

Vietnamese Non-English Majors' Perceptions of the Impact of ChatGPT on Self-Directed Learning: A Study at a Public College

Dao Thu Uyen¹, Le Van Tuyen²

¹ Ho Chi Minh City Industry and Trade College, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

² HUTECH University, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

ABSTRACT: ChatGPT has attracted considerable interest from educators and researchers in teaching English as a foreign language; however, there is not much empirical evidence about the effects of ChatGPT on EFL learners' self-directed learning. The current study explores the impact of ChatGPT on self-directed learning among EFL learners in a Vietnamese public college. A mixed-methods research design was used. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews through the participation of 144 non-English majors. Data were analyzed quantitatively through descriptive statistics and qualitatively through thematic analysis. Findings revealed that non-English majors mostly used ChatGPT for self-study, language practice, and answer verification. Furthermore, ChatGPT had a moderate positive effect on self-directed learning among participants, especially in terms of personal responsibility and self-regulation. However, ChatGPT's role in promoting learner autonomy was rather insignificant. The findings imply that ChatGPT may be efficiently integrated into English learning, provided it is done alongside pedagogical guidance and critical assessment of ChatGPT responses by learners.

KEYWORDS: ChatGPT, English language learning, self-directed learning, non-English majors, Vietnamese context

INTRODUCTION

The process of English as a foreign language (EFL) education has been considerably developed in recent decades. In Vietnam, the need for English language competence has significantly increased because of economic integration and international cooperation in the country. However, the success of English language education in Vietnam is still questionable. The majority of Vietnamese university students perform poorly in English language learning (ELL) and cannot communicate even at the most basic level (Nguyen & Tran, 2025). They often experience foreign language anxiety, which reduces their self-confidence, willingness to communicate, and ability to learn effectively, resulting in poorer English learning outcomes (Tran et al., 2013). Vietnam, according to the English Proficiency Index (2025), ranks 63rd out of 116 countries, indicating a clear discrepancy between national educational targets and learners' real proficiency level. The issue seems even more urgent in the case of non-English majors, particularly in the fields of technical studies. Modern higher education requires that students assume more responsibility for their learning processes (Benson, 2011). Self-directed learning (SDL) is widely recognized as an effective tool for improving learners' language proficiency and autonomy (Knowles, 1975; Garrison, 1997). The advent of ChatGPT, a large language model designed by OpenAI, offers additional possibilities for promoting SDL in ELL (Bokurt, 2023; Firat, 2023; Khan et al., 2023; Ivanov & Soliman, 2023). Still, although it has certain pedagogical benefits, few studies have considered the effect of ChatGPT on SDL behavior and attitude of Vietnamese non-English majors, whose educational process does not imply a sufficient amount of English instruction. This study aims to explore how non-English majors use ChatGPT in their English learning and their views about how ChatGPT affects their SDL at Ho Chi Minh City Industry and Trade College. The study attempts to address the following two research questions:

- 1) To what extent do non-English majors use ChatGPT in learning English at Ho Chi Minh City Industry and Trade College?
- 2) What are non-English majors' perceptions of the impact of ChatGPT on their self-directed learning?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the use of ChatGPT in ELL and to explore its impact on non-English majors' SDL. As stated by Creswell (2014), a mixed-methods design involves both quantitative and qualitative



approaches to give a broader perspective of the research problem. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) further argue that use of both types of data can help researchers identify general patterns and get deeper insights into participants' perceptions.

Research site and participants

The research was conducted at Ho Chi Minh City Industry and Trade College (HITC) located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It is a public college under the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The college admits approximately 4300 students annually and offers ten specialized facilities. English is a compulsory subject for all students. Convenience and purposive sampling were employed, providing practical and contextually relevant data for the present study. 144 first-year non-English majors enrolled in General English courses at HITC during the 2025-2026 academic year were involved in the study. All participants had an English proficiency level of A1 according to the CEFR. They were from four intact classes representing different academic majors, including Information Technology, Logistics, Network Communications, and Graphic Design. 61.3% of them were male, and 38.2% were female. They had various experiences in ELL: 44.4% of them learned English for more than five years, 31.3% for less than three years, and 24.3% for three to five years. Concerning the level of using AI in ELL, most participants (46.5%) used AI at a high level, 5.8% at a medium level, and 7.6% at a low level.

Research instruments

Two types of instruments were employed for the data collection. The first one is a closed-ended questionnaire which consists of three sections: Section I asks about demographic information; Section II, including 26 items with a five-point Likert-scale of frequency, asks about the use of ChatGPT in ELL, and Section III, consisting of 17 items with a five-point Likert-scale of agreement, asks about non-English majors' perceptions of the impact of ChatGPT on SDL. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the questionnaire items are Frequency of ChatGPT use (5 items; 0.792), Purpose of ChatGPT use (15 items, 0.931), Forms of ChatGPT use (6 items, 0.673); part 3: Self-regulation (5 items, 0.673), Motivation (5 items, 0.660), Personal responsibility (3 items, 0.705), and Learner autonomy (4 items, 0.851). Semi-structured interviews, consisting of 7 questions, were employed as the second type of instrument to collect qualitative data to support the quantitative data. Both instruments were designed in English and then translated into Vietnamese to eliminate possible difficulties in understanding.

Procedures of data collection and analysis

All non-English majors at the college were given access to ChatGPT to assist them in English learning. To collect data, permission from college administrators was obtained, and the researchers informed all participants of the purpose of the study and instructed them on how to complete the questionnaire on Google Form. It took the participants around 25 minutes to fill out the questionnaire, which was released for seven days, from July 15th to 20th, 2026. Following the questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted for two days (July 16th and 17th) with ten selected non-English majors among 144 respondents. The researchers needed to spend around 10-15 minutes on each interview. All the interviews with seven guide questions were recorded with the consent of the interviewees.

Data analysis was done using SPSS 27.0. For research question 1 (RQ1), descriptive statistics were used to analyze the ChatGPT usage by students. The frequency and percentages were computed in order to understand the frequency, intention, and modes of ChatGPT use. For research question 2 (RQ2), in order to understand the students' perceptions about the influence of ChatGPT on SDL, mean scores (M) and standard deviation (SD) were computed. The data were interpreted using the following scales.

Table 1. Mean Score Interpretation

Scales	Mean Scores
Very low /Strongly disagree	M=1.00 -1.80
Low/Disagree	M=1.81- 2.60
Moderate/Unsure	M=2.61- 3.40
High/Agree	M=3.41- 4.20
Very high/Strongly agree	M=4.21- 5.00

Regarding data collected from interviews, the transcripts were then carefully and repeatedly read to gain familiarity with the data before being manually coded. Similar codes were then grouped into broader themes related to students' perceived benefits

and challenges of using ChatGPT, as well as its perceived role in supporting four components of SDL, namely self-regulation, motivation, personal responsibility, and autonomy.

To protect participants' confidentiality, each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym from S1 to S10, which was used consistently throughout the analysis and presentation of the findings. These codes were used when presenting quotations and discussing the interview findings. The identified themes were synthesized and compared with the quantitative findings from the questionnaire (Bloor et al., 2001). This process enabled the researcher to explain and elaborate on the survey results, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions and experiences of using ChatGPT to support their SDL.

RESULTS

Extent of ChatGPT Usage among Non-English majors in English Language Learning

Table 2 presents the overall extent of ChatGPT use among non-English majors in ELL across three dimensions. Overall, the findings indicate that students reported a moderate level of ChatGPT used in ELL. Among the three dimensions, frequency of use obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.715$), closely followed by forms of use ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.642$), whereas purposes of use received a slightly lower mean score ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.782$).

Table 2. Extent of ChatGPT Usage (N = 144)

Categories	M	SD
Frequency of ChatGPT use (1-5)	3.26	0.715
Purposes of ChatGPT use (6-20)	3.13	0.782
Ways of Interacting with ChatGPT (21-26)	3.25	0.642
Extent of ChatGPT Usage		

The findings suggest that the extent of ChatGPT usage among non-English majors was at a medium level. In more detail, the following sections present the data reflecting frequency, purposes, and forms of ChatGPT use,

Frequency of ChatGPT Usage

Table 3. Frequency of ChatGPT Usage (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
1. I use ChatGPT daily to support my English learning.	3.13	0.821
2. I use ChatGPT in my English lessons when my teacher required it.	3.26	0.937
3. I use ChatGPT when I study English on my own.	3.67	0.876
4. I use ChatGPT when I do not understand my English lesson.	2.98	0.912
5. I use ChatGPT when doing English assignments.	3.25	1.238

Data displayed in Table 3 show that most of students frequently used ChatGPT when studying English independently (item 3: $M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.876$), indicating the highest level of ChatGPT use among students, followed by teacher-directed lesson (item 2: $M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.937$), and completing English assignments (item 5: $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.238$), and using ChatGPT when students did not understand their English lessons (item 4: $M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.912$). These results were further supported by the interview data. For instance, S1 explained, "I use ChatGPT mostly when doing homework and studying by myself at home, but I still check and adjust its answers to make them fit my own writing style." In addition, S3 reported, "When I study by myself at home, when I do not understand the question, or when I forget what I learned in class."

Purposes of ChatGPT Usage

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of fifteen items (6 – 20) representing these three categories. Overall, students reported a moderate level of ChatGPT use or English learning purpose ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.782$), language knowledge development ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.922$), followed closely by language skills development ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.791$). Task-related support was reported less frequently ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.842$), although it remained within the moderate range (Table 5).

Table 4. Purposes of ChatGPT Usage (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
Language Knowledge Development (6-9)	3.18	0.922
Language Skills Development (10-16)	3.17	0.791
Task-Related Support (17-20)	3.02	0.842
Purposes of Use	3.13	0.782

Language Knowledge Development

Regarding language knowledge development (Table 5), students reported a moderate level of using ChatGPT to improve their vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

Table 5. Purpose of Use _Language Knowledge Development (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
6. I use ChatGPT to look up the meanings of new English words.	3.13	1.207
7. I use ChatGPT to see examples of how English words are used.	3.32	1.126
8. I use ChatGPT to learn English grammar rules.	3.17	1.105
9. I use ChatGPT to check grammatical errors in my sentences.	3.10	1.111

As the descriptive statistics of four items, using ChatGPT to see examples of how English words are used received the highest score (item 7: M = 3.32, SD = 1.126). This finding was consistent with S2's explanation "*I use ChatGPT to look up vocabulary, learn grammar, create examples, write paragraphs, and translate texts.*" Similarly, participants reported their views of using ChatGPT to learn English grammar rules (item 8: M = 3.17, SD = 1.105), looking up the meanings of new English word (item 6: M = 3.13, SD = 1.207) and checking grammatical errors in sentences (item 9: M = 3.10, SD = 1.111), all of which showed comparable levels of frequency. This pattern was also reflected in S10's explanation, "*I use ChatGPT to solve problems related to the meanings of new words and grammar,*" The findings indicate that ChatGPT was used to support a variety of aspects of language skills development, particularly reading comprehension and communication practice.

Language Skills Development

Table 6. Purpose of Use _Language Skills Development (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
10. I use ChatGPT to understand English reading texts.	3.03	1.060
11. I use ChatGPT to understand unfamiliar vocabulary in English reading texts.	3.43	1.008
12. I use ChatGPT to explain difficult parts in English reading texts.	3.28	1.056
13. I use ChatGPT to practice English conversations.	3.41	1.125
14. I use ChatGPT to practice expressing my ideas in spoken English.	2.85	1.020
15. I use ChatGPT to support my English writing.	3.10	1.120
16. I use ChatGPT to help me understand English conversation.	3.10	1.120

As presented in Table 6, most participants agreed that ChatGPT helped them understand unfamiliar vocabulary in English reading texts (item 11: M = 3.43, SD = 1.008), practice English conversations (item 13: M = 3.41, SD = 1.125), and explain difficult parts in reading texts (item 12: M = 3.28, SD = 1.056). These findings were echoed by S8, who described: "*I usually ask ChatGPT to explain the parts of the lesson that I do not understand. I like that ChatGPT can explain the same thing in different ways, so I keep asking until I understand.*" In addition, S1 mentioned: "*I use ChatGPT to learn vocabulary and grammar, practice writing, and improve my communication skills in English. Besides, I can practice anytime without being afraid of asking wrong questions or feeling embarrassed, so I feel more confident when learning English.*"

Compared with the other language skills, students were less likely to use ChatGPT to practice expressing ideas in spoken English (item 14: $M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.020$), to support English writing (item 15: $M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.120$), and to understand English conversation (item 16: $M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.120$). The findings suggest that students use at a moderate to a high level.

Task-Related Support

Unlike the previous two categories, the use of ChatGPT for task-related support was more closely associated with completing academic requirements than with developing language competence.

Table 7. Purpose of Use: Task-Related Support (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
17. I use ChatGPT to understand English assignment instructions.	3.04	1.057
18. I use ChatGPT to generate ideas for English tasks.	2.86	1.022
19. I use ChatGPT to translate sentences or paragraphs into English.	3.03	1.606
20. I use ChatGPT to summarize English content.	3.13	1.207

Among four activities (Table 7), ChatGPT was used for summarizing English content most frequently (item 20: $M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.207$). Similar levels of frequency were reported for understanding assignment instructions (item 17: $M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.057$) and translating sentences or paragraphs into English (item 19: $M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.606$). These findings were supported by the following interview findings, which paint a clearer picture of how these functions were used in practice. S3 explained, “I use ChatGPT to translate the instructions in English exercises and check whether my answers are correct.” A similar tendency was observed in S5’s response, S5 reflected: “I use ChatGPT to search for information, do homework, and quickly check my knowledge. I choose it because it saves more time than searching through many different websites.” Although generating ideas or English tasks received comparatively less agreement (item 18: $M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.022$), some participants still regarded this function as valuable. S10 stated: “I use ChatGPT to solve problems related to the meanings of new words and grammar, correct mistakes in sentences or short paragraphs, write essays, and generate ideas. I chose ChatGPT because I believe AI can help me learn more.”

Ways of Interacting with ChatGPT

This subsection examined how students interact with ChatGPT during ELL. As shown in Table 8, the overall mean score of Ways of Interacting with ChatGPT was 3.25 ($SD = 0.642$), indicating a moderate level of interaction with ChatGPT. The most frequently reported form is evaluation-oriented ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.742$), followed by output-oriented interaction ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.801$). In contrast, although input-oriented interaction remained within the moderate range, it received the lowest mean score ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.936$).

Table 8. Ways of Interacting with ChatGPT (N = 144)

Subcategories	M	SD
Input-Oriented Interaction (21, 22)	2.98	0.936
Output-Oriented Interaction (23, 24)	3.09	0.801
Evaluation-Oriented Interaction (25, 26)	3.68	0.742
Overall mean score	3.25	0.642

Input-Oriented Interaction

Input-oriented interaction reflects the ways in which students used ChatGPT to obtain explanations and build their understanding of English lesson (Table 9).

Table 9. Input-Oriented Interaction (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
21. When using ChatGPT, I typically ask for explanations when I do not understand the lesson	3.06	1.160
22. When using ChatGPT, I tend to ask for examples to better understand the lesson.	2.89	1.159

There are only two items in this category, but both received moderate ratings, indicating that ChatGPT was regularly consulted when students needed to clarify the lesson. Students used ChatGPT to explain unfamiliar lessons more frequently (item 21: $M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.160$) than requesting examples to facilitate understanding (item 22: $M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.159$). They fully understood the lesson, instead of using ChatGPT merely to obtain answers. According to S8, *"I usually ask ChatGPT to explain the parts of the lesson that I do not understand. I like that ChatGPT can explain the same thing in different ways, so I keep asking until I understand."* Similarly, S9 appreciated: *"I use ChatGPT to explain grammar and show me how to do exercises because it does not just give me the answers but also explains each step."*

Output-Oriented Interaction

As presented in Table 10, the data show that students were more inclined to rely on ChatGPT to generate sentences or paragraphs (item 24: $M = 3.42$; $SD = 0.889$) than to paraphrase existing texts (item 23: $M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.236$).

Table 10. Output-Oriented Interaction (N = 144)

	M	SD
23. When using ChatGPT, I use it to help me paraphrase sentences or paragraphs.	2.76	1.236
24. When using ChatGPT, I rely on it to generate sentences or paragraphs.	3.42	0.889

This tendency was also reflected in the interview findings. Some respondents reported using ChatGPT to produce written output for different learning purposes. S2 shared, *"I use ChatGPT to look up vocabulary, learn grammar, create examples, write paragraphs, and translate texts."* While S10 described: *"I use ChatGPT to solve problems related to the meanings of new words and grammar, correct mistakes in sentences or short paragraphs, write essays, and generate ideas."*

Evaluation-Oriented Interaction

Table 11. Evaluation-Oriented Interaction (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
25. When using ChatGPT, I use it to check the correctness of my answers.	3.71	0.801
26. When using ChatGPT, I use it to obtain feedback on my writing.	3.65	0.934

As presented in Table 11, checking the correctness of the answer was the most regularly reported activity (item 25: $M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.801$), closely followed by obtaining feedback on writing (item 26: $M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.934$). The data collected from interviews reflect a similar point of view. For example, S3 reported: *"I use ChatGPT to translate the instructions in English exercises and check whether my answers are correct."* S6 pointed out: *"I usually use ChatGPT to check my answers, look up vocabulary, and review grammar...."* The findings show that students used ChatGPT for getting feedback at the highest level in comparison with other forms of interaction.

Non-English Majors' Perceptions of ChatGPT Use

To address RQ2, the study examined non-English majors' perceptions of ChatGPT's impact on self-directed learning. Although all categories fell within the moderate range, noticeable differences were observed. Personal responsibility was considered the strongest perceived impact ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.794$); however, learner autonomy recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.936$). Meanwhile, motivation ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.706$) and self-regulation ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.725$) showed comparable levels of agreement.

Table 12. Non-English Majors' Perceptions (N = 144)

Categories	M	SD	Impact Level
Self-regulation (27-31)	2.98	.725	Moderate
Motivation (32-36)	3.02	.706	Moderate
Personal responsibility (37-39)	3.21	.794	Moderate
Learner autonomy (40-43)	2.72	.936	Moderate
Perceptions	2.97	.666	Moderate

Self-Regulation

As presented in Table 13, the data show that students generally perceived ChatGPT as having a moderate impact on their self-regulated English learning.

Table 13. Non-English Majors' Perceptions_Self-Regulation (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
27. ChatGPT helps me plan my English learning activities.	3.00	1.103
28. ChatGPT helps me monitor my English learning progress.	3.26	0.995
29. ChatGPT helps me know what aspects of language learning need to be improved.	3.44	1.043
30. ChatGPT helps me evaluate my English learning outcomes.	2.44	1.127
31. ChatGPT helps me decide on what learning strategies are appropriate for me in reaching my learning goals.	2.74	1.228

Among five categories of self-regulation, item 29 has the highest level of agreement, with $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.043$, followed by item 28: $M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.995$), indicating that ChatGPT can help students plan and monitor their learning. The other items (items 27, 30, and 31) obtained a moderate level of agreement among students. Regarding learning planning, students moderately agreed that ChatGPT helped them plan their English learning activities (item 27: $M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.103$). By contrast, the lowest levels of agreement were found for evaluating English learning outcomes (item 30: $M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.127$) and deciding appropriate learning strategies to achieve learning goals (item 31: $M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.228$).

Qualitative data revealed several similar expressions. For instance, S8 explained, “*Yes. ChatGPT helps me identify the areas where I am still weak, so I can focus more on improving them.*”, while S6 reported “*Yes. I use ChatGPT to remind me of the knowledge that I have forgotten and suggest which topics I should review first.*” Additionally, S5 shared “*After finishing my exercises, I usually ask ChatGPT to check my mistakes and explain them, so I know where I went wrong and how to correct them.*” S1 pointed out “*In my opinion, using ChatGPT is beneficial if it is used properly and not overused. If people rely on it too much, they may become less decisive and dependent on it. The knowledge belongs to AI, not to themselves. I use ChatGPT to make my study plan, practice pronunciation, translate meanings, and prepare well for tests.*”. These findings revealed that most students perceived that the use of ChatGPT has impact on their self-regulation.

Motivation

Regarding this category, students perceived ChatGPT as having a moderate influence on their motivation to learn English (Table 14), although its motivational impact varied across different aspects.

Table 14. Non-English Majors' Perceptions_Motivation (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
32. ChatGPT makes me more interested in learning English.	2.84	1.132
33. ChatGPT encourages me to do my best to learn English.	3.61	0.997
34. ChatGPT helps me stay more motivated when learning English is difficult.	3.40	0.940
35. ChatGPT helps me enjoy learning new information related to English.	2.33	1.102
36. I am motivated by ChatGPT's convenience for supporting independent learning.	2.92	1.229

In more detail, most of the students strongly agreed that ChatGPT encouraged them to do their best in English (item 33: $M = 3.61$, $SD = .997$), and it also helped them stay motivated when learning English became difficult (item 34: $M = 3.40$, $SD = .940$). Through the interviews, students also expressed their agreement. According to S1, “*It motivates me because I feel that I always have support whenever I need it. It gives me a sense of security, so I do not feel worried.*” S2 shared, “*ChatGPT creates different emotions while I am learning. It explains things very carefully and clearly, which makes learning more interesting.*”

Besides the above positive influences, ChatGPT had some negative influence on non-English majors' intrinsic enjoyment of learning. Several students did not agree that ChatGPT helped them enjoy learning new English lessons (item 35: $M = 2.33$, $SD =$

1.102), made them less interested in learning English (item 32: $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.132$), or it was less convenient for independent learning (item 36: $M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.229$). Qualitative data show similar views. For example, S5 admitted, “*ChatGPT reduces my motivation to study because I know AI can do the work for me. As a result, the next time I have homework, whether it is easy or difficult, I tend to use ChatGPT instead of thinking by myself.*” S9 similarly mentioned that “*It makes me lose interest in studying because ChatGPT solves everything without requiring me to think. However, it is also very helpful because its explanations are easy to understand and make the lessons easier to remember.*”

Personal responsibility

Table 15 demonstrates data reflecting the impact of ChatGPT on personal responsibility. A moderate level of this impact was obtained among the students.

Table 15. Non-English Majors' Perceptions_Personal Responsibility (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
37. ChatGPT helps me to be responsible in my learning.	2.92	1.254
38. I evaluate the accuracy of ChatGPT's responses before using them.	3.64	1.021
39. I take responsibility for my learning outcomes when using ChatGPT.	3.06	1.160

About half of the students agreed that ChatGPT helped them to be responsible in learning (item 37: $M = 2.92$ and $SD = 1.254$). Most of them strongly agreed that they evaluated the accuracy of ChatGPT's responses before using them (item 38: $M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.021$) and took responsibility for learning outcomes when using ChatGPT (item 39: $M = 3.06$ and $SD = 1.160$). Qualitative data revealed that students always checked answers from ChatGPT, showing that they use ChatGPT responsibly. S2's admitted, “*Yes. I check the answers to see where I made mistakes, how ChatGPT solved the problem, what method it used, and whether its explanation is consistent with what my teacher taught or what I have learned.*” In addition, S5 reported “*Yes. I always check ChatGPT's answers because the information it provides is not always completely accurate. Therefore, I also search for information from websites, books, and other sources before deciding whether to trust it.*”

The findings show that non-English majors generally recognized their responsibility for directing and evaluating their learning rather than transferring that responsibility entirely to AI.

Learner autonomy

Rather than showing strong agreement, students expressed relatively cautious perceptions about ChatGPT's contribution to autonomous learning as reflected by the moderate mean score across four items (Table 16).

Table 16. Non-English Majors' Perception of_Learners Autonomy (N = 144)

Items	M	SD
40. ChatGPT helps me learn English independently.	2.53	1.206
41. ChatGPT helps me decide how to learn English on my own.	2.81	1.044
42. Through ChatGPT, I know how to find resources for learning.	2.74	1.199
43. Through ChatGPT, I can rely less on teachers when learning English.	2.81	1.044

The data in Table 16 show that about half of the students agreed that using ChatGPT has an impact on the learner autonomy. More specifically, ChatGPT helps them learn English independently (item 40: $M = 2.53$ and $SD = 1.206$), decide how to learn English on their own (item 41: $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.044$), find resources for learning (item 42: $M = 2.74$ and $SD = 1.199$), and rely less on teachers when learning English (item 43: $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.044$). Through interviews, several students expressed similar opinions. For instance, S3 pointed out, “*ChatGPT helps me learn English more independently. When I do not understand something, I can immediately find the answer, ask follow-up questions, and practice by myself without waiting for my teacher or someone else. ChatGPT also suggests ways to learn vocabulary.*” Likewise, S4 compared “*ChatGPT is like a teacher who can guide me through every detail if I ask.*” Meanwhile, S2 regarded “*I think self-study is an essential part of learning for everyone, and ChatGPT is a technological companion that provides support. When we know how to combine both, learning English becomes much easier.*”



These findings imply that many students did not perceive that ChatGPT could help them develop learner autonomy in English learning. They might still rely so much on teachers.

DISCUSSION

Extent of ChatGPT usage

Regarding frequency of ChatGPT use, the findings indicate that non-English majors primarily used ChatGPT during self-study rather than in formal classroom settings. It is consistent with the characteristics of SDL proposed by Garrison (1997), where learners actively seek resources to regulate their own learning process. Similarly, Lin (2023) described ChatGPT as a virtual tutor that enables learners to set personal learning goals, receive individualized guidance, and study asynchronously according to their own learning schedules. By contrast, students reported comparatively lower use of ChatGPT when they did not understand classroom lessons. ChatGPT appears to complement formal instruction by providing immediate academic support whenever students require additional explanation or practice.

With respect to purposes of ChatGPT use, the present study demonstrates that non-English majors employed it for a wide range of learning purposes. ChatGPT was more frequently utilized for the acquisition of language knowledge and language skills than for English tasks. In line with Ngo (2024) and Zhang (2024), ChatGPT was primarily used to develop vocabulary, grammar, and language accuracy. This finding corroborates the findings of Ahmed et al. (2025), who claimed that students viewed ChatGPT as helpful in all four language skills. In contrast to Le et al. (2025), who concentrated on the capacity to use ChatGPT in simulated conversation. ChatGPT served as a learning support tool that gave students the confidence to finish academic assignments while still taking ownership of their education.

Concerning ways of interacting with ChatGPT, evaluation-oriented interaction was found to be the most prevalent, indicating that ChatGPT was mostly used to verify the correctness of their own responses. This result is consistent with that observed by Abdallah et al. (2025) and Zhang et al. (2024), as students prefer to employ ChatGPT for error detection and correction of their responses. According to Garrison (1997), efficient self-directed learners should always evaluate themselves during the process of learning.

The impact of ChatGPT on Self-directed learning

The second research question focused on how non-English majors perceived the impact of ChatGPT on their SDL across the four dimensions. Building upon Garrison's (1997) multidimensional framework, the findings reveal that ChatGPT was perceived to influence self-regulation, motivation, personal responsibility, and learner autonomy to different extents.

With regard to self-regulation, the participants perceived ChatGPT as supporting planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning rather than replacing these processes. According to Zimmerman's (2000) view, effective self-regulation involves planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning rather than simply completing learning tasks. In addition, Dillon (2024) and Dizon et al. (2025) reported that immediate AI-generated feedback assisted learners in monitoring their learning progress and identifying errors during independent study. The findings also indicate that ChatGPT was perceived as a supportive rather than a controlling tool for self-regulation. ChatGPT assisted them in organizing and monitoring their learning; they did not perceive the chatbot as making learning decisions on their behalf.

In terms of motivation, ChatGPT was seen as a convenient tool to make students more motivated in studying, but its effects on motivation were mainly situational and not long-term. This approach corresponds with existing literature indicating that AI-based learning can improve engagement of learners by offering personal support and instantaneous feedback. Wang et al. (2025) showed that such an unbiased form of interaction enables learners to persevere. This observation is compatible with Fan et al. (2025), who argued that motivation derived from convenience and immediate assistance may not necessarily develop into sustained intrinsic motivation once AI support is removed.

In this study, personal responsibility emerged as the strongest perceived dimension of SDL. The learners often cross-checked the answers provided by ChatGPT prior to use, thereby implying that responsibility for learning still rested with the learners themselves. This finding validates the findings of Qiu (2024) and the PRO model of Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991), which demonstrated students' responsibility by remaining accountable for evaluating information, making learning decisions, and accepting ownership of their learning outcomes, as opposed to the worries expressed by Cotton et al. (2023) and Ali et al. (2024).



Concerning learner autonomy, a noteworthy paradox became evident despite the widespread use of ChatGPT for self-study and learning assistance outside the classroom. Previous studies showed that ChatGPT allows for developing autonomous learning but also poses challenges to the development of learner autonomy. As reported by Lin (2023) and Dizon et al. (2025), ChatGPT assists learners in studying autonomously through the provision of flexible access to explanations, language practice, and personalized support. Nevertheless, both researchers stressed the fact that learners' decisions are often made based on the recommendations of AI rather than their own critical judgment. This point is highly relevant to the concept of pseudo-autonomy, according to which learners learn independently but still rely on AI when making learning decisions. The present research suggests that while ChatGPT can provide the conditions necessary for autonomous learning, it does not ensure its development on its own.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings provide pedagogical implications for non-English majors, English teachers, and college administrators regarding the integration of ChatGPT into ELL and the promotion of SDL. For students, ChatGPT can serve as an effective supplementary learning tool when used purposefully and critically. Since students reported using ChatGPT mainly for self-study, language development, and evaluating their own learning outcomes, they should be encouraged to use the chatbot for planning learning activities, monitoring their progress, identifying learning difficulties, and obtaining immediate feedback. Developing these learning habits may help students use ChatGPT to strengthen their SDL while maintaining responsibility for their own learning decisions. For English teachers, they may consider incorporating guided AI-assisted learning activities that extend learning beyond the classroom and encourage students to justify their learning decisions, evaluate ChatGPT's responses critically, and reflect on their learning process, particularly because learner autonomy received the lowest level of agreement. The college administrators need to organize AI-related workshops and seminars for both students and teachers. In addition, the college may consider developing institutional guidelines for the appropriate use of generative AI in ELL and integrating AI literacy into English courses.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Despite providing valuable insights into non-English majors' use of ChatGPT and its perceived impact on SDL, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Although participants represented several non-English majors, the findings reflect one institution. Moreover, the intervention was implemented over a relatively short period of six weeks, and students' perceptions may evolve as they gain more experience using AI tools over time.

Future studies could involve participants from multiple universities or colleges with different educational contexts and learner characteristics. Researchers may adopt longitudinal designs to investigate how students' use of ChatGPT develops SDL over a longer period. Future studies could employ diverse methods such as learning logs, classroom observations, or examine other factors that influence the effectiveness of ChatGPT in language learning, such as digital literacy, AI literacy, English proficiency, learning styles, or teachers' instructional practices.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the use of ChatGPT by non-English majors in the process of learning English, as well as the impact of ChatGPT on SDL among them, was explored. Based on the results, it was found that the students in the context utilized ChatGPT at a moderate level. They used it mainly for self-study, language improvement, and feedback purposes. Moreover, ChatGPT was perceived to make a moderately significant contribution to the development of SDL through increasing personal responsibility, motivation, and self-regulation, but it did not significantly contribute to learner autonomy. In general, the current study makes an important addition to the existing literature on language learning supported by AI in that it provides empirical data related to the Vietnamese context of vocational higher education.

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