

STUDY HABITS OF ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN VIET NAM

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Abstract - Study habits play a crucial role in the academic performance of students at all education levels. Especially, students' study habits have been considerably impacted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This study was conducted with the aim of investigating the study habits of students and their changes in this time to help learners understand their study habits and make some suitable adjustments to reach academic success. The data was collected through an online questionnaire administered to 325 English-majored students. Descriptive statistics, T-tests, ANOVA, and thematic coding were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that there are significant differences in study habits of male and female students, particularly in terms of note-taking habits, mode of study, and time management habits while study habits were not affected by class levels and academic results. Besides, the majority of participants confirmed that their study habits relatively changed after the pandemic.

Key words - Study habits; English-majored students; Covid-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

In higher education, the aspects of quality and quantity are institutionally controlled, while intrinsic organization largely depends on the students. Students are responsible for understanding their purposes for attending university and developing strategies to achieve those purposes so that they have good academic results. There are numerous factors that influence students' achievements, including school facilities, parent involvement, family financial situation, etc. Yet, most importantly, study habits have a significant influence on learners to reach educational success.

Study habits are defined as study routines, including but not restricted to, frequency of studying sessions, review of the material, self-testing, rehearsal of learned materials, and studying in a conducive environment [1]. Good study habits are a good asset to learners because they assist students in achieving mastery in areas of specialization with excellent performance, whereas the opposite constitutes constraints to learning and achievement, leading to failure [2] - [5]. There was no significant difference between study habits of male and female students [6]. In contrast, other research showed distinct results that female students had higher study habits than male students [5]. Besides, a strong relationship was found between study habits and the academic performance of students. The improvement of students' study habits like taking notes more while learning and managing their time effectively can support them in reaching impressive achievements [2]. In Vietnam, a study discovered that the study habits of undergraduates gradually changed over the

years. Especially, in the first two years, students needed more time to adapt to the university environment and balance their lives since they had to live far away from their hometowns. Moreover, the participants still studied passively, which was listening to the lecture and then taking notes instead of reading and researching more after school [7].

In addition, the study habits of students all around the world have noticeably changed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic which affected and necessarily reshaped the study, work, and social lives of distance learning students [8]. Learners need to adjust their study habits in order to adapt to the pandemic period and then, the new normal. As a result, these changes have both positive and negative impacts on students' academic attainment. The majority of negative impacts on study habits were associated with difficulties in managing workload and limited interaction with other students [8], [9]. Changes in certain studying habits before and after the pandemic are associated with the time and space of studying which is mainly about the prohibition of movement and socializing outside the household, a decline in motivation and its connection with lowering learning goals and students finding it harder to focus on learning. Nevertheless, the new mode of studying brings greater flexibility for students, so some want to continue to learn in this way.

In general, all aforementioned studies revealed certain aspects of students' study habits in various majors before and during the period of the pandemic. However, little research is conducted for English-majored students, especially during post Covid-19 time. Therefore, the current study is carried out with the purpose of filling the gap in the field. Like many other higher education institutions around the world, universities in Vietnam have gone through the same situation of Covid-19. Therefore, in this study, we focus on examining the study habits of English-majored students at a University in Vietnam. The study seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the study habits of English-majored students?

RQ2: What are the changes in study habits of English-majored students after the Covid-19 pandemic?

The following hypotheses are framed for verification in this study:

H01: There is no significant difference between study habits of English-majored students by gender.

H0₂: There is no significant difference between study habits of English-majored students by class level.

H0₃: There is no significant difference between study habits of English-majored students by academic results.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research design

The quantitative approach was adopted for the research.

2.2. Research participants

The research population is 3,642 English-majored students from all class levels in the University of Danang – University of Foreign Language Studies in Vietnam. The sample of this study consisted of 325 students. They were selected through a simple random sampling technique.

Table 1 Distribution of students according to sex, academic year, and academic performance (See **Appendix**).

2.3. Instrument

In this study, the questionnaire is developed from Palsane and Sarma Study Habits and Inventory (PSSHI) and from a questionnaire designed by a group of researchers [9].

The questionnaire included two parts. In the first part, closed questions were used to collect general information about students including gender, faculty, academic year and academic results. The second part was designed to examine students' study habits in six aspects: reading habits, note-taking habits, learning styles, memorization habits, test preparation habits and time management habits. All these 32 items were measured on a 3-point Likert-type frequency scale. Then, there were two open-ended questions added to explore the changes in their study habits after the pandemic.

2.4. Data collection and analysis

Students were asked to do a survey anonymously and fill out the questionnaire voluntarily.

After the data collection process, the quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS software. In order to categorize and summarize the data set, descriptive statistics such as the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution tables were used. Then, inferential statistics including independent T-tests and one-way ANOVA were utilized to look for differences in study habits of different groups of students. In addition, the qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed by using theme and code.

With the Linkert scale of 1-3, the interval is 0.66 (i.e. Interval = $N-1/N$, $N=3$). It indicates that mean values from 1.00 to 1.66 represent "Rarely"; mean values from 1.67 to 2.33 represent "Sometimes"; mean values from 2.34 to 3.00 represent "Often".

2.5. Reliability and validity

The PSSHI is a standard tool, which has been applied to numerous studies related to the study habits of undergraduates students by researchers around the world [2], [4], [10]. In addition, the pilot study was implemented to rate the validity of the items before the main survey was

conducted. The Cronbach's Alpha value in the pilot study and main study was quite similar, 0.875 and 0.867, respectively, which indicated that the questionnaire had relatively high reliability.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Study habits of English-majored students

The result shows that English-majored students had fairly good study habits after the Covid-19 pandemic. With a mean value of 2.42, the majority of respondents agreed that they often studied in a quiet place, took a short break during the study time, prepared everything carefully for studying, used printed materials for learning, set study goals and learned with pleasure. They also adopted a habit of memorization, which they often tried to learn during the peak energy hours, review the lesson before the upcoming exams, summarize their notes for better understanding, etc. (Mean value = 2.34). However, when it comes to the habits of reading, note-taking, test preparation and time management, not many students participated in these kinds of activities with high frequency, with mean values of 2.31, 2.14, 2.31 and 2.24, respectively. Almost all respondents said that they sometimes browsed the outline, asked questions, and looked for familiar concepts or main ideas when reading a chapter of learning materials. Note-taking is also one of the study habits that students do from time to time during class lectures and reading time. To achieve good marks, the participants studied in groups, actively got help from their classmates and instructors to understand the lessons thoroughly, tried to finish all tasks on time, anticipated questions before the test, as well as revised the learned materials, but not very often. Besides, the students had pretty good time management skills because they made an effort to design a schedule so that they could complete all of their academic and personal duties, and balance between studying and entertaining.

Comparing the study habits in male and female students

Table 2 Descriptive Statistic and Independent T-Test (**Appendix**).

According to Table 2, there were significant differences between study habits of male and female students, particularly in the habit of note-taking, the mode of study and time management (p value < 0.05). The results showed that English-majored female students were more likely to engage in detailed note-taking during the lessons, applying different methods such as handwriting and typing. They occasionally organize their notes in a systematic manner, with a mean value of 2.16. In contrast, English-majored male students tended to take fewer notes and less compared to their notes with classmates after class (mean value: 1.92). In terms of the mode of study, female participants preferred to study in quiet and few distracting places. They were used to preparing everything, and setting study goals before starting learning (mean value 2.44). However, these activities were not welcomed by male students, with a mean value of 2.21. The majority of male respondents supposed that they irregularly determined the number of problems they would do and pages they

would read as well as took care of everything they needed before learning. Moreover, the study indicated that female students generally demonstrated better time management skills than their male counterparts. They reported higher levels of being self-disciplined and were less prone to procrastination since most of them agreed that they started projects as soon as they were assigned (mean value of 2.26). By contrast, male students displayed a more flexible approach to time management and were more likely to learn under deadline pressure. Besides, no significant difference between the habits of reading, memorization and test preparation of male and female students was found in this study.

In general, there was a significant difference between study habits of male and female students majoring in English (p value = $0.09 < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis H_{01} was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was supported.

The outcomes of this research were similar to numerous previous studies. One study conducted in 2014 concluded that female students might be more inclined to use note-taking as a way to engage with material actively, enhancing their comprehension and retention of the information [11]. Earlier, the findings of a study also showed that females tend to exhibit better organizational and planning skills than males. This difference might be linked to the development of executive functions, which have been found to mature earlier in females than in males [12].

Nevertheless, due to the big gap between the number of English-majored male and female students, the above finding can only use as a reference in research, not a material that could apply to every situation at the university.

Comparing the study habits of students between the class levels

Table 3 Descriptive Statistic and one-way ANOVA (Appendix)

Table 3 indicated that there were not many differences in study habits of English-majored students between class levels (p value > 0.05), except for the habit of time management. The results showed that first-year students had the most effective time management, followed by second, third and fourth-year students. The youngest learners usually had well-developed strategies for goal setting, prioritization and avoiding procrastination (mean value: 2.40). Interestingly, the study habits of second and third-year students were quite similar, with a mean value of 2.22. Their ability to manage time was not as good as the freshmen. On the other hand, final-year students generally exhibited the least developed time management skills, often struggling to balance between studying with other responsibilities, such as part-time jobs and internships, with the mean value of 2.18. They found it difficult to keep track of completing their academic and personal duties. The differences in other aspects of study habits including reading, note-taking, mode of study, memorization and test preparation between students from different class levels were not

detected in the result of this study.

Generally, the findings of this study showed that there is no significant difference between the study habits of English-majored students according to the academic year. Therefore, the research failed to reject the null hypothesis H_{02} .

Some previous studies also found no such differences in study habits across academic years [1], [13]. Other research has indicated the same trend in time management habits among students in higher education, with students in earlier academic years exhibiting better time management skills compared to their senior counterparts [14]. In some first years, learners might receive more support and scaffolding from teachers and advisors, which could help them develop better time management abilities. However, as students become more independent and take on additional responsibilities, especially working, they may struggle to maintain effective management habits. Interestingly, other studies suggested that time management skills develop over time as students gain more experience and adapt to the demands of higher education [15].

Comparing the study habits of students having different academic performances

Table 4 Descriptive Statistic and one-way ANOVA (Appendix)

Table 4 presented that there was no distinction between English-majored students having different academic performances (p value > 0.05), excluding reading habits (p value = $0.02 < 0.05$). The participants from all performance levels reported similar strategies and challenges in many aspects of study habits including habits of note-taking, mode of study, memorization, test preparation and time management. Nevertheless, reading habits emerged as the only factor that significantly differed among students with varying academic performances. Students with higher academic results reported more consistent and effective reading habits (mean value of 'Excellent', 'Good', and 'Fair' is 2.48, 2.36, and 2.27, respectively) while students with lower ones reported less consistent and less effective reading habits (mean value of 'Poor' and 'Very poor' is 2.08 and 2.20). Excellent, good and fair learners usually read information systematically. They had a tendency to browse the outline of documents first, then tried to get the main ideas of content while reading read (item 5 with mean = 2.25, and item 5 with mean = 2.64). They also researched for more familiar concepts as well as ideas that sparked their interest as they (item 4 with mean = 2.36). However, these activities were not applied in the reading process of poor and very poor learners, which made them read passively and did not reach great success in their academic studies.

Although there was no difference in study habits between English-majored students who have different academic achievements, which leads to the fact that the research failed to reject the null hypothesis H_{03} , the line graph in Figure 1 gave a special trend. It illustrates that those who have better educational results will have better study habits.



Figure 1. Mean of study habits according to academic performance

It is obvious that these differences have been convinced in a great number of previous studies. High-achieving students often employed a variety of techniques such as self-testing, summarizing, and elaborating on the material, which promoted better retention and understanding [16]. On the other hand, students with lower academic performance tended to rely on passive learning methods, such as rereading and highlighting, which have been shown to be less effective [17]. In addition, a strong positive correlation has been observed between students' reading habits and their academic success across various subjects, including language, mathematics, and science [18]. Frequent reading has been shown to enhance students' vocabulary, comprehension skills, and general knowledge, which in turn contribute to their overall academic achievement.

3.2. The changes in study habits of English-majored students in the post-covid-19 pandemic

The findings of this study show that 173 (53.2%) of the participants reported that their study habits have changed relatively after the online learning period, while 152 of them (46.8%) supposed that their study habits were not affected by distance education.

The data from the open questions reveal that the Coronavirus has caused noticeable changes in study habits of students. Firstly, a large number of students (61 respondents) reported that they have changed their study time and locations in the new normal. The reason was that they have been free to study whenever and wherever they want without any restrictions compared to during the pandemic. Some students were fond of going to the coffee shop with their friends or library to study whereas some others still kept the habit of learning at home alone. Importantly, joining in more other activities such as clubs, part-time jobs, parties, etc. made students spend less time on self-learning.

Q: Did your study habits change when you had to switch from learning online to offline? How have they changed?

A: "My study time and place significantly changed after the covid-19. During the pandemic, I usually studied alone in the evening. Now I often go to the coffee shop to learn with my friends in the daytime" (325th student).

Q: What changed the most in your study habits when you switched from learning online to offline?

A: "In the online learning period, I spent three hours for self-study, but when I came back to the new normal, I spent only one and a half hours studying" (105th student).

Secondly, 45 of the participants concurred that their use of technological devices for educational purposes has increased, which was not the case prior to the pandemic. They had used their personal laptops for online learning, reading materials and taking notes during the quarantine period since they were not allowed to go out to get printed textbooks. In this situation, students got used to it and adopted a habit of reading online. However, some respondents admitted that looking at the screen for a long time makes them have eye fatigue. That was the reason why when coming back to the new normal, many of them chose printed books to learn.

Q: What changed the most in your study habits when you switched from learning online to offline?

A: "I like taking notes and learning on the computer, I stop using paper or printed materials" (201st student).

Q: Did your study habits change when you had to switch from learning online to offline? How have they changed?

A: "Yes, of course. I spent more time for self-study and group study, reduced time using technology, and got information from printed materials more" (2nd student).

Thirdly, 44 participants shared that they changed their note-taking habits in the post-Covid-19 pandemic. Some respondents used physical materials and notebooks for note-taking more frequently upon returning to school. By contrast, others believed that laptops and other gadgets offered greater convenience for learning because they could highlight and take notes the important ideas at the same time they were learning.

Q: What changed the most in your study habits when you switched from learning online to offline?

A: "I prefer taking notes on the personal computer while learning so I still keep that habit in the new normal" (305th student).

Q: Did your study habits change when you had to switch from learning online to offline? How have they changed?

A: "After the covid-19 pandemic, I read textbooks before class more than during the online period. In the traditional class, I try to take notes as much as possible, then compare and check my notes with my friends' notes. However, in online classes, I usually watched videos again to write down important information. Especially, my note-taking habits were adopted during the online learning period" (26th student).

In addition, other aspects of study habits including reading, test preparation and time management were also mentioned as one of the changes after the pandemic by the participants, but those numbers were not considerable.

In previous research, a notable shift observed during the pandemic was the increased reliance on technology for educational purposes. Students were required to use digital tools, such as video conferencing platforms, learning

management systems, and online resources, to attend classes, access materials, and complete assignments. This transition to remote learning prompted students to develop digital literacy skills and utilize technology more frequently for their studies [8]. Furthermore, in the absence of a structured classroom environment, students had to take more responsibility for their learning, setting goals, and managing their time effectively to balance various tasks and deadlines [19].

4. Conclusion

This study examined the study habits of English-majored students. The result showed that students learning English language have had fairly good study habits. There were significant differences in the study habits of male and female students, particularly habits of reading, mode of study and time management. In contrast, no considerable difference was recorded in the study habits of students who are in various class levels and have different academic success. Furthermore, the majority of participants said that their study habits had changed in the post-covid-19 pandemic, especially in terms of study time and place, note-taking habits and learning materials. Other aspects such as reading, test preparation and time management habits also were mentioned by many respondents but not considerably.

The results of this research have a great contribution to education and training. For students, the research will help students gain perspectives about their study habits so that they can make proper modifications to learn more effectively. Male learners should pay more attention to their studies so that they can create good study habits and keep pace with female ones. The difference in time management among students in different academic years showed that senior students are more likely to be distracted from other activities such as part-time jobs, clubs, internships, projects, etc. Therefore, it will be much easier for them to handle their workload if they keep organized and cut down on procrastination [2]. Especially, students, in general, should focus more on reading because it plays a crucial role in enhancing their academic achievement. In addition, teachers and educational organizations can use data related to study habits of students to improve and upgrade their teaching methods. Lecturers should concern and encourage male students more in classes in order to help them study better. Also, the low academic performance students need to be motivated more as compared to higher ones. Besides, since the self-study time of the majority of students decreased significantly, teachers should have some methods to make them learn more effectively. For instance, consistent testing can help them relearn and recall information, and it pays off when preparing for final exams [3]. Based on the changes in study habits, some actions should be done to help students adapt to the new learning environment. The university should provide adequate references and the Internet for students to meet the demand of studying in the digital era. This will support learners using technology like laptops to take notes or research for more information while learning in the online classes.

Due to the time limitation, this study only examines the study habits of English-majored students and the changes in their study habits after the Covid-19 pandemic. For further studies, the researcher should find out the factors that impact the study habits of students and determine the difficulties that learners have to face during the learning process on a daily basis, then provide some methods as well as solutions to help them improve academic achievements.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Distribution of students according to sex, academic year, and academic performance

Sex		Academic Year				Academic Performance				
Male	Female	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
7.7 %	92.3 %	16.3 %	28 %	36.3 %	19.4 %	4.6 %	33.2%	58.8 %	3.1 %	0.3 %

Table 2 (Descriptive Statistic and Independent T-Test)

Indicators	Reading	Note-taking	Mode of study	Memorization	Test preparation	Time management	Study habits
P value	0.720	0.005*	0.001*	0.096	0.074	0.045*	0.009*

*significant P value

Table 3. Descriptive Statistic and one-way ANOVA

Indicators	Reading	Note-taking	Mode of study	Memorization	Test preparation	Time management	Study habits
P value	0.271	0.242	0.606	0.698	0.825	0.033*	0.241

*significant P value; (1: 1st students; 2: 2nd students; 3: 3rd students; 4: 4th students)

Table 4. Descriptive Statistic and one-way ANOVA

Indicators	Reading	Note-taking	Mode of study	Memorization	Test preparation	Time management	Study habits
P value	0.02*	0.721	0.345	0.201	0.413	0.693	0.273

*significant P value; (5: excellent; 4: good; 3: fair; 2: poor; 1: very poor)