

Perceptions of and Experiences with Vocational College English Majors' Out-of-class English Learning in Taiwan

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Abstract—The purpose of this study was to investigate vocational college EFL students' experiences with and perceptions of out-of-class English learning. The research involved a survey, comprising three sets of questionnaires concerning learners' perceptions of and experiences with out-of-class English learning. Four intact classes of 164 EFL vocational college students participated in the study. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight successful EFL learners. The intentions were to highlight the perspectives of the eight successful English learners with in-depth understandings. The results showed that the successful EFL learners more aggressively and voluntarily participated in their out-of-class English learning because they were highly motivated. To conclude, this study may be of importance for explaining the dynamic relationship between learning outcomes and learners' autonomy as well as in providing English teachers with a better understanding of how students' out-of-class learning outcomes relates to their motivation and autonomy.

Index Terms—learning autonomy, out-of-class learning, motivation, learning outcomes, successful EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

English is a lingua franca, which makes communication possible across cultures and boundaries. To increase students' comparative advantages and competitiveness on the world stage, students in Taiwan, especially vocational college students, have been encouraged to increase their English proficiency. The government has launched several programs to help create a friendly English-learning environment because exposure to English is considered one of the most crucial conditions for achieving proficiency. Directly focusing on college students, the government has provided funding that helps them improve their English proficiency on standardized tests such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), which in turn has prompted most of the colleges in Taiwan to set up an English proficiency threshold as a requirement before graduation (Executive Yuan, 2005).

Despite these many actions taken by the government, vocational college students' English proficiency has not seen much improvement. According to the 2011 Educational Testing Service (ETS) report (TOEIC Newsletter 28, 2011) in Taiwan, the average TOEIC score for undergraduates at institutes of science and technology is 422 points, whereas the average for students at comprehensive universities is 585 points. Given that, there is an urgent need to increase vocational college students' overall English proficiency to better prepare them for their future career and employment.

In more recent years, we have seen mounting evidence of the usefulness of learners' incorporating self-learning strategies into their English acquisition processes because exposure to a foreign language outside of the classroom is considered one of the most crucial conditions for achieving proficiency (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Freeman, 1999). Out-of-class learning is important in creating necessary motivation for learners to advance and progress (Lamb, 2002; Nunan, 1990; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Rubin & Thompson, 1994). Woo(2003) noted that out-of-class learning should be considered a necessary skill outside of normal class settings because it promotes learning in a way that is not constrained by time and space and it cultivates one's autonomy that can be useful for a lifetime. Research done by Pickard (1996) and Ruben (1975) demonstrated that successful English learners were those who made good use of their time by developing personal learning strategies outside of normal class settings.

The purpose of this study was to investigate vocational college English majors' experiences with and perceptions of out-of-class English learning. Along with successful English majors' experiences and perceptions, it is hoped that the study may provide alternative solutions to the problem of autonomous English-learning outside of normal class settings, especially for those who struggle to keep pace with their English classes at vocational colleges. The participants of interest were English majors at a vocational college in central Taiwan. It was assumed that English majors would have a stronger motivation to learn English compared with non-English majors. Surveys were distributed to all English majors at this institute for initial data collection. Following the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposefully selected successful English learners. The successful learners who volunteered were interviewed for their

out-of-class English-learning experiences and perceptions to provide in-depth understandings and perspectives from their point of view.

A. *Definition of Terms*

Out-of-class English learning in this study is defined as any English-learning activities performed outside of normal class settings, such as reading English magazines, listening to English radio programs, and watching English movies and TV programs (Pickard, 1996); it also includes attending cramming programs.

According to Pickard (1996), successful English learner is defined as anyone who performs better than average or better than the standard. Based on the 2011 ETS report (TOEIC Newsletter 28, 2011) in Taiwan, the average TOEIC score for undergraduates at institutes of science and technology is 422 points, whereas the average for students at comprehensive universities is 585 points. To be further promoted at work, it is suggested that one needs to have a TOEIC score of 700 points or higher (Chang, 2012). Therefore, students with a TOEIC score of 750 points or higher are considered successful English learners in this study.

B. *Research Questions*

To emphasize the issues outlined, the present study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. What are vocational college English majors' experiences with and perceptions of out-of-class English learning?
2. What are successful vocational college English majors' experiences with and perceptions of out-of-class English learning?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Out-of-class learning should be promoted in classes. It is a teacher's job to motivate students to learn and to be persistent in learning in class and outside of class over time. Throughout the process, students develop skills that are relevant to learning, and they learn to take control of their learning. Liu (2010) noted that teachers should take the initiatives to help promote out-of-class learning. During the process, teachers gradually shift away from the role of instructor to coordinator and then to promoter; teachers do not limit or confine students' learning but provide resources and suggestions for them to aggressively and voluntarily participate in their own progress. Studies (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Deci & Ryan, 2000) have shown that autonomy-supportive teachers tend to help increase learners' motivations, whereas controlling teachers were prone to decrease learners' interests in and motivation for learning. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), autonomy-supportive teachers help trigger learners' self-initiation, which is critical regarding motivation. The study (Kiany & Shayestefar, 2011) further revealed that students' English performance was lower when teachers were more controlling compared with autonomy-supportive teachers. As shown, motivation is such an important factor that leads to successful learning outcomes. If motivation could be generated and gradually increased, learning outcomes would be expected to improve over time (Csizer, Kormos, & Sarkadi, 2010; Hsiao, Tu, & Chung, 2012).

In the process of becoming aggressive autonomous learners, students need to learn to take control of their learning and understand the importance of self-management, self-initiation, and self-disciplines to achieve their goals (Liu, 2010). More importantly, the key to learning is not what to learn but more how to learn. Betts and Kercher (1999) noted that it was not an easy task to build up autonomous learning skills. Learners first need to assess their own capabilities, set up appropriate goals, generate their motivation for autonomous learning, and constantly make necessary adjustments to their goals. Furthermore, autonomous learning is beneficial to self-perception and perceived self-efficacy because students learn to gradually take control of their learning and advance their studies. According to Bandura (1986 & 1997), perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs in their ability to successfully achieve what they have planned, and perceived self-efficacy is closely related to an individual's motivation and ultimate learning outcomes.

Hergenhahn and Olson (2001) and Benson (2001) emphasized that learners themselves should initiate out-of-class learning and that the ultimate goal of out-of-class learning should center on cultivating people's autonomous learning skills and mastering concepts that they can apply throughout their lives. More importantly, teachers are coordinators and promoters who help facilitate the learning development, not instructors who give commands about what to accomplish. Consequently, students are motivated to participate in learning voluntarily and encouraged to take control of their learning.

Out-of-class learning has become an important issue that educators and researchers have advocated for in colleges in Taiwan for the past several years because of a highly autonomous learning environment in colleges. With the shift away from the highly structured learning environment in high school in Taiwan, out-of-class learning skills are critical regarding learning outcomes for college students (Chiu, 2010).

Classroom instruction is often conducted for a group of students, and individual learners' differences cannot be taken into account. Therefore, out-of-class learning is considered significant for an individual's progress and advancement. A substantial amount of research (Benson, 2001; Pearson, 2004; Sato, 2002) has revealed that successful learners are those who developed out-of-class learning strategies to provide themselves with more effective and efficient learning outcomes. Pickard (1996) and Ruben (1975) emphasized that successful English learners were those who aggressively

sought out out-of-class opportunities to practice English. In Lamb’s (2002) and Nunan’s (1995) research, out-of-class learning was a contributing factor to successful learning outcomes.

Kao (2008) noted that successful learners possessed the characteristics of an explorer, usually seeking out opportunities to learn and revised actions based on past mistakes. Furthermore, Brown (1994) emphasized that successful English learners did not particularly rely on textbooks or lectures given in classes; instead, they would try to develop customized learning strategies that fit with their own learning styles and characteristics. In the research conducted by Ruben (1975) and Ellis (1989), the findings revealed that successful language learning outcomes significantly correlated with an individual’s characteristics. These findings imply that developing individualized learning strategies based on one’s characteristics is significant for improving one’s learning and increasing motivation.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. The Participants

This study employed a mixed method approach. This approach incorporates quantitative survey questionnaires and qualitative face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Bryman (1988) and Creswell (2003) note that a combination of different methods helps present a general overview of an issue because of the differences in approaches.

To ensure some homogeneity in educational background, all participants were selected from the Department of Applied English at a vocational university in central Taiwan. That is, the participants in this study were English majors from the same institute. A survey (see Appendix A) was distributed to all of the students, 191 in total, in the Department of Applied English with a return rate of 85.86%. Among the participants, eight successful English learners volunteered to take part in the semi-structured interviews to further reveal their personal perceptions of and experiences with out-of-class English learning. The following table (Table 1) shows the details of the population. It was also worth noting that only 20 out of 191 students had a TOEIC score of 750 points or higher at the time of participation. TOEIC test was chosen as a measurement instrument of the participants’ overall evaluation of learning outcomes was due to the fact that TOEIC test score had been widely accepted as a graduation threshold in most of higher education institutes in Taiwan. At the participants’ institute, all English majors are required to pass a TOEIC test of 650 points or higher before the end of their senior year.

TABLE 1:
THE DETAILS OF THE POPULATION

Year	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Freshmen	13	29	42
Sophomore	4	32	36
Junior	6	32	38
Senior	7	41	48
Total	30	134	164

Based on the literature review, the survey questionnaires were developed (see Appendix A). The self-developed survey questionnaires were intended to explore English majors’ experiences with and perceptions of out-of-class English learning. The developed questionnaires were reviewed by three field experts and pilot-tested by 20 students (not included in this study). The survey questionnaires were further revised based on the suggestions from the three experts and the 20 students. The survey questionnaires were forced-choice items because forced-choice questions motivate respondents to answer (De Vaus, 1991).

The purpose of the survey questionnaires was to explore the experiences with and the perceptions of the participants’ out-of-class English learning. The questionnaire consisted of three sections, the first of which was intended to elicit demographic information on the respondents. The second section asked respondents to assess their experiences with out-of-class English learning. Section three focused on perceptions of out-of-class English learning. To further understand the successful English learners’ detailed perceptions of and experiences with out-of-class English learning, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

B. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated, analyzing the experiences with and perspectives of the English majors’ out-of-class English learning. To further understand the successful English majors’ perspectives of and experiences with out-of-class English learning, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding. That is, I aimed for detailed descriptions of the individual cases. All of the interviews were conducted in Chinese, which is the native language of the participants and the investigator. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes. None of the interviewees were blind as to the nature of the interviews. They were told prior to participating that they were being further interviewed to present their perspectives of and experiences with out-of-class English learning; they were not told, however, what types of results were expected. Each interview was transcribed and translated by the investigator. The transcripts, in Chinese and English, were sent back to the interviewees to further confirm the content via e-mail.

To analyze the transcribed data, the interview transcripts were first broken down into parts based on the interview protocols (see Appendix B). The parts were reviewed repeatedly in order to be condensed and reduced. The reduced data were then coded. Once coding was saturated and completed, codes were reviewed and further linkages among the codes were revealed. Finally, patterns of the linkages and themes were developed to represent the interviewees' perspectives, and quotations were added to emphasize the interviewees' views.

IV. RESULTS

A. Vocational College English Majors' Out-of-class English-learning Experiences

As shown in table 2, the majority (96.4%) of the English majors conducted certain out-of-class activities. 67.7% of all respondents revealed that they either sometimes or frequently participated in out-of-class English activities; only 3.7% of all respondents had never conducted any form of out-of-class English-learning activities. Among those who had conducted their activities, up to 41.4% did so over the weekdays.

TABLE 2:
ENGLISH MAJORS' OUT-OF-CLASS ENGLISH LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Factor	Choices	N	%
The frequency of out-of-class English learning(n=164)	always	6	3.7
	usually	19	11.6
	sometimes	86	52.4
	rarely	47	28.7
	never	6	3.7
Time for conducting out-of-class English learning(n=157)	weekdays	65	41.4
	weekends	52	33.1
	Summer/winter vacation	17	10.8
	Other time	23	14.6
Motivation for conducting out-of-class English learning(please mark everything that applies)	Request from parents	32	20.4
	Suggestions from teachers	15	9.6
	Preparation for English certificates	113	72.0
	For future job requirement	36	22.9
	For study-abroad	45	28.7
	For self-improvements	82	52.2
	Personal interests	51	32.5
Location for conducting out-of-class English learning(please mark everything that applies)	As leisure activities to spend time	27	17.2
	School	48	31.0
	Cramming school	45	29.0
	At home	126	81.3
	Off-campus libraries	25	16.1
Skill(s) that have been emphasized(Please mark everything that applies)	Others	3	1.9
	Listening	107	66.0
	Speaking	61	37.7
	reading	105	64.8
	writing	41	25.3
	Translation	33	20.4

Regarding the motivation for conducting out-of-class English-learning activities, 28.2% of those who had done so expressed that the most important reason was to prepare for tests, followed by improving English proficiency (20.4%). In terms of the location for conducting out-of-class English-learning activities, most of the English majors (51.0%) stated that they did so at home. Among the out-of-class English-learning activities, 30.8% emphasized listening skills, followed by reading skills (30.3%). Speaking, writing and translation-related activities were comparatively not as popular as listening and reading activities.

Table 3 shows that listening to English songs was the most popular activities among the choices. Just under two-thirds (61.5%) of those who chose listening to English songs as their out-of-class English-learning activity believed that it was effective in helping improve their English proficiency. The second most popular activity was vocabulary memorization. Over half (56.4%) of those who chose vocabulary memorization as their out-of-class English activity expressed that vocabulary memorization was effective in improving their English-learning outcomes.

TABLE 3:
OUT-OF-CLASS ENGLISH ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY ENGLISH MAJORS.

Learning outcome Way of out-of-class English learning	Very good	Good	Fair	Bad	Very bad	Number
Listening to English songs	15(14.4%)	49(47.1%)	37(35.6%)	3(2.9%)	0	104
Vocabulary memorization	12(12.8%)	41(43.6%)	37(39.4%)	2(2.1%)	2(2.1%)	94
Watching English movies	18(20.7%)	38(43.7%)	31(35.6%)	0	0	87
Practice English listening for English proficiency tests	17(24.3%)	39(55.7%)	12(17.1%)	2(2.9%)	0	70
Practice English reading for English proficiency tests	17(24.6%)	37(53.6%)	12(17.4%)	3(4.3%)	0	69
Reading English magazines	13(20.0%)	29(44.6%)	21(32.3%)	2(3.1%)	0	65
Singing English songs	16(26.7%)	19(31.7%)	25(41.7%)	0	0	60
Listening to English stories or CD	9(15.8%)	22(38.6%)	24(42.1%)	2(3.5%)	0	57
Listening to English radio programs	3(5.8%)	21(40.4%)	24(46.2%)	4(7.7%)	0	52
Sending messages in English (including text messages, online instant messages, Facebook messages etc.)	11(21.2%)	20(38.5%)	20(38.5%)	1(1.9%)	0	52
Browsing English websites	8(18.2%)	18(40.9%)	14(31.8%)	4(9.1%)	0	44
Practicing English speaking with others	16(39.0%)	14(34.1%)	11(26.8%)	0	0	41
Attending cramming school	7(17.1%)	20(48.8%)	13(31.7%)	1(2.4%)	0	41
Reading English novels	7(18.9%)	16(43.2%)	11(29.7%)	3(8.1%)	0	37
Read-aloud English articles	6(16.2%)	22(59.5%)	9(24.3%)	0	0	37
Watching English news	7(20.0%)	17(48.6%)	10(28.6%)	1(2.9%)	0	35
Reading English news	2(7.1%)	10(35.7%)	14(50.0%)	1(3.6%)	1(3.6%)	28
Memorizing idioms or articles	5(17.9%)	11(39.6%)	11(39.6%)	1(3.6%)	0	28
Writing mails in English	9(39.1%)	4(17.4%)	9(39.1%)	1(4.3%)	0	23
Reading English comic books	2(16.7%)	5(41.7%)	3(25.0%)	2(16.7%)	0	12
Keeping a diary in English	1(9.1%)	4(36.4%)	6(54.5%)	0	0	11
Study-abroad	4(66.7%)	1(16.7%)	1(16.7%)	0	0	6
Hiring tutors	1(20.0%)	3(60.6%)	1(20.0%)	0	0	5
Attending working holidays abroad	2(66.9%)	1(33.3%)	0	0	0	3

More than 50% (64.4%) of those who conducted out-of-class English-learning activities revealed that watching English movies yielded good results in their language learning. An interesting phenomenon was that English certificate-related activities came in the forth and fifth places among the participants' choices, whereas those activities were considered very effective regarding learning outcomes from the perspectives of the participants (80.0% and 78.3% respectively). For the majority of the English majors, learning effectiveness of English proficiency tests was not a decisive factor in conducting out-of-class English-learning activities. Interest and entertainment-related activities seemed to dominate most English majors' choices.

Table 4 showed that 85% of those who conducted out-of-class English-learning activities decided for themselves how they wanted to pursue out-of-class English learning. Whenever they encountered difficulties and problems, they usually went to their teachers or friends for help and suggestions. Finally, when they were asked whether out-of-class activities had had a positive effect on their in-class learning, 60.8% of those who conducted out-of-class English-learning activities agreed.

TABLE 4:
PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF OUT-OF-CLASS ENGLISH LEARNING ON IN-CLASS LEARNING

Factor	Choices	N	%
How do you make decisions of the methods for out-of-class English learning? (Please mark everything that applies).	Recommendation by teachers	23	14.2
	Recommendation by friends	15	9.3
	Your own decision	136	84.0
	Others	1	.6
How do you solve the problems encountered?	Seek for help from teachers	88	56.4
	Look for solutions on your own	87	55.8
	Ignore the problems	6	3.8
	Others	2	1.3
Out-of-class English learning is helpful (N=166)	Agree	101	60.8
	Fair	61	36.7
	Not agree	4	2.4

Overall, the results from Table 1, 2, and 3 showed that out-of-class English-learning activities were generally well-received by the majority of the English majors, and that listening to English songs and memorizing vocabulary were significantly more popular than any other activities among the respondents' choices. Finally, the results appeared to emphasize that out-of-class English-learning activities yielded positive effects on the participants' in-class learning.

B. Vocational College English Majors' Out-of-class English-learning Perspectives

Table 5 shows that the majority of the English majors believed it was necessary to conduct out-of-class English-learning activities ($M=4.21$) because out-of-class English-learning activities were helpful in improving individual English proficiency ($M=4.29$), passing English proficiency tests ($M=4.12$), and promoting learning motivation ($M=4.08$). The majority of the English majors did not consider out-of-class English-learning activities a waste of time.

TABLE 5:
ENGLISH MAJORS' OUT-OF-CLASS ENGLISH LEARNING PERSPECTIVES

	Mean	SD
1. You are supposed to conduct out-of-class English learning with or without taking English classes.	4.21	.673
2. Out-of-class English learning is helpful in improving your English proficiency.	4.29	.656
3. Out-of-class English learning helps you pass English related certificates.	4.12	.783
4. Out-of-class English learning helps improve your motivation for learning English.	4.08	.772
5. Out-of-class English learning is considered a waste of time.	1.74	.769
6. It is flexible to conduct out-of-class English learning.	4.14	.673
7. Out-of-class English learning resources are diverse.	4.27	.657
8. There is no pressure when it comes to out-of-class English learning.	3.94	.868
9. It is not easy to persist in out-of-class English learning.	3.20	1.051
10. Compared to in-class English curriculum, out-of-class English learning is more structured.	3.26	.831
11. Out-of-class English learning is more fun than in-class English classes.	3.86	.776
12. Out-of-class English learning is considered more important than in-class English learning.	3.54	.828
13. Out-of-class English learning is more beneficial than in-class English learning.	3.57	.721
14. Out-of-class English learning helps you with your in-class English learning.	4.01	.735
15. It is necessary to set your study plan for out-of-class English learning.	3.66	.843
16. It is necessary to have you guided for the out-of-class English learning.	3.08	.926
17. It is more efficient to have a study partner for your out-of-class English learning.	3.67	.946
18. To conduct out-of-class English learning, English proficiency is considered a prerequisite.	3.92	1.021
19. Compared to non-English majors, it is more important and urgent for English majors to conduct out-of-class English learning.	3.67	.971
20. The learning outcomes of out-of-class English learning cannot be easily measured.	3.09	.928

The majority of the English majors found it flexible to conduct out-of-class English-learning activities ($M=4.14$), and they felt stressed about learning compared with in-class learning ($M=3.94$). They believed that it was more difficult to persist with out-of-class activities in the long run ($M=3.20$). In addition, most of the English majors agreed that there were a variety of English-learning resources available on the market ($M=4.27$).

The results revealed that out-of-class English-learning activities were more fun to learn ($M=3.86$) and more important ($M=3.54$) compared with the participants' in-class English learning. Further, the participants believed that out-of-class English-learning outcomes were indeed helpful in promoting their in-class English learning ($M=4.01$). That is, learning outcomes from out-of-class English learning were crucial to supporting the participants' progress in class and their persistence over time.

In conducting out-of-class English-learning activities, the participants believed that planning was prerequisite ($M=3.66$) and that study groups would also help promote out-of-class English learning ($M=3.67$). The participants in this study revealed that fluent English proficiency was necessary to conduct out-of-class English learning ($M=3.92$). They tended to agree that English majors should conduct more out-of-class English learning than should non-English majors ($M=3.67$). Finally, the participants agreed that the learning outcomes from out-of-class English learning could not be easily measured ($M=3.09$). Overall, the participants believed that out-of-class English learning was necessary and beneficial, especially for English majors.

C. Successful Vocational College English Majors' Out-of-class English-learning Experiences and Perspectives

Through semi-structured interviews, the eight successful English majors' out-of-class English-learning experiences and perspectives were further explored. Table 6 shows the demographic information on the eight participants.

The semi-structured interview protocols were based on the research questions (see Appendix B). To further explore the differences between the successful English majors and the rest, the results from the surveys were considered crucial to further revealing the successful English majors' underlying thoughts and beliefs.

TABLE 6:
THE DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH MAJORS

Pseudonym	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Year	Senior	Senior	Senior	Senior	Senior	Senior	Freshman	Freshman
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female
TOEIC score	790	825	820	815	795	760	755	755

Several themes emerged from the interviews with the successful English majors: 1) Out-of-class English learning helps the students prepare for English proficiency tests; 2) the students incorporate online resources into out-of-class English learning; 3) they emphasize listening and reading activities; and 4) the students further their personal interests.

All of the eight successful English majors conducted out-of-class English learning and were able to maintain that as part of their daily routines. When asked to comment on why they conducted out-of-class English learning, the responses were generally positive and centered on improving English proficiency and preparing for English proficiency tests.

Six out of the eight interviewees revealed that they were motivated to conduct out-of-class English learning because they wanted to improve their English proficiency test scores. It was obvious that their goals were clearly set and were test-oriented.

Out-of-class English learning could help me prepare for my TOEIC exam. Plus, I would like to study abroad in the future. I believe that practicing my English is important. My TOEIC score is 790 points now. I would like to reach at least 900 points before I graduate in June. (Student A)

You definitely need to study English out of classes if you would like to achieve a certain level of English proficiency. The classes at school do not necessarily focus on or include English proficiency test-related skills, so you would have to be on your own if you would like to see improvement on your tests or even develop English learning as an interest. (Student B)

I started my study because I had only 510 points when I first took the TOEIC test. I was so upset because English majors should at least achieve at least 750 points in their sophomore year. After that, I started to plan my own out-of-class English learning while attending a cramming program for the TOEIC test. (Student C)

I conducted out-of-class English learning simply because I wanted to improve my TOEIC score. I know that I could have a better job if I have a good TOEIC score...in-class English is not enough if you would like to polish your English skills. (Student F)

All of the interviewees responded that they had incorporated online resources into their out-of-class English learning because of the great variety. Unlike the English textbooks, the online resources were more interesting and more related to their day-to-day interests.

To practice my speaking skills, I use Skype to talk to my net-friends from around the world. With a click, the world is simply like a small village. Everything is so available. Aside from *Skype*, I also have a *Facebook* account that I can use to send messages to my friends from different countries. Talking in English is really different from the in-class exercises (in-class English tests). If you want to be able to use English, you really need to talk (with emphasis) in English first. (Student A)

I usually listen to online English radio programs, such as *ICRT*, to practice my listening skill. And, *YouTube* is also a great choice if you like to watch clips on particular topics. I like out-of-class English learning because I can pick the topics that interest me, and learning is not confined in any way. I can do that at any time and any place. Learning is supposed to be fun. Plus, English learning nowadays is very convenient because of easy access to lots of resources online. (Student C)

To make myself more competitive regarding English proficiency, I watch *CNN* news every day. *CNN* news is a great way to improve my listening skill. Besides that, I have a social exchange account online, a *Facebook* account. *Facebook* provides me wonderful opportunities to get to know people from English-speaking countries. I believe that speaking with native speakers of English will help me improve my speaking skill. (Student E)

Most of the interviewees reported favorably on listening and reading activities. Only one of the interviewees conducted speaking activities because he had friends from around the world that he occasionally chatted with. *Facebook* and *YouTube* were widely accepted as resources for conducting out-of-class English learning. To the interviewees, listening and reading activities were easier to conduct. Furthermore, the TOEIC test does not include speaking test, which might have directed them to focus more on listening and reading activities.

Since TOEIC test focuses on reading and listening tests, I tend to focus more on those two parts. Plus, it was difficult to find someone that you can practice speaking with for long. Of course, I met friends online and talked to them. But, those social exchange communications usually do not last for long. (Student B)

Speaking is definitely an important skill. But, without solid foundation in reading and listening, it is difficult to produce appropriate and effective output in speaking. I love to talk in English. For now, I would simply focus on listening and reading. (Student C)

There are speaking resources available online. But, you would have to pay for the service. I think I have to practice my listening and reading for now...speaking is another level of advancement when I am good enough in English. I expect myself to be able to really speak fluent English in the future. (Student E)

Based on reports from all interviewees, it was obvious that they were motivated to conduct out-of-class English-learning activities because of personal interest and that they had been doing out-of-class English learning for a period of time. It was a common thread that all of the interviewees started their out-of-class learning in preparation for English proficiency-related tests and that they all ended up keeping out-of-class English learning as an interest they developed over time.

English learning shouldn't be separated from one's real life. So, I try to incorporate my day-to-day topics into my English learning. I surf on the Internet every day, and I learn English online as well. Gradually, you feel like English learning is part of your life...it is even better if you can find someone to work with you as a team. (Student B)

I love my own out-of-class English learning because it gives me information about what I am interested in. English helps you explore the world around you, and it provides you updated news. I love exploring the world in my own way. Learning is not as boring as you think if you develop an interest in it. (Student C)

It is great to use English in a practical way. We always learn how to take tests but not really about how to use the language appropriately and effectively. Being able to really use English makes me more curious about what people from different cultures think. Without English, I wouldn't be able to communicate with them. (Student D)

I always know that English proficiency provides an individual comparative edge, which is especially important for graduates from technology universities. I need to get ready for my future employment...English is fun to learn. What I learn from out-of-class contexts really helps improve my in-class tests. But, I would consider out-of-class learning more important because it paves the way for your lifelong learning. (Student F)

In order to improve my TOEFL score, I realized that I needed to do something extra to help me practice. Out-of-class English learning gradually became part of my routine because I was determined to make it happen. During the process, I developed the passion for learning English. Learning English was no longer for grades, but for my own interest. (Student H)

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To conclude, the present study is preliminary a research study on vocational college English majors' out-of-class English learning, but its relevance to motivation and autonomy can also be seen. A major finding is that the successful vocational college English majors were more motivated and interested in conducting out-of-class English learning because all of them had developed out-of-class English learning as part of their learning routines, in contrast with their peers. The results indicate that the successful English majors participated more aggressively in their English learning. Based on the successful English majors' accounts, it can be reasoned that their motivation and interest support and persist them in learning over time. The findings confirm those of Eslami-Rasekh, Rezaei, and Davoudi (2012) that motivation will eventually lead to better learning performance. That is, the better performance of the successful English majors seems to indicate that their motivation and interest in out-of-class English learning played a crucial role in their English learning journey. As emphasized by the successful English majors, out-of-class learning proved to be a useful skill for helping to increase their motivation and learning outcomes. More importantly, their out-of-class learning motivation mainly derived from personal interests and determination. However, exactly how their interests were generated in the first place remained unclear.

For about one-third of the vocational college English majors, out-of-class English learning was initiated to help improve their English proficiency test scores because they believed that out-of-class English learning would help improve their learning outcomes on English standardized tests. In other words, the reason for conducting out-of-class activities was test-oriented. Despite this motivation, a small percentage of the English majors started their out-of-class English learning because they wanted to develop their interest in English. As for the out-of-class English activities, listening to English songs and watching movies were the most popular among their choices. It was shown that the students' out-of-class English learning was focused more on entertainment-related activities. As indicated in prior research (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), extracurricular activities, namely out-of-class activities, that incorporate learners' personal interests are significant for increasing learning opportunities beyond regular in-class settings. Enjoyable learning activities based on learners' interests can help maintain and increase learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). Eventually, motivation would help improve students' learning outcomes.

For most of the vocational college English majors, their out-of-class English learning did not provide them expected outcomes. According to the records at the time of participation, only 20 students had a TOEIC score of 750 points or higher. Although out-of-class studying was common among the participants, it did not provide most of them with significant improvements to their English learning outcomes. As the survey results indicated, learning effectiveness was not a decisive factor for most of the English majors when it came to out-of-class English learning. Unlike the successful English majors, most of the English majors did not conduct their out-of-class English learning as goal-oriented and determined as the successful English majors.

Among the successful English majors, five of them (Student A, B, E, F, H) started their out-of-class English learning to prepare for English proficiency tests, such as the TOEIC and the GEPT. Most of the successful English majors tried to improve their English proficiency by conducting entertainment-related activities, such as watching movies or listening to music. Prensky (2007) noted that integrating entertainment-related activities and learning would help improve learning outcomes. Compared with the rest of the English majors, the successful English learners incorporated their English learning into their leisure activities, set a goal, and persisted over time.

Based on the results of the study, most of the successful English majors tended to focus their out-of-class learning on listening and reading related activities, such as listening to English radio programs, watching *CNN* news, and reading English magazines. The major differences between the successful English majors and the rest were that the successful English majors were more capable of persisting with their out-of-class English learning over time, set feasible goals

more aggressively, and continuously revised their actions to achieve what they had planned. Betts and Kercher (1999) noted that autonomous learning is not an easy task. Pierson (1996) and Chan (2001) emphasized that successful autonomous learning relied greatly on learners' motivation and attitudes. It appears that the key to successful learning outcomes lie in learner's motivation and persistence over time. The participants (Students A, B, G, H) showed great motivation to improve their English proficiency through out-of-class English-learning activities; students B and G were interested in English learning when they started their out-of-class activities. The common threat among the successful English majors was that they were able to maintain their out-of-class English learning over time. However, it is also worth noting that motivation is constantly and dynamically changing. As language instructors, it is important that we be aware of this reality and be flexible about making necessary adjustments to help increase learners' motivation.

Another finding also suggested that the successful English majors were more capable of setting feasible goals and continuing to work toward their goals. The successful English majors were motivated because they had goals to work towards; they developed their own learning styles and extended their in-class learning into their day-to-day lives (HoffMacan & Shahani, 1990). More importantly, out-of-class learning activities should not be separated from learners' in-class learning; the successful English majors noted that out-of-class learning indeed helped them progress significantly in classes.

As revealed by the English majors, study groups and guidance were needed to help promote out-of-class English learning. Unlike the successful English majors, most of the English majors needed to rely on their peers or teachers to further guide their out-of-class learning because out-of-class learning is usually not as structured and organized as the in-class curriculum. Although most of the English majors felt the need to conduct out-of-class English learning, they were somewhat discouraged by their perceived proficiency as they reported. According to the survey results, the English majors believed that fluent English proficiency was a prerequisite for conducting out-of-class English learning. The results further demonstrated that encouragement, support and instruction were needed to help promote out-of-class learning.

The present findings confirm previous evidence that motivation is positively correlated to learning performance (Gardner, 2001; Hsiao, Tu, & Chung, 2012). The successful English majors seemed to more aggressively conduct their out-of-class English-learning activities because they were more motivated to do so. Compared with their peers, the successful English majors were more capable of persisting with their out-of-class English-learning activities and continuously setting feasible goals. Being able to extend in-class learning into their day-to-day lives was crucial for the successful English majors to not only customize their learning but also integrate learning in a way that could be developed as a hobby and an interest over time. In a macro view of education, learning is meant to develop an individual's life-long learning skills. Learning how to learn is more crucial and significant to an individual's development over time. As a language teacher, it is important to develop learners' autonomous learning skills, which will benefit them in the long run.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers have dramatic impacts on students' learning (Alton, 2006; Covill, 2011). If teachers could act as coordinators, facilitators and promoters to help learners develop autonomous learning in out-of-class contexts, long-term learning outcomes can be reached. In addition, it is suggested teaching materials be integrated with students' interests so that learning can be more fun and enjoyable (Dörnyei, 2001). Online learning resources are recommended for use as homework assignments outside of regular class sessions because they provide a variety of topics for students to choose from.

Future research is obviously required, and an important area for future research in the years to come will be in how to motivate low-achievers to conduct out-of-class learning so that their interests can be developed over time. Finally, it is hoped that the study will shed some light on several issues or at least pave the way for new research projects that will help low-achievers find more appropriate and personalized ways to learn foreign languages in vocational college settings.

APPENDIX A. OUT-OF-CLASS ENGLISH LEARNING SURVEY

Part 1: Background Information

(Please mark inside box)

1. Program: Day program Night Program
2. Year: Freshmen Sophomore Junior Senior
3. Gender: Female Male
4. Certificates obtained:
 - TOEIC Grade:
 - GEPT elementary level: First Stage Second Stage
 - GEPT intermediate level: First Stage Second Stage
 - GEPT High-intermediate level: First Stage Second Stage
 - Others: Grade:

Plan to obtain the following certificates in the future: GEPT Level: _____

TOEIC TOEFL Others: (Please name)

Please leave your name, cell phone number, and e-mail for further interviews. Thank you!

Name:

Cell number:

E-mail:

Part 2: Experiences of out-of-class English learning

1. When did you start to learn English (including any informal out-of-class English learning, such as attending cramming school)

Kindergarten First-second grade Third-fourth grade Fifth-sixth grade The summer before attending junior high school Junior high school

2. Where did you first start your English learning?

At school Cramming school Tutoring Self-studying at home Overseas Others

3. Have you ever conducted any out-of-class English learning (If **never**, please go to Question 8.)

always often sometimes rarely never (Please briefly describe the reason if you answer "**never**".)

4. When do you usually conduct your out-of-class English learning?

weekdays weekends summer and winter vacation other time:

5. What is (are) the primary motivation(s) for your out-of-class English learning?(Please mark everything that applies to you)

Requests from your parents Suggestions from teachers Preparation for English certificates For your future job requirement For study-abroad For self-improvement Personal interests As leisure activities to spend time Others (Please explain):

6. Where do you usually conduct out-of-class English learning? (Please mark everything that applies to you.)

At school At cramming school At home At off-campus libraries Others

7. What are the resources that you use for out-of-class English learning? (Please mark everything that applies to you)

On the Internet Self-learning software On TV Watching movies Listening to radio programs CD/MP3
 Books Magazines Newspaper Dictionary Attending cramming school From peers From foreign friends
 Others _____

8. Which skill(s) do you emphasize more? (Please mark everything that applies to you.)

Listening Speaking Reading Writing Translation

9. What are your ways of out-of-class English learning? How are the perceived learning outcomes?

Ways of Out-of-class English Learning	Perceived Learning Outcomes
<input type="checkbox"/> Listen to English songs	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Listening to English radio programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Listening to English stories or CD	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Practicing English listening for English proficiency tests (includes TOEIC or GEPT etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Practicing English reading for English proficiency tests (including TOEIC or GEPT tests, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading English novels	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading English comic books	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading English magazines	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading English newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Browsing English websites	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Watching English movies	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Watching English news	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Practicing English speaking	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Singing English songs	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Read-aloud English articles	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Memorizing idioms or articles	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary memorization only	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Writing letters or e-mails in English	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Sending messages in English (including text messages, online instant messages, Facebook messages etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Keeping a diary in English.	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Attending cramming school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Hiring tutors.	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Joining study-abroad programs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Attending working holidays abroad	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Others	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/> Very bad

10. How do you make decisions of the methods for out-of-class English learning?

Recommendation from teachers Recommendation from friends Your own decision Others

11. Have you encountered any difficulties in the process of out-of-class English learning? Yes No

If so, how do you solve your problem(s)?

- Seeking suggestions and advices from others
- Looking for solutions yourself
- Ignore the problems
- others _____

12. Does out-of-class English learning help your **in-class** learning in any way?

- Yes
- Somehow
- Not at all

Part 3: Perceptions of out-of-class English Learning

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. You are supposed to conduct out-of-class English learning with or without taking English classes.					
2. Out-of-class English is helpful in improving your English proficiency.					
3. Out-of-class English learning helps you pass English related certificates.					
4. Out-of-class English learning helps improve your motivation for learning English.					
5. Out-of-class English learning is considered a waste of time.					
6. It is flexible to conduct out-of-class English learning.					
7. Out-of-class English learning resources are diverse.					
8. There is no pressure when it comes to out-of-class English learning.					
9. It is not easy to persist in out-of-class English learning.					
10. Compared with in-class English curriculum, out-of-class English learning is more structured.					
11. Out-of-class English learning is more fun than in-class English classes.					
12. Out-of-class English learning is considered more important than in-class English learning.					
13. Out-of-class English learning is more beneficial than in-class English learning.					
14. Out-of-class English learning helps you with your in-class English learning.					
15. It is necessary to set your study plan for out-of-class English learning.					
16. It is necessary to have someone guide you with your out-of-class English learning.					
17. It is more efficient to have a study partner for your out-of-class English learning.					
18. To conduct out-of-class English learning, English proficiency is considered a prerequisite.					
19. Compared with non-English majors, it is more important and urgent for English majors to conduct out-of-class English learning.					
20. The learning outcomes of out-of-class English learning cannot be easily measured.					

APPENDIX B. THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

1. What are your perceptions of out-of-class English learning?
2. What are your experiences with out-of-class English learning?
3. How has out-of-class English learning influenced your English learning?

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