

## STEPS IN ADVISING TRANSLATION STUDENTS TO LEARN ENGLISH AUTONOMOUSLY

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**Abstract.** *Many translation students feel that their English is inadequate and are unhappy with their proficiency level and the grades they get in their English courses. They feel that course materials and class activities are insufficient for developing their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The article proposes a model of a self-study program to help students practice English on their own. The self-study program consists of a plan for self-study, with deadlines and time slots for developing the required skill(s), a weekly and monthly study schedule, online activities for developing the target skill according to each student's needs and her proficiency level. The advisor gives sample online activities and helps students assess their EFL skills using online tests. The students keep a weekly log of their progress. At the end of the semester, they answer a questionnaire-survey to assess the self-study program and find out areas of improvement and weaknesses.*

**Key words:** *student autonomy, self-study, translation study, online activities, online tests*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Self-access and language advising are relatively recent and increasingly common types of language support offered in schools and tertiary institutions around the world (Reinders, 2007). There has also been a growing recognition of the importance of learner autonomy and the role of individual learners in directing their own learning process, both inside and outside the classroom (Allford & Pachler, 2007). A review of the literature has shown that self-access language learning has several advantages. The students evaluated it positively, and considered it a means of learning English and developing independent learning skills. It is a student-centered and highly flexible approach. It can be used as a complement or alternative to traditional face-to-face learning, especially in situations where existing student needs are too great or diverse to be met by traditional methods (Reinders (2007). It brings together language learning and independent learning, enables the student to improve both linguistic proficiency and independent learning skills, and provides the resources and support for the learner support (Morrison, 2008).

To support self-learning and learner autonomy, prior studies have used several technologies and non-technology-based techniques and strategies. For example, Meyer, Fisher & Pearl (2007) used a self-study assignment which was a requirement for a life-span human development course with 278 students. Results showed an overall positive evaluation of the assignment. The majority of the students indicated that the assignment increased their self-understanding, understanding of course concepts, and ability to apply those concepts. The assignments made the course more meaningful. Similar results were found with three self-assessment activities: Writing letters to the instructor, keeping a

daily language learning log, and preparing an English skills portfolio, designed for university-level English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students (McNamara & Deane, 1995).

Students enrolled in a high-beginner EFL class used five websites for a homework assignment and self-study. They had an overall positive attitude towards using the teacher-selected websites and reported that learning English through ESL/EFL websites was interesting, and that the teaching strategies used were effective and necessary. Results of a follow-up study conducted a year later supported the original findings (Kung & Chuo, 2002).

In another study, Thai university students enrolled in an English Foundation course used a Course Management System integrated into a traditional face-to-face class indicated that the course management system played a significant role in creating and developing four aspects of learner autonomy: Autonomous perception, autonomous behavior, autonomous strategy, and interdependence (Sanprasert, 2010).

Reinders (2007) also implemented an extensive monitoring system of student learning, that allowed for the provision of more tailored language support. It was found that the electronic learning environment better prepared students for and guided them in their self-directed learning.

Murray (1999) proposed a model for creating a learning environment that facilitates learner autonomy based on a learning structure that required students to reflect on their second-language needs and interests, set their learning goals, devise projects to meet those goals, and self-assess their learning. The model was implemented in three multimedia lab classes of two content-based language courses of a sheltered immersion program for Japanese ESL students. The environment highlighted learner autonomy and the use of technology. Findings showed that the treatment promoted learner autonomy and enhanced motivation, metacognitive knowledge, and personal growth. Similar results were obtained with French second-language learners who worked independently with an interactive video program.

The need for self-access language learning and advising at the post-secondary level was highlighted by numerous studies in the literature. Over the past 15 years, the U.S. Department of Education has continuously reported the increasing need for developmental and remedial education at post-secondary institutions (Hollis, 2009). Similarly, undergraduate students of Spanish, using a self-access learning environment for the first time, possessed a significantly limited model of language learning strategies (Piper, 1994). Dickinson & Carver (1980) concluded that it is very difficult to get students to continue learning after finishing formal instruction, due to the complexities of language learning.

Like EFL students in other countries, Saudi students majoring in English-Arabic translation need remediation and developmental support in the classroom. Results of an exploratory study, conducted by the author, with 55 Saudi students at the college of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia showed that many freshman students feel that their English is inadequate and are unhappy with their proficiency level and the grades they get in their EFL courses. They feel that the course materials, textbooks and class activities are insufficient for developing their listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and/or spelling skills. They have limited opportunities to practice English with native speakers. Some request guidance in selecting material for extensive reading. They come to author's office during office hours or contact her by e-mail and ask how they can improve their English, in

general, and their listening, speaking, reading or writing skills, in particular (See Examples 1, 2, 3 & 4 in the Appendix).

To help translation students supplement class instruction with out-of-class self-study materials, the present study proposes a model for language advising and self-access language learning that could be used by instructors or advisors to increase learner responsibility and self-learning. It shows how academic advisors can help their advisees practice English out of class, on their own.

## 2. GUIDELINES FOR SELF-STUDY AND LANGUAGE ADVISING

The advisor may make a list of useful supplementary websites. Websites selected should focus on an overall skill such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and/or spelling or a specific skill or structure such as “*identifying main ideas*”, “*topic sentences*”, “*tenses*” or “*silent letter*”. Websites selected should provide definitions, explanations, examples, supplementary exercises for extra practice and instant feedback. Recommended websites should match the student’s proficiency level and contain enough material and items for assessment, practice and remediation. Several websites that target a particular skill or structure can be given.

Advisees can be also trained to search for websites on their own by enclosing the topic of interest such as “*tag questions*”, “*complex sentences*”, or “*phrasal verbs*” in quotation marks in the Google search box and by connecting search terms with Boolean operators such as “*and*”.

Based on a review of the literature on self-access and language advising, the following guidelines can be followed:

- Provide students with *methodological preparation*, where they can learn how to continue learning; *psychological preparation*, where they become confident in *controlling* their learning; and practice in *self-direction* (Dickinson & Carver (1980).
- *Provide guidance and optional tasks*. Lu (2010) integrated a self-access language learning (SALL) project into an ESL course to improve students' English, develop interest in computer-based self-learning and enhance learner autonomy. The participants reported that SALL would be less successful if treated as a compulsory learning task. To make SALL really helpful, teacher's guidance is indispensable, particularly in the initial stages.
- *Self-assessment accuracy*. Blanche & Merino (1989) indicated that self-assessment accuracy is a condition of learner autonomy. If students can assess their own performance accurately enough, they will not depend entirely on the opinions of teachers and, at the same time, they will be able to make teachers aware of their individual learning needs. Both teachers and researchers should keep in mind that foreign language learners' self-estimates may be influenced to a varying degree by the use of the Monitor.
- Define a curriculum for academic advising, derive advising goals and values from the institutional mission statement, assist advisees in developing higher-order thinking skills, create and organize situations that assist students in meeting learning goals, create dialogue between the student and advisor to effect changes in goals and values (Hemwall & Trachte 2005 & 1999).

- Develop four language-learning strategies: Strategies for coping with target language rules, receiving performance, producing performance, and organizing learning (Carver (1984).
- Include non-print materials. Results of a study with 969 students enrolled in an independent study course suggested that student motivation in print-based self-study courses can be improved by including non-print materials (Hotrabhavananda & Wedman, 1993).

## 2.1. The Self-study Materials and Tasks

The proposed self-study program is an individualized, technology-based language learning program. It is tailored to the needs and proficiency level of each advisee. Since each student at COLT owns a mobile phone, and most students can access the internet from home or from campus through the university wi fi, they can access the online tasks and websites from their smart phones, iPad or laptop anytime, anywhere and as many times as they need. The self-study program focuses of the following:

### 2.1.1. Setting a plan for self-study

First, the advisor helps each student set a plan for self-study with deadlines and time slots for developing the required skill(s). She also helps each student build a weekly, monthly and semester study schedules that show mid-term and final exams, holidays and breaks and university and college events (See Examples 5 & 6 in the Appendix).

### 2.1.2. Pre-practice self assessment

The advisor provides advisees with websites that include self-grading, interactive tests to help them assess their overall English proficiency level, their mastery of a specific skill or structure, and help them diagnose their own weaknesses. Online tests selected should depend on the students' needs and proficiency level. The following are examples:

- Test Your English Level: <http://www.world-english.org/test.htm>
- English Assessment Test: <http://englishenglish.com/englishtest.htm>
- Listening Placement Test:  
[http://www.peakenglish.com/placement\\_test/placementTest.jsp](http://www.peakenglish.com/placement_test/placementTest.jsp)
- Listening Placement Test: <http://www.act.org/compass/tests/esl.html>
- General listening quizzes: <http://www.esl-lab.com/>
- Grammar Quizzes by level: <http://a4esl.org/>
- Self-grading interactive grammar quizzes:  
<http://www.esltower.com/grammarquizzes.html>  
<http://englishmedialab.com/beginnervideos.html>
- Parts of Speech: <http://www.eslus.com/LESSONS/GRAMMAR/POS/pos.htm>
- Prepositions quiz: <http://a4esl.org/q/j/ck/mc-prepositions.html>
- Articles Quiz:  
[http://www.learn4good.com/languages/evrd\\_grammar/article\\_ex.htm](http://www.learn4good.com/languages/evrd_grammar/article_ex.htm)
- Diagnostic Grammar Test: [http://www.world-english.org/diagnostic\\_grammar.htm](http://www.world-english.org/diagnostic_grammar.htm).

### 2.1.3. For Listening and Speaking Self-study

The instructor advises the students to: (i) find a native-speaking partner online (on Facebook, MSN or Yahoo Messengers); (ii) use graded MP3 lessons; (iii) watch TV or online videos, take notes, record vocabulary and expressions while watching; and (iv) listen to podcasts. Activities and websites selected may target a specific skill such as pronunciation, listening comprehension, developing fluency or language functions. They may listen to British or American native speakers, to short or long conversations or academic lectures in a specific field such as business. The following are examples:

- Podcasts: <http://www.podbean.com/podcasts>
  - Graded listening and speaking lessons: <http://www.talkenglish.com>
  - Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab: <http://www.esl-lab.com/>
  - English Pronunciation/Listening:  
<http://www.international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation>  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/multimedia/pron>  
<http://funeasyenglish.com/american-english-pronunciation.htm>
  - Watch & Listen: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/general/>
  - Video English:  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1556\\_videoenglish\\_8](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1556_videoenglish_8)
- This Day in History (video): <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history.do>.

### 2.1.4. For Reading Self-study

The advisor may recommend specific software and websites that would help the students develop oral reading accuracy and fluency, reading comprehension, ability to identify main ideas, supporting details and organizational structure, and guessing meaning from context or extensive reading. For example:

- The advisor helps the students download one of the text-to-speech software available such as:  
<http://www.naturalreaders.com/index.htm>  
<http://www.text-to-speech-software.com/>  
<http://www.squidoo.com/text-speech-programs>  
<http://www.readonweb.com/>
- Students can do online reading comprehension exercises as in the following:
  - Finding main ideas: <http://elearn.mtsac.edu/amla/readingroom/Mainidea.htm>
  - Guessing word meaning from context:  
<http://elearn.mtsac.edu/amla/readingroom/context.htm>
  - Identifying details: <http://elearn.mtsac.edu/amla/readingroom/details.htm>
  - Reading Comprehension –Beginner:  
[http://www.readingmatrix.com/directory/pages/Reading\\_Comprehension\\_Beginner/](http://www.readingmatrix.com/directory/pages/Reading_Comprehension_Beginner/)
  - All you need to know about reading comprehension:  
<http://academic.cuesta.edu/acasupp/as/308.HTM>
- For extensive Reading, the advisor can recommend any of the following:
  - Reading ebooks over their smart phone, ipod, ipad, or itouch:
  - Read street and bus signs.
  - Many Books: <http://manybooks.net/>
  - Short Stories:  
[http://www.readingmatrix.com/directory/pages/Short\\_Stories/](http://www.readingmatrix.com/directory/pages/Short_Stories/)  
<http://www.englishclub.com/reading/short-stories.htm>

- 200 Reading topics:  
<http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/200/reading/index.htm>
- Online magazines and newspapers such as:  
<http://www.topics-mag.com/>  
<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/>
- NASA kids (art & stories):  
<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forkids/artsstories/index.html>
- This Day in History (text): <http://www.infoplease.com/dayinhistory>
- Online Almanac, Dictionaries, Encyclopedia:  
<http://www.factmonster.com/>  
<http://www.onelook.com/>  
<http://kids.britannica.com/>

#### 2.1.5. For Writing Self-study

The advisee may write a daily journal, use a blog such as [www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org), [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), [www.blog.com](http://www.blog.com), or post paragraphs in an online discussion forum such as <http://www.eslforum.com/> or <http://www.usingenglish.com/forum/>. The advisor may recommend websites that focus on a single writing subskill such as writing a thesis statement, a topic sentence, supporting details, cohesion and coherence, word choice, punctuation, loose, periodic and balanced sentences, sentence fragments and others. The following are examples:

- Paragraph writing: <http://esl.about.com/od/writingintermediate/a/paragraphs.htm>
- Descriptive paragraphs:  
[http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite\\_descriptive1.htm](http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite_descriptive1.htm)
- Narrative paragraphs: [http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite\\_narrative1.htm](http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite_narrative1.htm)
- Writing an essay: <http://esl.about.com/library/howto/htessay.htm>
- Writing a five-paragraph essay:  
<http://homeworktips.about.com/od/essaywriting/a/fiveparagraph.htm>
- Complex sentences:  
[http://esl.about.com/od/intermediatewriting/a/cplex\\_sentence.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/intermediatewriting/a/cplex_sentence.htm)
- Letter writing: [http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite\\_narrative1.htm](http://esl.about.com/library/writing/blwrite_narrative1.htm)
- Grammar checker:  
<http://www.grammarly.com/?gclid=CJWt1vfap60CFWIntAodRBTdlg>
- Spelling checker: <http://www.spellcheck.net/website-spellcheck/>
- Punctuation: <http://www.edufind.com/english/punctuation/index.php>  
<http://correctpunctuation.explicatus.info/>  
<http://www.englishclub.com/writing/punctuation.htm>
- Common grammar and usage mistakes: <http://www.englishchick.com/grammar/>.

#### 2.1.6. For Spelling Self-study

The advisor can recommend websites that provide spelling practice in specific spelling areas such as silent letters, double letters, vowel and consonant digraphs, spelling changes, spelling variants, homophones and others. The following are examples:

- [http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises\\_list/buchstaben.htm](http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises_list/buchstaben.htm)
- <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/interactive/literacy.html>
- Homophones: <http://www.bifroest.demon.co.uk/misc/homophones.html>

### 2.1.7. For Vocabulary Self-study

The students may use specific English internet websites that develop general vocabulary in categories such as animals, body parts, buildings, clothes, occupations, classroom objects, place names, countries and nationalities, household appliances, states and feelings, soccer and so on. They may also focus on a single aspect of vocabulary learning such as pronunciation, words commonly mispronounced, homonyms and homophones, synonyms and antonyms, prefixes, suffixes and roots, word families, compounds, idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, acronyms and abbreviations, American and British and formal and informal usage, and others. Websites may include:

- Graded self-Study vocabulary quizzes: <http://a4esl.org/q/h/vocabulary.html>
- Vocabulary exercises:  
[http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises\\_list/alle\\_words.htm](http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises_list/alle_words.htm)
- Collective noun list: <http://www.ojohaven.com/collectives/>
- Prefixes and suffixes:  
<http://www.advanced-english-grammar.com/prefixes-suffixes.html>
- Acronyms and abbreviations: <http://www.acronymfinder.com/>
- Idioms: <http://www.goenglish.com/Idioms.asp>  
[http://www.learn-english-today.com/idioms/idiom-categories/alpha-list\\_A.html](http://www.learn-english-today.com/idioms/idiom-categories/alpha-list_A.html)
- Phrasal verbs:  
<http://www.learn-english-today.com/phrasal-verbs/phrasal-verb-list.htm>  
<http://www.churchillhouse.com/english/exercises/phrasals/index.html>
- English Club: <http://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/index.htm>
- Ohio ESL: <http://www.ohiou.edu/esl/english/vocabulary.html>

The student can also make vocabulary cards to learn and review their vocabulary.

### 2.1.8. For Grammar Self-study

The students may use specific internet websites that include self-grading and interactive grammar quizzes, explain grammar rules, provide definitions, single structure exercises such as comparatives, conditionals, passives, quantifiers, modal verbs, a daily grammar lesson, error correction or remedial tasks. The following are examples:

- A daily grammar lesson: <http://www.training2you.com/information/443.php>  
<http://www.worldenglishclub.com/grammar/daily-grammar-lessons/pronouns-5>
- Articles: <http://www.world-english.org/articles.htm>  
<http://www.usingenglish.com/glossary/definite-article.html>  
[http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/grammar\\_list/artikel.htm](http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/grammar_list/artikel.htm)
- Questions: <http://english-zone.com/index.php?ID=1>
- Passive Voice: [http://online.ohlone.cc.ca.us/~mlieu/passive/what\\_h.html](http://online.ohlone.cc.ca.us/~mlieu/passive/what_h.html)
- Verb Tense Tutorial: <http://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/verbtenseintro.html>
- Rewriting sentences: <http://www.world-english.org/sentencerewriting.htm>
- Error correction: <http://www.world-english.org/correctingsentences.htm>  
[http://www.world-english.org/correct\\_mistakes.htm](http://www.world-english.org/correct_mistakes.htm)  
[http://www.world-english.org/correct\\_word\\_order.htm](http://www.world-english.org/correct_word_order.htm)
- Irregular verbs: <http://www.englishpage.com/irregularverbs/irregularverbs.html>
- Irregular nouns: <http://english-zone.com/spelling/plurals.html>
- Grammar Basics: <http://www.englishchick.com/grammar/>
- Comprehensive grammar website: <http://www.world-english.org/>

### 2.1.9. Study Skills and Self-improvement Guides

The advisor recommends websites that guide advisees to effective studying, test preparation and test-taking skills, time, stress and project management, positive thinking, and others, such as:

- <http://www.studygs.net>
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com>
- <http://www.positivearticles.com/>

### 2.1.10. Follow-up and Post-practice Self-Assessment

At the end of the self-study program, the students assess their listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary or spelling skills in English by themselves using the online interactive, self-graded tests mentioned above. Each student keeps a weekly log of her progress, skill development, test scores and amount of material covered.

## 2.2. Advisor's Role

The advisor serves as a facilitator. Her guidance is crucial in facilitating the use of online tasks to improve students' skills. She creates a positive and supportive learning environment. She responds to students' needs, answers their queries and provides technical support. She encourages the students to stop by her office or contact her by e-mail or through her chatbox if they have questions, problems or if they need technical support.

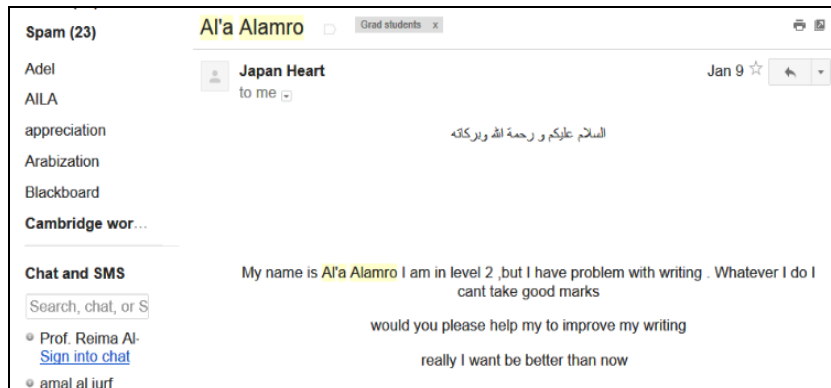
## 2.3. Reflections: Effects on Skill Development in EFL

At the end of the semester, the students answer a questionnaire-survey to find out the advantages, areas of improvement and weaknesses of the EFL self-study program. Students' responses and feedback through e-mail emphasized the effectiveness of the proposed online websites and tasks in improving the students' skills in EFL, as the proposed out-of-class independent practice is tailored to each student's needs, interest, convenience, pace of learning, proficiency level and target skill (See Example 7 in the Appendix).

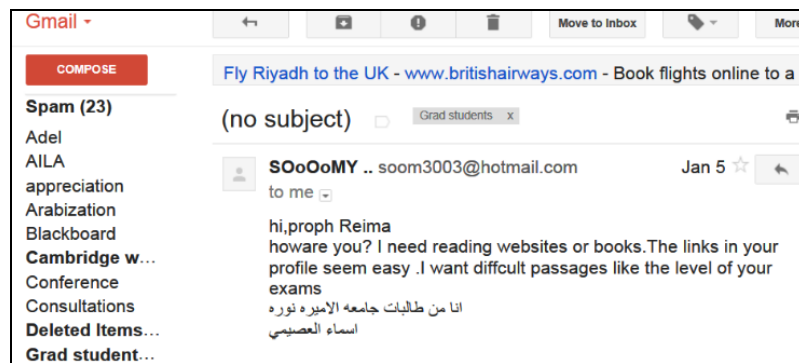
Hi Prof.Reema,  
 Thank you so much for inviting me to your forum. I'm so proud of knowing you and being a former student of yours.  
 I really believe that you are the best teacher i've ever met, and i feel that i need to be your student once more...  
 Prof. , i decided to improve my language through this summer break.i'm gonna be at level 5 the next semester which means that i will have 2 subjects on translation. In my view, to take subjects on translation must mean that i must be so good at understanding English language.but i think i'm facing some difficulties.  
 1-i don't know my real level at the language.  
 2-i don't know the best way to take the advantage of my enthusiasm.  
 You may want to ask me:Well Maha, what are you doing these days for your language?  
 You know,i'm just reading for pleasure....  
 I sometimes listen to the news in English, sometimes translate a few words a day but i quickly forget their meaning.  
 I think the way i read is not effective,or there is something wrong..  
 I want to feel that my language is improving...  
 please prof Reema help me,I need your advice..  
 -what should i do during this break?  
 -what's the most effective way to learn the English language?  
 -how can i know my real level?  
 -what should i do when i read a book? an article?...etc  
 -what should i do when i listen to something in English?  
 -should i read and listen in the same field?  
 -should i translate every single word?  
 -should i put every word (that i translated) in a sentence?  
 -how could i be well-prepared for level 5?  
  
 I will be so happy to follow your advice..  
 Maha..

Example 1 An e-mail showing a student's several linguistic needs

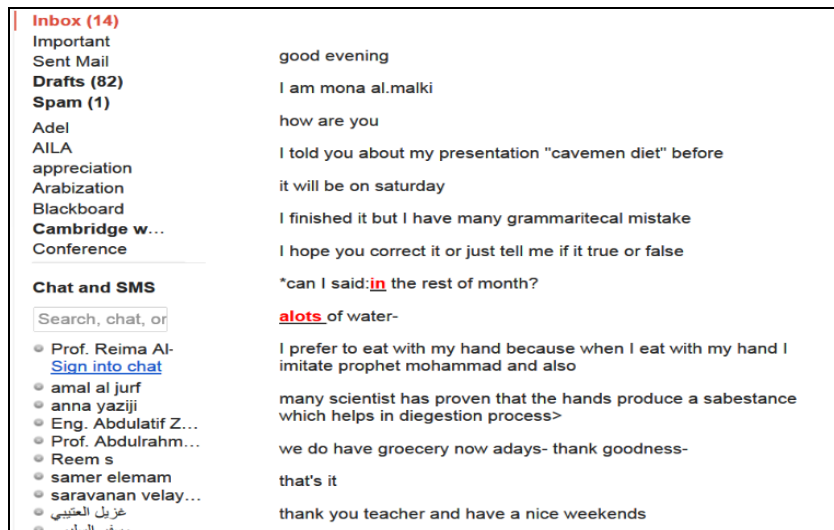




Example 2 An e-mail showing a student's writing needs



Example 3 An e-mail showing a student's reading needs



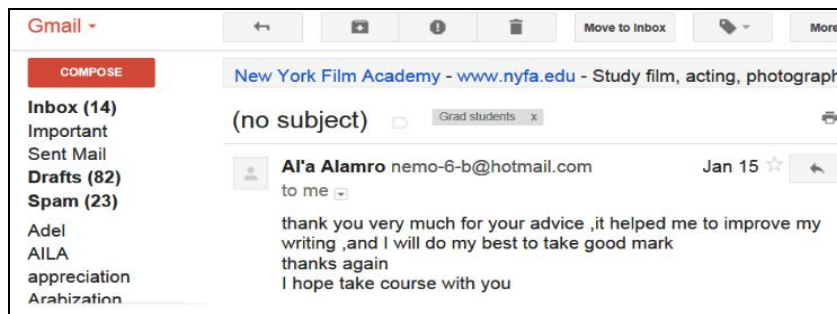
Example 4 An e-mail showing a student's grammar needs



Example 5 Monthly Calendar

	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Th	Fri
6-7 a.m.							
7-8 a.m.							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1 p.m.							
1-2							
2-3							
3-4							
4-5							
5-6							
6-7							
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							

Example 6 Weekly Schedule



Example 7 A student's reactions to the self-study program

## 7. CONCLUSION

Self-access and language advising are becoming increasingly common types of language support offered to students. To help Saudi translation students master English language skills independently, the present article recommended use of internet websites that the students can use on their own out of class. Use of supplementary online tasks has several advantages: The students can access them anytime, anywhere, whenever they need and they can perform them at their own convenience. They can monitor their own progress through self-graded interactive tests. Thus, become independent learners, in charge of their own learning.

In addition, the present study also recommends that a website repository (library) be created in which listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary and spelling websites are classified and stored according to specific skills or structures. The repository should have a comprehensive alphabetical index that facilitates the searching process and allows advisors and students' quick and easy access. The online repository should be interactive. Students should be able to post questions and receive answers and feedback to their queries. The English websites used should be constantly updated and reviewed, with new websites added and malfunctioning websites or those with broken links removed. Those are believed to enhance self-study by EFL students of all proficiency levels and needs.

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