language, and (ii) directions to solve problems facing the students as illustrated in the interviews' questions.

4 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Questions 1: How do the students use web sites for learning English?

1. What are some popular web sites that the students use for learning English?
Data collected from the questionaire shows that 100% of the participants use web sites to study English themselves. Among them, 47% of them employ the entertainment web sites. Youtube is the most popular web page. VOA and Tedtalk come second. It means that students prefer using these types of webs for studying English because they think these web help them relax and enjoy English at the same time. The percentage of IUH English-majored seniors who get on with education web sites, news and business are 37%, 14% and 2%, respectively.
2. What language skills that the students want to practice on the web sites?
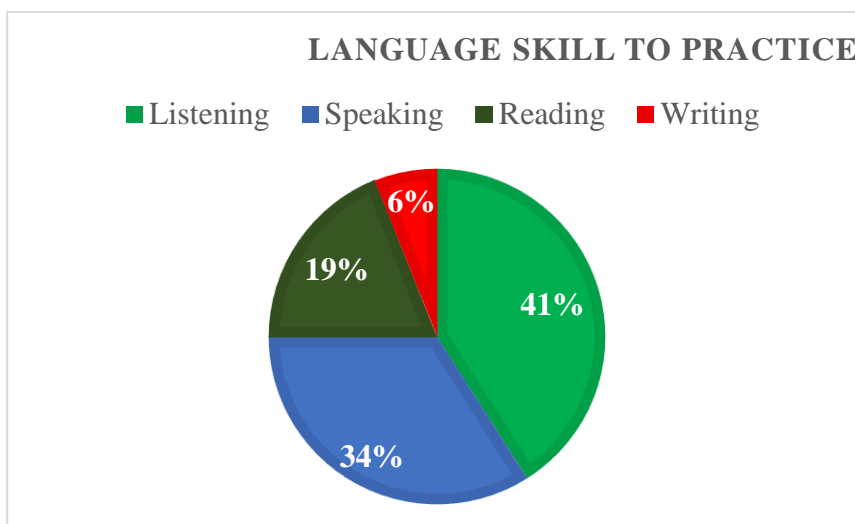
LANGUAGE SKILL TO PRACTICE

Figure 1: Language skill to practice

When surfing on the internet, the participants here also want to practice their language skill. The pie chart shows the percentage language skill learners mostly concern in the web sites. In general, it seems that the majority of participants who use web sites to improve their listening: 41% of the participants say that they use the web sites to practice their listening skill; 34% say that they can practice their pronunciation, intonation, and accent; 19% of people like reading on the webpages because they can access the authentic reading passages here. Unsurprisingly, a small number of the seniors say that they are interested in writing because it helps them collect and expand their vocabulary in advance.

3. How much time do the seniors spend daily using web sites to self-study English?
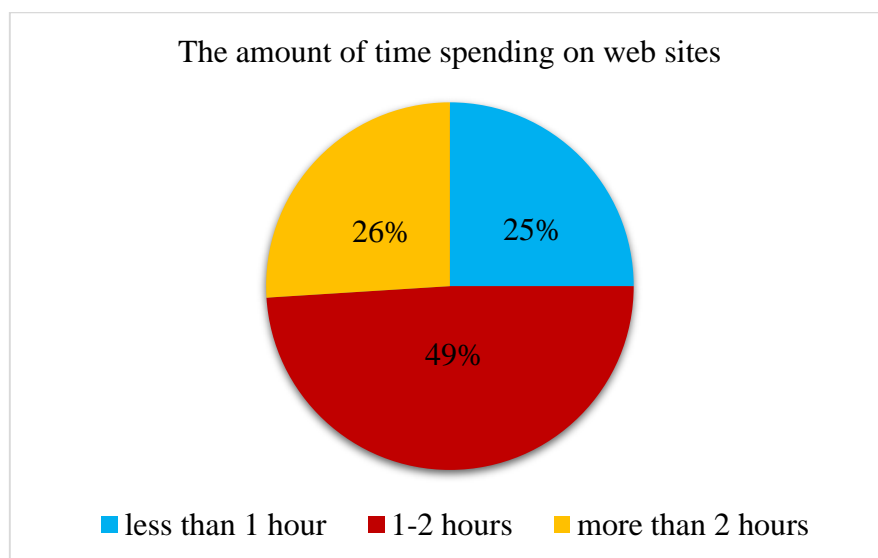
The amount of time spending on web sites

Figure 2. The amount of time spending on web sites

The researcher also try to find out the amount of time that the participants spend on the web sites every day. The pie chart shows how much time the students spend using web sites to self - study English into each day. The majority of them (49%) spend one to two hours a day on web sites to practice their English. This is a good number which show that the students here pay a lot of attention for practicing their language skills. However, this is just the amount of time. We have to look at the next part to see if the participants can be distracted while surfing on the internet.

The next question of the questionaire asks if the participants can move away from their intented websites if there are some kinds of distractors (e.g. advertisements, instant messages,etc). The reponses from the participants have shown that most of them (98%) will lose their attention if there is some pop-up

advertisement or instant messages. Therefore, we can see that the amount of time that the students spend on learning cannot assure for their accomplishment since there still be many distractors on the internet.

4.2 Research Questions 2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the web sites for learning English?
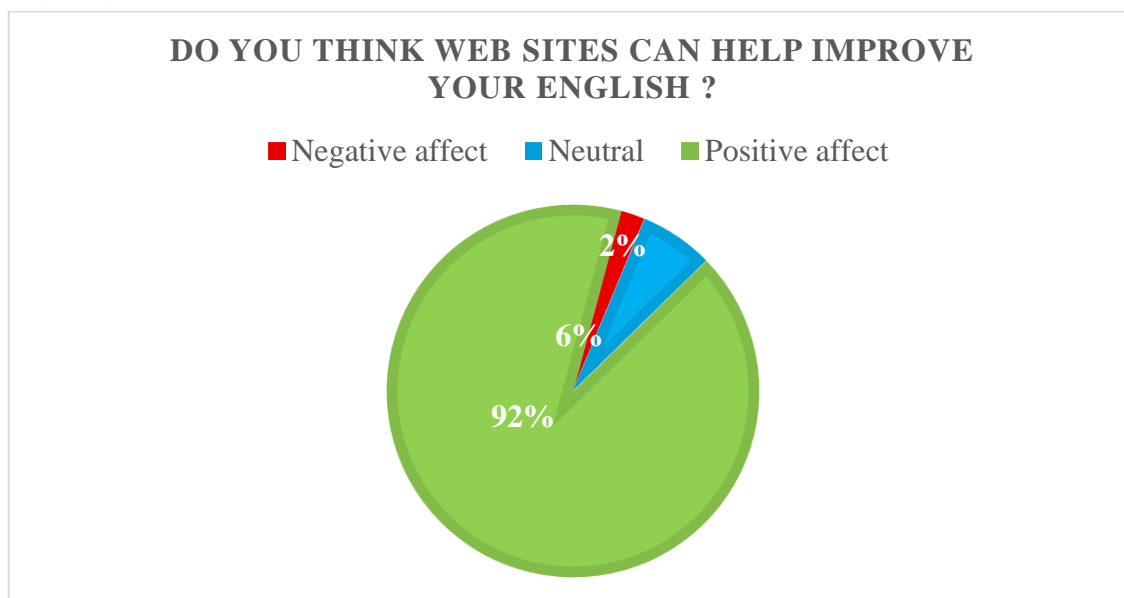

Figure 3. Do student think web sites can help improve your English?

When asking about the advantages, Web sites are thought to have had a detrimental effect on individual people as well as society and local communities. 92% of the participants think that web sites promote their English skills. With regard to individuals, the impact that web sites have had on each person has clear advantages. Firstly, people from different countries can easily access all of the websites to study with foreigners/ native speakers to improve their English skills whereas, before the development of technology and social networking sites, people rarely had the chance to meet or communicate with anyone outside of their immediate circle or community. 90% of the participants claim that they feel more confident with their speaking ability after practicing with their online friends. 81 % of them think that their listening skill is also enhanced and feel less stressful when attending listening lesson in class. 75% of them think that reading online provides them with update lexis so that they can use in the real situation. Except for the writing skill, which receives less attention from the seniors, only 15% of the participants think that their writing ability can improve through studying on the website. The second advantage of studying through the websites is that many videos/lessons or any resources are available for various levels of learners. People can download or study online for free. Finally, the learners now can access the internet whenever they want. Because of these advantages,100% of the participants in this study think that web sites are very effective tools to improve their language skill.

Only 2% of the participants in the study think that web sites have any negative effects. The effects are mentioned as false information, wrong guidance,etc.It is true that not all the information on the web sites are correct. Thus using which web sites to study should be considered carefully to avoid the false information/ knowledge that we can get from them.

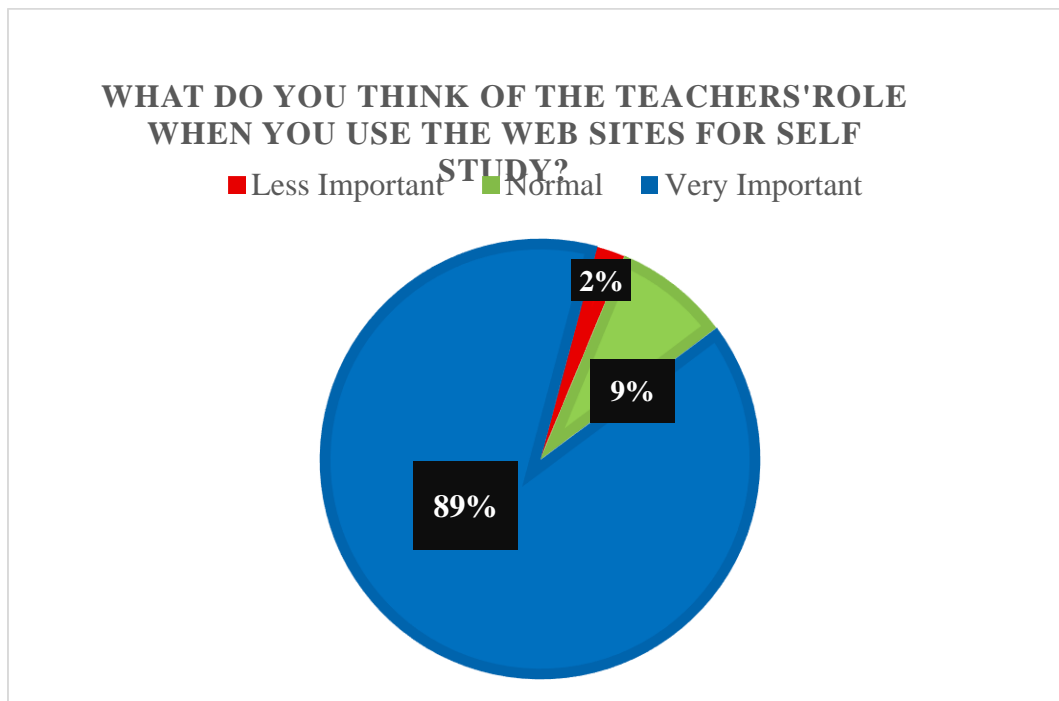So do the teachers have any roles in relations to the learners' using web sites for their self learning?

Figure 4.Teacher roles

 As can be seen from this chart, despite the exitstence of web sites, teachers are still believed to play an important role in the learning process of learners. The reasons given are that the teachers can deal with the specifc problems that the students may have in the classroom, which cannot be offered through any web sites.

Only a small number of particiants think that they don't need a teacher's guide because the the knowledge can be accessible on the internet. In fact, from the view of the researcher, the teacher's role is mandatory in language learning process. The teachers can guide us through the process of "unknown" to "known" something and give us helpful advice so that we can find the right answer as well as choosing suitable route for our learning process. None web sites can identify our problems and suggest solutions for us like our teachers.

Looking closer into the advantages that web sites may have, the majority of the participants (51%) believe that lacking real interaction is the main problem when using the web sites to practice English. They need verbal interaction from teachers and classmates not only to enrich knowledge in-class progress but also to build up the ability to reponse immediately in English. 34% of the participants claim that using the laptop/ tablet for a long time to study is tiring. About 10% of them find that poor net work connection can make them feel demotivated while doing dome activities on web sites. The rest of them (5%) see that there is no problem to study through the web sites.

To sum up, the researcher believes that learning through webpages have benefits and drawbacks. Therefore, employing the benefits of learning through the webpage with guidance from the teacher will be extraordinarily essential to learn English effectively.

4.3   Research Questions 3: What are the effective strategic ways to improve English majored seniors capability of web page autonomous English learning?

With the variety of environment and methods of English learning, learning English in an autonomous way on the web sites is playing a more and more important role in modern English learning. The participants in the research are also asked about their strategies when learning English on the web sites. First of all, they recommend following the guidance of the lecturers. In most of the courses in class, the lecturers often provide some useful websites for students to practice on particular subjects. Students can make use of these website and then ask the lecturers for support in case they don't understand something. Second, not losing attention while learning on the web sites is also an important issue. Since there can be a lot of distractors while learning on the web sites such as instant messages, advertisement, email,etc., it is suggested that we

need to bare in mind our current purpose (e.g. we are practicing listening, we are practicing reading,etc.) and keep our focus on it. If we turn away from the current purposes, we may waiste a lot of time and thus can not improve our ability. Finally, make a careful plan for their study and keep track to that plan will help learners achieve their goal. A plan for daily self-study, including the time and content you want to learn and the websites to learn can save your time and money.

5 CONCLUSION

The current paper has described an overview of the current situation of the IUH English-majored seniors' using the web sites to improve their language competence, discussed some advantages, disadvantages and raised some suggestions for its implementation. Understanding how the students employ the web sites can be helpful for their teachers to understand the learners and thus can make use of these web sites to improve the learners' ability. On the side of learners, knowing these advantages and disadvantages will help them have better autonomy exercise on the web sites. Further research should be done to examine into more details about the specific activities that the students do online and the progress that the students have made after learning through a particular web sites. That will help to inform the teachers, the policy makers, and the stakeholders at IUH of feasible and workable practices with clearer perspectives on the situations.

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NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ HIỆN TRẠNG SINH VIÊN RÈN LUYỆN TIẾNG ANH THÔNG QUA CÁC TRANG WEB

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Tóm tắt. Học tập suốt đời là một kỹ năng thiết yếu mà mỗi sinh viên cần phải phát triển trong quá trình trao dồi và phát triển năng lực của mình. Sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh cũng không phải là ngoại lệ vì ngôn ngữ luôn thay đổi. Họ cần cập nhật kiến thức để theo kịp thế giới. Với sự phát triển của công nghệ ngày nay, sinh viên có thể truy cập nhiều trang web thông qua mạng internet để nâng cao trình độ ngoại ngữ của mình. Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm tìm hiểu hiện trạng của việc sinh viên năm thứ tư chuyên ngữ Anh tại Trường đại học Công nghiệp Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh (viết tắt là IUH) sử dụng trang web để học tiếng Anh, nhận diện những thuận lợi và khó khăn của họ, và từ đó đưa ra một số đề xuất để giúp họ vượt qua những khó khăn này. Bài báo kết thúc bằng những phản ánh của các sinh viên dựa trên

kinh nghiệm thực tế của họ và các đề xuất của tác giả bài báo về cách sử dụng các trang web tốt hơn để cải thiện năng lực ngôn ngữ của họ một cách chủ động.
Từ khóa. learning languages, web sites