

# Survey Study of English Autonomous Learning Conducted by the Chinese Language and Literature Majors in XATU

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**Abstract:** Compared with other non-English majors, the Chinese language and literature students need to learn an additional language as their major. Contrarily, the students' interest and motivation in learning the language may reduce over time, which may be reflected in their English learning abilities. The present study was based on a survey about the current situation of English autonomous learning among Chinese language literature students in XATU. Furthermore, we investigated the factors that influence the students in learning the language, and provided teaching implications for improvement. According to the results obtained, the current situation of these students is not up to its optimal level. This situation is due to the influential factors, including low learning interest and motivation, unawareness of learning strategies, and inability to set learning goals.

**Keywords:** English autonomous learning; Majors of Chinese language and literature; Influential factors

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## 1. Introduction

In the recent years, with the upgrade of traditional class teaching methods, autonomous learning has been strongly encouraged by many teachers in China. The learning autonomy has become an influential factor in its student's long-term growth. Teachers should help students improve their ability to apply English knowledge and develop their awareness as well as skill in intercultural communication, as stated in the College English Teaching Requirements. Additionally, developing students' autonomous learning and improving their comprehensive cultural literacy needs to be focused on so that students can effectively use English in their life, work, and social interaction to meet the needs of society and personal development <sup>[1]</sup>. Besides English, the students need to study Chinese language and literature as an additional major. They spend so much time on learning ancient Chinese, modern Chinese, Chinese philology, Chinese phonology and etc. <sup>[2]</sup>. Students' interest and motivation for language learning may decrease with time, affecting their English learning abilities. This study was based on a survey about the current situation of English autonomous learning among Chinese language literature major students at Xi'an Technological University (XATU), and analyzes some problems in their autonomous learning method, and offers some implications for improvement.

## 2. Research Questions

There were three questions which were answered:

- (1) What is the current situation of autonomous learning of Chinese language and literature major

- students in XATU?
- (2) What are the factors which influence autonomous learning of Chinese language and literature major students in XATU?
  - (3) What are the teaching implications?

### 3. Research Subjects

There were a total of 70 students involved in this study who were students of Chinese language and literature major in XATU. All of them have studied college-level English for one year and have attended intensive reading and listening classes once a week too.

### 4. Research Instruments

Questionnaires and interviews were used simultaneously in this study. The questions in the questionnaire were selected from the published book *Autonomous learning: Principles and Strategies of learning and teaching* and were modified for the need of the study<sup>[3]</sup>. The questionnaire used 1-5 Likert Scale, where 1 indicated “strongly disagree,” 2 indicated “disagree,” 3 indicated “neither agree nor disagree,” 4 indicated “agree,” and 5 indicated “strongly agree.” The questionnaire consisted of 36 questions which were divided into five parts. The first part consisting of questions 1-11 was set to get basic information about their learning motivations. The second part consisting of questions 12-17 was to investigate the level of understanding of the autonomous learning content on students. The third part consisting of questions 18-26 was to investigate the strategies used for autonomous learning. The fourth part consisting of questions 27-31 was to investigate the outcomes of autonomous learning on students. The last part consisting of questions 32-36 was to investigate the environment in which they participated for the autonomous learning. Cronbach’s alpha of the questionnaire was 0.976 which meant that the questionnaire prepared was credible. Additionally, the questionnaires were handed out through WJX.cn.

#### 4.1. Interview questions

An interview was conducted to clarify the possible factors that influenced autonomous learning. Six students were selected randomly to participate in the interview. Below are the six questions asked during the interview:

- (1) Do you participate in English autonomous learning?
- (2) Are you interested in learning English?
- (3) Do you make plans and formulate objectives for learning English by yourself?
- (4) Do you know what English learning strategies are, and do you know how to use them in the process of English autonomous learning?
- (5) Do you study English with the help of external factors?
- (6) Can your relationship with your roommate influence your participation in autonomous learning?

### 5. Questionnaire Analysis

There were a total of 70 questionnaires available. In this part, the data collected through the questionnaire will be discussed in detail.

#### 5.1. Analysis on the motivation of autonomous learning

Autonomous learning requires students to be self-motivated. A high motivation is the basis of effective learning. This questionnaire divides learning motivation into active consciousness, value consciousness, self-efficiency, and learning interest<sup>[4]</sup>. **Table 1.** describes the motivation of the XATU students majoring in Chinese language and literature from the aspects of active consciousness, value consciousness, self-

efficiency, and learning interest. Among these four aspects, value consciousness has the highest mean, i.e. 3.400. Students get average scores of 3.429 and 3.371 separately on item five and six. Therefore, the students understand that English is important to them and learning English is beneficial for their future development. The mean of active consciousness is 2.782 which ranks the second. Even though it is below 3.000, when item four is taken into consideration, they still think their learning methods need some improvements. For item one, students hardly read any English books or do any practice work if the teacher does not give them assignments. Item two is to investigate their activeness in class, they got 2.757 which means they do not usually answer teacher's question initiatively. It is not impressive that they do not analyze their mistakes made in the examination for they got the average of 2.800 on item three, whereby the mean of self-efficiency is 2.715. For item seven, students got 2.886 which means they do not think they have a great potential in learning English and that they do not think the teacher and their parents would put them under pressure that they cannot handle. This can be expressed by the average score of 2.543. They got an average score of 2.676 on the investigation of learning interest which means English is boring for them to learn.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of learning motivation

Content	Mean	Item	Mean
Active consciousness	2.782	1	2.529
		2	2.757
		3	2.800
		4	3.043
Value consciousness	3.400	5	3.429
		6	3.371
Self-efficiency	2.715	7	2.886
		8	2.543
		9	2.671
Learning interest	2.676	10	2.929
		11	2.429

## 5.2. Analysis of autonomous learning content

In this part, the questionnaire is divided into two aspects: selecting the content and setting learning goals. **Table 2.** shows the mean of selecting teaching content is 2.829 which includes item 12 to 14. This indicates that they do not know what they should learn without the instruction of a teacher. Item 13 states an average score of 3.200, which indicates most of the students require the guidance of teachers. Item 15-17 investigates whether students set their goals for learning English, which has an average score of 2.719. Thus, it means most of them do not have the habit of setting goals for English learning. The average scores of items 15 to 17 are all below 3.000, indicating that they are still grappling with confusion in the process of English learning.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of learning content

Content	Mean	Item	Mean
Selecting the content	2.829	12	2.686
		13	3.200
		14	2.600
Setting learning goals	2.719	15	2.243
		16	2.929
		17	2.986

### 5.3. Analysis on the strategies of autonomous learning

Good learning strategies can help students gain knowledge more effectively. Based on the questionnaire, the autonomous learning strategies for English learning are divided into participating, understanding, reviewing, constructing, processing, and general strategies. Items 18 to 26 investigate the strategies applied by the Chinese language and literature students. **Table 3.** shows that most of the students do not know how to apply strategies when learning English. For item 18, most of the students do not participate if the teacher does not ask them to so, which was expressed by the average score of 2.614. There are hardly any examples provided for them to understand the learning content comprehensively, thus they got 2.743 on item 19. For reviewing, they also performed badly as the mean of this part is 2.793. This shows students do not have the habit of summarizing and reviewing the lesson after class. Students got 2.857 on item 22 which shows that just a small portion of students take notes while reading English books. The mean of processing is 2.886 which indicates that most of the students cannot use some methods to help them memorize the information and classify the information they have learned. Furthermore, the mean of general strategies including items 25 and 26 is 2.893. Item 26 should be focused upon as its mean is 3.806, which means most of the students are aware of various learning strategies. All in all, the XATU Chinese language and literature students do not utilize the learning strategies appropriately.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of learning strategies

Content	Mean	Item	Mean
Participating	2.614	18	2.614
Understanding	2.743	19	2.743
		20	2.729
Reviewing	2.793	21	2.857
		22	2.857
Constructing	2.857	23	2.929
		24	2.843
Processing	2.886	25	2.700
		26	3.086

#### 5.4. Analysis on the outcomes of autonomous learning

Evaluating the learning outcomes can provide feedback to students, which will help them to improve their learning methods and strategies. Items 27 to 31 investigate how students evaluate their own learning outcomes. **Table 4.** shows that items 27 to 31 are divided into self-checking, self-summary, self-evaluation, and self-adjustment. For item 27, the students got 2.557 which indicates that most of them do not have the habit of checking their homework. They also do not summarize what they have learnt previously, which is interpreted by the mean of self-summary 2.629. Items 29 and 30 investigate the self-evaluation of students, which they also did badly as the mean score was 2.593. However, nearly half of the students have the awareness to analyze the reason for their descending grade, which is indicated by the mean 2.941 of item 30. Students got the highest average score on self-adjustment that is 3.057. In other words, majority of the students would self-motivate themselves if they got bad results in English examinations.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics of learning outcomes

Content	Mean	Item	Mean
Self-checking	2.557	27	2.557
Self-summary	2.629	28	2.629
Self-evaluation	2.593	29	2.271
		30	2.914
Self-adjustment	3.057	31	3.057

#### 5.5. Analysis on the environment of autonomous learning

Besides learning strategies, learning environment is another factor which influences students' autonomous learning. Students can master the knowledge more efficiently with the aid of a good learning environment. Items 32 to 36 investigate whether the Chinese language and literature major students in XATU learn English with the help of their surroundings. Items 32 and 33 are about their physical environment, where they got an average score of 2.436 which means these students seldom read English-related books in their daily life. Items 34 to 36 are about social environment, where the mean is 2.495, indicating that most of the students are very shy to ask for help when they are in a predicament while learning English. Item 35 claims that students will ask their classmates for some advice about English learning, while item 36 claims that students will turn to their teachers for solving problems. Compared with their teachers, they are willing to resort to their classmates for help as the mean of item 35 is higher than that of item 36 (**Table 5.**).

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics of learning environment

Content	Mean	Item	Mean
Physical environment	2.436	32	2.386
		33	2.486
		34	2.243
Social environment	2.495	35	2.900
		36	2.343

## 6. Analysis of the Interview

An interview was conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence autonomous learning for Chinese language and literature students. Due to the COVID-19 situation, QQ phone call was used to conduct the interview in which six questions were answered by six students. All six students were aware of autonomous learning and they gave their own understanding of autonomous learning which can be stated as an independent learning without the instruction of others. When it comes to English, three of them mentioned that they were so busy with homework of their major courses that they had only little time for other courses, including English. Regarding learning interest, only one student claims that he cannot learn English well and thus, he loses the interest in learning English. In relation to English learning objectives, one student says that he gets confused when learning English and among the other five students, three of them claimed that they learnt English for CET 4. The remaining two students mentioned that their objective is to pass the final exam as they got poor grades in the monthly quiz. Additionally, all of them are aware that learning strategies are important to learn English. However, only half of them adopt learning strategies and the other half do not know the detailed strategies. Three students claimed that they used external factors to learn English. One of them is a member of the English club in XATU. Besides that, four of them claim that having a good relationship between roommates is good for their learning, as their roommates can remind them to study. Furthermore, good relationship can engender good mood, which is beneficial to their studies.

## 7. Conclusions and Implications

To sum up, the current situation of autonomous learning participated by the Chinese language and literature students is not up to its optimal level in XATU. According to the results of the questionnaire and the interview, the factors which cause the poor situation are low learning interest, unaware of learning strategies, as well as inability to set learning goals, use external factors and evaluate learning result. Thus, it is necessary to improve the current situation of autonomous learning among the students of Chinese language and literature in XATU. There are some limitations to this study, where due to time limitations, only 70 students were questioned and all of them were freshmen. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 situation, all the work was done through QQ phone application, whereby very few students took the survey seriously.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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