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**LEARNER AUTONOMY  
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND  
FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER  
AUTONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF VIETNAM:  
NON-ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTIONS**

PHD DISSERTATION  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Learner autonomy (LA) is considered one of the important goals in language education (e.g., Ciekanski, 2007; Raya & Vieira, 2015) and in Vietnam, it needs promotion in higher education (T. Dang, 2012). Although there have been a number of investigations into LA in the Vietnamese context of tertiary education, the majority of them focus on the perceptions and performances of LA among English-major students (e.g., T. Dang, 2012; Q. Le, 2013; L. Nguyen, 2009; V. Q. Nguyen, 2019) or EFL teachers (e.g., V. T. Nguyen, 2011; N. T. Nguyen, 2014), on the potential for fostering LA among university students (e.g., Cao, 2018; Humphreys & Watt, 2014; T. Phan, 2015; L. Trinh, 2005), and on the relationship between LA and other constructs (e.g., H. Tran, 2019). However, the studies on the perceptions of LA among non-English-major students who account for the large proportion of students in Vietnam are scarce. Also, which internal and external factors that may support or hamper the development of LA, from those student's perspective, are under-researched.

Using mixed methods with convergent parallel design, this study was conducted to investigate non-English-major students' perceptions of LA in terms of its components and explore the factors that influence their exercise of LA. Also, the study aims to indicate whether there are any significant differences in their perceptions of LA's aspects among different groups of participants according to their genders, years of study, and grades that they got in the previous English course. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. A total of 1,565 students completed and returned the survey questionnaires and then 13 of whom participated in the interviews. Two types of data were collected at the same time before the mixed data analysis with the support of SPSS version 24.0, SmartPLS3, and SPSS AMOS for quantitative data and ATLAS.ti for qualitative data. The findings from two strands were compared, contrasted, and mixed to elucidate the research questions.

The study conceptualized LA as a construct manifesting itself in some components which were beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation and desire, metacognition [i.e., metacognitive knowledge (MK) and metacognitive skills (MS)], and freedom. The research found that the students had general but not really comprehensive understandings of LA and positive attitudes towards LA. Their conceptualization focused on proactive sense of autonomy and mainly from the psychological perspective, which highlighted the students' qualities such as motivation, desire, self-discipline, and self-regulation. They valued the importance of LA to their language learning process. Concerning the beliefs about teacher's roles, the students demonstrated a tendency towards a teacher-centered learning process even though to some extent, they raised awareness of responsibilities. The teacher played an indispensable role in their learning

process. In terms of motivation and desire, the students were highly motivated and desired to learn English as learning English interested them and they knew English was necessary for their life. Regarding metacognition, their MK about self and learning context was adequate but there was a lack of MK about language matters and learning process as well as MS (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating). Last but not least, the students had freedom to study English outside classrooms and team-work with classmates in class. They found it unfamiliar to approach their teacher for learning issues or make suggestions. Their out-of-class activities regarding English were prone to be for entertainment whereas the skill-based activities were not their focus.

The study encountered several statistical differences in the perceptions of LA's components among students with different genders, marks in the last English course, and years of training. To illustrate, males tended to be dependent on teachers than females. The students with higher marks appeared to have stronger motivation and desire to learn English than the lower achievers. The students in later years at university had tendency to be less competent in metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills than the students in earlier years.

Turning to the mediating or inhibiting factors, the students concurred that the most influential internal factors were desire, motivation, metacognition, whereas teacher's activities, social-cultural environment, curriculum, and peers embodied in the most powerful external factors. Also, the students agreed that the influence of the internal factors on their LA outweighed that of the external ones.

The research results brought about insights into LA and the factors that influence LA, as perceived by non-English-major students in Vietnam. Besides, the study contributed to the extensive literature on LA and language learning in Vietnam, an Asian context from the EFL learners' perspective. Furthermore, the findings practically informed the relevant stakeholders such as lecturers, educators, curriculum planners, and policy makers through responsible implications to foster LA especially in the hard times of COVID 19 pandemic.

## DISSERTATION DECLARATION

I hereby certify that all the work in my dissertation is the result of my progress which was achieved under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr.habil. Anita Habók.

I would like to state that this thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or tertiary institution and to my best knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by any other people, except where the publications and due references have been listed in the text.

I agree that the final version of my thesis can become available via the university's research depository, the university, and the search engines.

Date: 31st October, 2021

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ngson', written in a cursive style.

**Nguyen Van Son**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ANOVA | Analysis of variance                               |
| ASEAN | the Association of Southeast Asian                 |
| AVE   | Average variance extracted                         |
| BTR   | Beliefs about teacher's roles                      |
| CE    | Civil engineering                                  |
| CEFR  | Common European Framework of References            |
| CFA   | Confirmatory factor analysis                       |
| CFI   | Comparative fit index                              |
| CLT   | Communicative language teaching                    |
| CR    | Composite reliability                              |
| EFA   | Exploratory factor analysis                        |
| EFL   | English as a foreign language                      |
| ELT   | English language teaching                          |
| ESL   | English as a second language                       |
| GE    | General English                                    |
| HE    | higher education                                   |
| HPL   | High proficiency level                             |
| HTMT  | Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations        |
| ICT   | Information and communication technology           |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System      |
| IRB   | International review board                         |
| IT    | Information Technology                             |
| LA    | Learner autonomy                                   |
| LAPQ  | Learner autonomy perception questionnaire          |
| LPL   | Low proficiency level                              |
| M&D   | Motivation & desire                                |
| ME    | Mechanical Engineering                             |
| MK    | Metacognitive knowledge                            |
| MKC   | Metacognitive knowledge about the learning context |
| MKL   | Metacognitive knowledge about the language matters |
| MKP   | Metacognitive knowledge about the learning process |

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| MKS       | Metacognitive knowledge about the self                           |
| MMR       | Mixed methods research   |
| MOET      | Ministry of Education and Training                               |
| MS        | Metacognitive skills   |
| MSE       | Metacognitive skill of evaluating                                |
| MSM       | Metacognitive skill of monitoring                                |
| MSP       | Metacognitive skill of planning                                  |
| NFI       | Normed fit index   |
| NNFI      | Non-normed fit index   |
| OCED      | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development            |
| PA        | Parallel analysis  |
| PhD       | Doctor of Philosophy   |
| RMS_theta | Root mean square residual covariance                             |
| RMSEA     | Root mean square error of approximation                          |
| SDL       | Self-directed learning   |
| SE        | Standard error   |
| SPSS      | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences                      |
| SRL       | Self-regulated learning  |
| SRMR      | Standardized root mean square residual                           |
| TESL      | Teaching English as a second language                            |
| TLI       | Tucker–Lewis index   |
| TOEIC     | Test of English for International Communication                  |
| UNESCO    | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| WTO       | World Trade Organization   |

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*The present chapter introduces a comprehensive overview of the research project. The chapter begins with the background to the study and the problem statement followed by the presentation of research aims and objectives. Then, the significance of the study is presented before the structure of the dissertation, as the end of the chapter, is outlined.*

### 1.1. Background to the study

English has become a global language for effective communication and mutual understanding among the citizens all over the world. It is the mother tongue in the countries in the Inner Circle including the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. It is also the institutionally official language in the countries in the Outer Circle (e.g., India and Singapore). It is widely used as a lingua franca in the Expanding Circle countries (e.g., Vietnam, Thailand, China, and Japan) with its non-native speakers outnumbering its native speakers (Cogo, 2015; Hülmbauer, Böhringer, & Seidlhofer, 2008; Jenkins, 2012). As such, in Vietnam, it has performed an important role and drawn considerable attention in various areas such as education, trade, and international relations for a long time since Vietnam's reform, known as *Doi Moi* in 1986. Firstly, English enables people to get access to diverse information on academic knowledge and daily-life issues. Thanks to the advent of the Internet and technological devices, people can update the news, most of which is written in English. Therefore, it is necessary to have a certain level of English proficiency to easily connect with the world. Secondly, English is regarded as a key for integration and cooperation. To meet the demands of globalization, Vietnam has actively participated in, has developed the international relationships with, and has promoted the cultural, economic, and political cooperation with many countries and a lot of organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN), World Trade Organization (WTO), Asia – Europe Meeting (ASEM), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (L. Lam, 2018; H. Tran, 2019). These nations and organizations use English as an official tool for communications and legal issues. Moreover, there is evidence that the more English the countries use, the better their economies get, and the higher the quality of life becomes (McCormick, 2013). Thirdly, English serves as a powerful tool for employees in the labour market. In response to *Doi Moi*'s policy, Vietnam has welcomed not only international companies but also foreigners for commerce, diplomacy, and tourism (H. Lam, 2018; T. Le & Chen, 2018). Moreover, currently, both

domestic and international employers set English as one important criterion in selecting suitable candidates. Accordingly, the demand for human resources who are competent in languages generally and English particularly is increasingly high.

With regard to higher education (HE), English has gained greater significance in the world in general and in Vietnam in particular; consequently, the Vietnamese government is making efforts to expand English language education for internationalized development (Trines, 2017). Specifically, at macro-level, it is stated in one document regarding Education Strategies that English proficiency is one of the necessary attributes of Vietnamese students (Government of Vietnam [GOV], 2012). Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) launched several projects to promote English language teaching (ELT) and learning such as Foreign language education in the Vietnamese educational system for the 2006-2010 period. The most well-known project was entitled “Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national formal educational system in the period of 2008-2020” (hereafter called Project 2020). In that regard, Vietnamese graduates are expected to be able to use foreign languages, especially English effectively in communicating, studying, and working in an integrated, multilingual, and multicultural environment (MOET, 2008). The English proficiency will serve as a strength of Vietnamese people in the industrialization and modernization in Vietnam.

At meso-level, English is made compulsory at tertiary education level and includes general English (GE) and English for specific purposes. More notably, there is an increasing number of universities which mandate a benchmark of English competency upon graduation. English is also selected as one of the admission requirements for graduate programs (i.e., Master’s and doctoral degrees). Besides, many universities have partnerships with foreign institutions to import their programs in which English is used as an instructional medium (C. Yao, Collins, Bush, Briscoe, & L. Dang, 2021).

At micro-level, a lot of scholars and students in Vietnam have aspirations to study abroad and follow curricula taught in English. Their favourite destinations are English-speaking countries in the Inner Circle (T. Le & S. Chen, 2018). Regardless of countries of residence and nationalities, they must demonstrate a level of English language competency that enables them to get a university offer, apply for a visa, and succeed in their studies. Similarly, people in the labour market also need a certain level of English to get a well-paid job (H. Tran, 2019; N. Vu & Burns, 2014). Accordingly, English language education is given top priority for Vietnamese people to prepare for internationalization and to become global citizens. As a response to such an increasingly high demand for English learning, especially in big cities such as Hanoi and

Ho Chi Minh city, there are a wide range of language centers which provide students with diverse programs, courses, and training activities (H. Lam & Albright, 2018).

Although there have been efforts, changes, and improvements in EFL education for non-English-major students, its quality does not live up to expectations (V. Hoang, 2010; H. Tran, 2019). Students have had nearly ten academic years to learn English at schools, but many of them have a low level of English proficiency (Nguyen, Nguyen, N. Tran, M. Le, & Ziyi, 2021; H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018) and are unable to communicate with foreigners in the most common daily-life situations (V. Hoang, 2010; Kieu, 2010). Various studies have been carried out to investigate non-English majors' English proficiency, highlighting that it is inadequate. For example, a recent survey conducted by Vietnam National University in Hochiminh city indicated that the majority of its students (85%) failed to achieve expected English levels before graduation (Nhandan, 2018). Another study at Vinh University revealed that over three quarters of those surveyed did not meet language requirements and even their levels were really limited (Nguyen, G. Pham, & Nguyen, 2018). Presentation, speaking, and writing skills are still poor among students (C. Q. Le, 2018) and they feel shy to start a conversation or afraid to make mistakes and be different from others (Adam, 2004; Dao, 2017; Hieu, 2011; N. Truong, 2018). Thus, many scholars indicate the alarming issues the labour market faces nowadays such as students' lack of fundamental knowledge and skills and difficulties in decision-making process (Hai, et al., 2007; Ly, 2008, as cited in T. C. Nguyen, 2014). The facts above entail one of the main reasons why it is struggling for lots of graduates to seek jobs which require language competency.

There exist many causes that the low quality of EFL teaching and learning aforementioned is attributed to. One of the most common ones is the traditional teaching method of teacher-centeredness. It regards teachers as "transmitter of knowledge" and students as "passive recipients of knowledge", whereas the world-wide cutting-edge approach positions teachers as "facilitator of learning, the nurturer of creative thinking" and students as "active, practical, flexible and creative agents" (L. Tran, Marginson, Do, T. T. Le, Nguyen, T. Vu, T. Pham, Nguyen, & Ho, 2014, p. 104). This immediately leads to the lack of learner autonomy (LA) and influences the effectiveness of language learning (H. Tran, 2019); meanwhile, LA is essential for successful language learning (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010; Little, 1994; Oxford, 2008; Teng, 2019). Therefore, the teacher-centeredness prevalent in traditional teaching methods needs to be changed into student-centeredness, which allows students to be responsible for learning and participate in the learning process actively (Lak, Soleimani, & Parvaneh, 2017; Tran, Tran, M. Nguyen, & M. Ngo, 2019) in order to enhance LA (Dam, 1995; Lak, Soleimani,

& Parvaneh, 2017; Reinders, 2010). The necessity for students' LA, hence, is becoming higher and higher. According to N. Bui (2018), applying LA is "a prudent policy to high-quality education and English language teaching and learning" (p. 158), and LA "has been endorsed to be included in English language education from the policy level" (p. 161). Notably, due to the COVID 19 outbreak, the modes of learning and teaching have changed dramatically, so students really need LA to be successful in language learning in such a special global context (Al Ghazali, 2020; Ludwig & Tassinari, 2021; Pratama & Kuswardani, 2021).

## **1.2. Problem statement**

LA has been hotly discussed among the scholars (e.g., Benson, 2013; Cooker, 2012; Cotterall, 1995a; Dickinson, 1987; Dixon, 2011; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1996a; Murray, 2014a; Teng, 2019). In Vietnam, however, LA is seemingly a new and strange concept and accordingly, the number of studies on this topic is still limited. The research work done before is about teachers' and English-major students' beliefs about LA and their performances (e.g., N. Bui, 2016; T. Dang, 2012; T. Duong, 2021; Q. Le, 2013; A. Le, 2018; L. Nguyen, 2009; V. T. Nguyen, 2011; N. T. Nguyen, 2014; V. Q. Nguyen 2019), strategies to foster autonomous learning (e.g., Cao, 2018; H. T. Nguyen & L. Hoang, 2010; Humphreys & Watt, 2014; N.T. Nguyen, 2012; T. Phan, 2015; L. Trinh, 2005), and relationships between LA and assessment (e.g., H. Tran, 2019). LA among non-English-major students has been obviously under-researched. Particularly, the non-English-major students' perceptions of LA and which factors influence LA in learning English have not been taken into great consideration. Therefore, this study is carried out to fill this gap.

## **1.3. Research aims and objectives**

There are three main aims to be achieved.

Firstly, the study is aimed at investigating how students who major in subjects other than English perceive LA. The literature is reviewed so that an operational definition of LA could be provided and a framework from different perspectives for a questionnaire survey can be established. The survey, then, is tested and delivered in order to generate the dimensions of LA in students' perceptions. The data for this aim is also gained by semi-structured interviews. Also, the study aims to examine any differences in the aspects of LA defined in this study between different groups of students regarding genders, years of study, and grades in the previous English course.



Secondly, the research examines the factors around the learners which could potentially influence their autonomous learning, including internal factors and external factors. The former refers to the factors coming from the learners themselves, whereas the latter emphasizes the factors from the learning environment such as teachers, peers, and curricula. They may be either positive or negative. The data was collected through both surveys and interviews in order that the points could be categorized to reach reasonable conclusions.

Lastly, induced from their perceptions and the factors above, suggestions for relevant stakeholders are given to enhance LA for students. These suggestions will be hopefully developed into class activities, discussions, training workshops, seminars, and other extracurricular activities which may involve both students and teachers. The activities might be undertaken at the beginning of the semester or the school year.

#### **1.4. Significance**

The research is hoped to offer more insights into how LA is perceived by non-English-major students and which factors have an impact on their autonomous learning in the specific context of Vietnam. As a result, suggestions and implications are provided to foster LA—one of the essential qualities in learning and living. These will help to enhance the quality of language teaching for teachers and language learning for non-English-major students, who account for the majority of students and the so-called labour force in Vietnam in the future. Hence, hopefully, this investigation will contribute to the improvement in quality of higher education in Vietnam in its process of globalization and internationalization.

#### **1.5. Structure of the dissertation**

The main content of the thesis includes eight chapters.

The present chapter provides the overview of the research including the research background, problem statement, research objectives, aims, significance of the study, and structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two outlines the context of the research in Vietnam. It briefs the historical, geographical, and cultural descriptions of Vietnam with regard to HE. Then, some information about HE and English tertiary education is provided. Finally, the chapter describes the research sites with regard to English language teaching and learning.

Chapter Three discusses the underpinning theoretical background of the research. The chapter presents some basic conceptualizations related to LA including its definitions,

importance, and differentiation which shows differences between LA and other concepts. Then, the chapter provides some critical understandings about LA in language learning regarding roles of LA in language education, variations of LA definitions, operational definition of LA, misconceptions of LA, versions of LA, roles of teachers in promoting LA, and degrees of LA. Chapter Three also delineates which factors internally and externally influence the development of LA and how LA is perceived by students all around the world on the basis of the review of studies in the extensive literature. In the end, it comes up with a conceptualization of LA in this study.

The discussions of misconceptions of LA were published in the proceedings of the annual conference of Thuyloi university (S. Nguyen, 2021b). Moreover, the publication regarding versions of LA was in the abstract book of 13th Training and Practice International Conference on Educational Science (S. Nguyen, 2020a). Exploration of roles of teachers in fostering LA is under review at the 18th Conference on Educational Assessment (S. Nguyen, 2022). Besides, the degrees of LA were published in the proceedings of the annual conference of Thuyloi university (S. Nguyen, 2020b). In addition, the discussions of the relationship between LA and motivation were published in the abstract book of XXI. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia (S. Nguyen, 2021a). Furthermore, the review of external factors that influence LA was published in the abstract book of XIX. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia (S. Nguyen & Habók, 2019).

Chapter Four justifies the research methodology which employs a mixed-method study approach, the participants including selection and their characteristics, and the data collection methods which involve survey questionnaires and semi-structured individual interviews. Also, this chapter presents data collection, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations in this research.

Chapter Five reports the findings from the questionnaire surveys about different aspects of LA among 1,565 non-English-major students. The chapter starts with validity and reliability evidences to make sure that the questionnaire used in this study has sound psychometric properties. The findings from the validation study were published in the Elsevier Heliyon journal (S. Nguyen & Habók, 2021a). More notably, students' self-reported data on several components of LA including beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation, desire, metacognition, and freedom are presented to offer insights into their perceptions of LA and on factors perceived that influence LA.

Chapter Six specifies the findings from the semi-structured interviews, of which open-ended questions are developed on the basis of the conceptualization of LA. Those interviews give

students' detailed answers in terms of LA's components conceptualized in this study to reveal more about what the perceptions of LA are and what factors impact LA.

Chapter Seven presents the combination of results in two previous parts based on convergent parallel analysis design to answer the research questions. It also initiates discussions of the results in chapters Five and Six in connection with research questions, objectives, theoretical background, and literature review in the previous chapters. More importantly, as a result of such discussions, responsible implications are offered so that relevant stakeholders can foster LA among non-English-major students in Vietnam and the countries with the similar contexts.

Chapter Eight ends the research by summarizing main points, revealing limitations, discussing contributions, and suggesting further studies.

In my dissertation, the summary of the research project in terms of theoretical background and proposed methodology was published on RELAY journal which is a Japanese journal specialized in research on LA (S. Nguyen & Habók, 2020). The findings on students' beliefs about teachers' roles were published on Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching (S. Nguyen & Habók, 2021b) and those about students' motivation and desire to learn English were published on Elsevier Heliyon journal (S. Nguyen & Habók, 2021c).

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH CONTEXT

*This chapter including two main parts aims to offer insights into the specific context of Vietnam relevant to the present study. It characterizes some information about Vietnam's geographical, historical, and cultural features regarding language education. Then, the chapter presents educational reforms related to LA as well as English language teaching and learning at non-English-major technical universities in Vietnam with an emphasis on participating universities.*

### **2.1. Basic geographical information**

Vietnam covers an area of about 331,212 square kilometers and a coastline of nearly 3,500 kilometer long (Athyal, 2015). Located in Southeast Asia to the east of the Indochinese Peninsula, it borders China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west (Government portal, n.d.). According to the General Statistics Office (2019), the population of Vietnam was around 96,209,000 people. These data make the country the fourth largest and the third biggest regarding area and population in the region, respectively. Vietnam is believed to be a strategic gateway on the important transportation routes and at the heart of Asia-Pacific, which helps the country to establish and develop relationships with other countries for global cooperation. The capital city is Hanoi, which is regarded as the sociocultural, political, economic, scientific, and educational center of Vietnam. There are 54 ethnic groups, 58 provinces, and five municipalities in Vietnam, of which Kinh group accounts for the majority of the population and the official language is Vietnamese (Athyal, 2015).

### **2.2. Basic historical information**

The history of Vietnam can be briefly described by six main chronological stages. It started with Chinese domination in more than one thousand years from 111 BC to 938 AD. The next stage witnessed the national independence during the period from 938 to 1858 although the country was invaded several times by the Chinese emperors. In the third stage, the country was colonized by the French until 1945 when the August Revolution became successful and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was created. The battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 marked the second failure of the French re-invaders in a nine-year war period. Then, it was not until the end of April 1975 that the Vietnam war between the North and the South with the dividing of two regions and the participation of the American army ended and the country saw a reunification. The sixth important stage signified the nation's subsidization and centralization in operating the economy, which was struggling for Vietnam as a result of post-war isolation

before the contemporary government decided to introduce and implement a wide-ranging economic reform entitled *Doi Moi* in 1986. Since then, the reform policy, as a historic turning point in Vietnam, has resulted in significant economic achievements (K. Tran & Yoon, 2008).

### 2.3. Basic cultural information

The representation of core values in the Vietnamese culture in terms of education well reflects the national history. Specifically, during the Chinese domination, Confucianism and Taoism strongly influenced the indigenous culture. As a result, these two religions increasingly became the important foundation for the development of society, authority, and education. Their values were gradually rooted in Vietnamese people's beliefs and behaviors. In this part, two of those values which were relevant to education and LA will be discussed.

Firstly, it is noteworthy to mention collectivism. Vietnam gains low score on the individualism index, so it is a collectivist society in which interests of communities become more important than those of an individual (H. Tran, 2019). Being harmonious and avoiding conflicts also play an important role in such a collectivist culture (N. Bui, 2018), which may prevent students from expressing their own thoughts and ideas, being different as well as developing their creativity. Learners in collectivist societies tend to find it easier to work in groups than individually and rely more on group work. Another characteristic of collectivism is the fear of losing face. People in this cultural dimension are careful to make decisions in order to protect the faces from unexpected issues and not to hurt others. This entails the fact that students become more and more passive in learning and they are demotivated to demonstrate their initiatives.

Secondly, due to the deep influence of Confucianism heritage, the Vietnamese tend to respect teachers and knowledge greatly (H. Nguyen & Hall, 2017; T. H. Pham, 2010; H. Tran, 2019). Specifically, Vietnamese people hold a belief that teachers work as a moral guide as well as a source of knowledge and that knowledge has power to change people's lives. Hence, as time goes by, the Vietnamese spend more money on education, especially for their offsprings. In the Vietnamese culture, there are a large number of proverbs that well reflect those beliefs such as *muốn sang thì bắc cầu kiều, muốn con hay chữ thì yêu lấy thầy* [if a person wants to reach the other shore, s/he needs to build a beautiful bridge; if a person wishes his/her child to be knowledgeable, s/he needs to respect the teachers], *không thầy đố mày làm nên* [without a teacher, a person definitely cannot be successful], and *người không học như ngọc không mài* [a person without knowledge is like an unsharpened gem]. These axioms suggest

that students need to depend on teachers during their lives for the sake of knowledge. In that regard, teachers enjoy great respect and central status in the learning process. This can bring either advantages or disadvantages to the fostering of LA. The respect for teachers may promote LA if teachers apply autonomy-enhancing activities and then students follow that direction (N. Bui, 2018). On the other hand, this cultural value prevents students from actively learning because they regard their teachers as main sources of knowledge and knowledge transmitters.

## **2.4. Educational reforms**

Since the economic reform of *Doi Moi* in 1986, Vietnam has become a member of many international organizations such as the WTO and the ASEAN and the Vietnamese economy has grown fast. This leads to the increasingly high demand for a high-quality labour which educational reforms especially in the section of HE have been undertaken to cope with (N. Bui, 2018). Specifically, the Education Law puts an emphasis on students' ability to work actively, creatively, and independently and to solve problems effectively in their fields of study. In other words, they are expected to think creatively, self-study, self-research, and develop self-studying awareness (Vietnamese National Assembly, 2005, 2012, 2015). In addition, in many other official documents such as the Higher Education Reform Agenda (GOV, 2005), the Decision on Education Development Strategies Plan (GOV, 2012), and the Communist Party's Resolutions (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013), the highlights identify renovations of teaching methods to improve learners' positiveness, creativity, proactivity, self-consciousness, and self-study ability (N. Bui, 2018; H. Tran, 2019).

Furthermore, the introduction of the credit system in HE institutions by MOET (2008) is believed to foster LA among students (Q. Le, 2013; A. Le, 2018; T. Phan, 2015). They need to take more responsibilities in their learning processes in the way that they can select timetables, lecturers as well as courses subject to their preferences. They are also required to self-study (*giờ tự học, giờ chuẩn bị cá nhân*) more with two thirds of the course's total time. This gradually replaces teacher-centredness in the conventional teaching methods and positions students in the centre of the educational process. Moreover, the ongoing Project 2020 stresses reforming foreign language teaching and learning in the educational system and implementing effective language programs to cultivate autonomous language learning. The indicators of LA aforementioned are deemed consistent with the guideline provided by Scharles and Szabó

(2000) which assert that LA, responsibility, consciousness, awareness, active participation are all interrelated.

However, it is noteworthy that despite the macro-level inclusion in the policies (N. Bui, 2018), LA, regarding the terminology itself, has not been explicitly embedded in the above documents, but under some terms such as *self-study*, *independent learners*, and *learner-centredness* (T. Phan, 2015; H. Phan & Hamid, 2017; H. Tran, 2019). They contribute to describing the diverse representations of LA in local contexts where stakeholders take charge of carrying out the policies (Hamid & H. Nguyen, 2016; H. Phan & Hamid, 2017) and thus, different perceptions of LA are held.

## **2.5. English language tertiary education for non-English-major students**

At the tertiary level, there are two categories of learners: English majors and non-English majors (T. Le & S. Chen, 2018; H. Ngo, Spooner-Lane, & Mergler, 2017; To, 2010). The former delineates those students who passed university entrance exams with three subjects, one of which was English. At university, they must study English language skills in depth, English linguistics, literature, country studies, interpretation, translation, and ELT methodology, subject to whether they are trained to become translators, interpreters, or teachers. Meanwhile, non-English majors neither have to choose English as one exam for university admissions nor get a degree in English studies. They study 8-10 credits equivalent to around 150 periods of 45-50 minutes each to improve their general English proficiency and support their specialized studies. They are supposed to reach level 3 tantamount to level B1 in Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) after graduation from high schools; however, most of them have elementary English level, so many basic GE programs from elementary level are designed for those students (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018). It is a paradox, in my viewpoint, that non-English-major institutions or programs require their students to achieve level B1 again as a criterion for university graduation (C. V. Le, 2017), and that theoretically, due to time constraint, they do not have much time to learn English in class but they must attain the goal of level B1.

Notably, although the framework of the GE programs must be consistent across HE institutions in Vietnam, its application is really different at each university and the requirements in language skills among institutions reveals a complexity (L. Lam, 2018). Teaching materials, testing and assessment systems, benchmarks, and level classifications are remarkably diverse among different institutions and even among different faculties at the same university depending on the choice offered by the Department of Foreign Languages.

English tertiary education for non-English majors, however, is making progress. Evidently, English as a foreign language (EFL) lecturers, who need at least Master's degrees in linguistics or language teaching, participate more actively in professional workshops and conferences such as VietTESOL, MekongTESOL, ThaiTESOL, and CamTESOL in the hope that the lecturers can make changes in their contexts. Also, more research papers on EFL in Vietnam are published for lecturers to have a more comprehensive overview of effective teaching practices by reading, adapting, and learning from those papers, although the open access is limited. Additionally, there are a variety of groups on social networks that aim to support teachers' professional developments (PD) such as ELT in Vietnam, VietTESOL Association, and Microsoft Innovative Educators MIE Vietnam. The leaders at some universities are now paying more attention to upgrading the facilities by equipping projectors, TVs, loudspeakers, and so on.

However, there still exist some challenges (see more at V. Hoang, 2010; H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018). Firstly, EFL classes, particularly at technical universities, are large-sized. The number of students on average in each class ranges from 30 to 50 or even more due to the university's dense schedule and the lack of lecturers and rooms. What is more, classrooms are sometimes either too large like a lecture hall or too small, which neither corresponds to the number of students in one class nor supports teachers' organizing different activities.

Secondly, EFL teaching and learning are part of an exam-oriented system. There are tests that students have to sit for every semester and they serve as assessments of proficiency (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018). In addition, as aforementioned, many non-English-major students have a low level of English competence, not to mention the fact that they put in little effort to learn English. They merely prefer gaining pass marks and getting a certificate to meet one of the graduation requirements and to apply for jobs after graduation. Thus, the main purpose of learning English among many non-English majors is passing all kinds of English exams.

Thirdly, students are described as silent and shy learners who fear to make mistakes, and believe teachers need to know everything about the subject and manage class issues (N. Bui, 2018; T. Tran, 2013; H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018). Fourthly, the facilities for EFL teaching and learning are poor. Students do not have many chances to work with self-access materials and centers except for the so-called American Center. The number of books and supplementary materials to accommodate learning and teaching English is clearly insufficient. The teaching conditions which remain basic in most EFL classrooms include copied textbooks, cassette players, boards, and chalks. This prevents the applications of information and technology communications (ICT) in class. These challenges presented above lead to the fact that teachers



have to focus more on helping students enhance linguistic knowledge such as grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The teachers do not have enough opportunities to utilize motivating teaching methods and to develop students' communicative competence.

To fulfill the demand of the globalized labour market for a competent labour force as well as to implement the policies above, English is a compulsory course for non-English-major students at any university in Vietnam. Its proportion in the curriculum accounts for around 10% of the total number of credits in an undergraduate program (V. Hoang, 2010). The syllabi are designed on the basis of specific conditions of the institutions as long as the framework in those syllabi is aligned with the general one issued by MOET. This means the universities and especially the heads of language departments are in charge of designing appropriate programs and assuring their qualities. As a result, the HE institutions vary in textbooks, materials, testing, and assessments. However, all undergraduate students are expected to achieve B1 language proficiency level in CEFR if they wish to graduate from the universities. Notably, the language tests upon graduation are determined by the universities themselves. After considering their preferences and conditions, students may take those internally used tests or international standardized tests and their equivalent. Some illustrations regarding the diversification in language programs are found in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The differences in language teaching programs at some Vietnamese universities

|                        | Thuyloi University   | Hanoi University of Industry  | Hanoi Law University  | Post and Telecommunications Institute of Technology  |
|------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Teaching materials     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Market Leader</i> by Pearson: economics, business, and accounting</li> <li>- <i>Prepare</i> by Cambridge University Press: other faculties</li> <li>- materials and syllabus prepared by lecturers: advanced programs</li> </ul> | Learning materials composed by a group of language lecturers which show the content suitable with their majors (e.g. English for electronic and electrical engineering, English for economics, or English for tourism): different faculties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Preparation series for the new TOEIC test</i> by Longman (Reading &amp; listening)</li> <li>- <i>Skills for the TOEIC test (Speaking &amp; writing)</i> by Collins</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>American English Files</i> by Oxford University Press</li> <li>- <i>Pathways</i> by Cengage</li> <li>- <i>Basic tactics for listening</i> by Oxford University Press</li> <li>- <i>Listen in</i> by Cengage</li> </ul> |
| Testing and assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attendance (20%)</li> <li>- Midterm tests (20%): listening – speaking</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 regular tests (20%) + the first: grammar and vocabulary</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attendance (10%)</li> <li>- An individual assignment (10%)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Final test (100%)</li> </ul>  |

|            |   |  |  |  |
|------------|---|--|--|--|
|            | - Final tests (60%): grammar – vocabulary – reading – writing | + the second: speaking   | - Midterm test (10%)   |  |
|            |   | - midterm test (20%): listening – reading – writing                      | - Final test (70%) (TOEIC-oriented mainly focusing on reading and listening)   |  |
|            |   | - Final test: grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, writing, speaking |  |  |
| Benchmarks | Internally used B1 Level CEFR or an equivalent certificate    | Internally used B1 Level CEFR or an equivalent certificate               | 500/1000 points in internally used TOEIC four-skill tests (300 points for listening, 300 points for reading, 200 points for speaking, and 200 points for writing) or an equivalent certificate | Internally used B1 Level CEFR or an equivalent certificate |

The language education for the non-English-major students has made progress, but there still exist several considerable challenges that arguably result in low quality and low level of language proficiency (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018), as discussed in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

*This chapter consists of two main parts and aims to shed light on the literature of the study. The first part introduces the theoretical background of LA including definitions of autonomy, its importance, and differentiation between LA and some other related concepts. Then, this part specifically discusses LA in language education regarding definitions, its roles, misconceptions, perspectives, levels, roles of teachers in fostering LA. Importantly, an operational definition or conceptualization of LA used as a framework for research instruments later is critically presented in this part. The second part of the chapter reviews the previous studies to investigate how LA has been perceived by university students and which factors have been found to influence the development of LA. This part contributes to identifying the research gaps to be bridged in the study.*

### 3.1. Theoretical background

#### 3.1.1. Learner Autonomy: Definition – Importance – Differentiation

##### 3.1.1.1. Definition

LA has become one of the focal points in education and educational studies for many years. It attracts attention from language educators, being reflected in the expansion of research and innovations (Stewart & Irie, 2012). In terms of etymology, the word “autonomy” comes from a Greek word called “auto-nomous”. Specifically, “auto” means “self”, and “nomous”’s meaning is “rules” or “laws”. Combined together, they create a word with a literal meaning of operation in accordance with one’s rules that s/he establishes for herself/himself (Heikkinen, Jokinen, & Tynjälä, 2012). Reich (2002) conceptualized autonomy as “a person’s ability to reflect independently and critically upon basic commitments, desires and beliefs, be they chosen or unchosen, and to enjoy a range of meaningful life options from which to choose, upon which to act, and around which to orientate and pursue one’s life projects” (p. 46). Winch (2002) strongly argued that autonomy refers to “the condition in which an individual is able to choose and act on the choice of a certain way of living” (p. 29). Most of the definitions of autonomy concur with each other on stating that autonomy is the ability to act and make decisions “without being controlled by anyone else” (Cambridge Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Temporary English, Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, 2018) or “rather than being influenced by someone else or being told what to do” (Collins English Dictionary, 2018).

Despite the fact that the term has its roots in Ancient Greece and the field of politics (Benson, 2009; Boud, 1988; Lawson, 1998; Smith, 2008), it has been widely used in many other fields such as design, architecture, management, social work, and other disciplines or professions (T. Lamb, 2017). Education is not an exception and LA appeared in education more than three decades ago (Komorowska, 2012). In the literature of education, LA is a “buzzword” (Dörnyei & Murphy, 2003, p. 105; Little, 1991, p. 2; Raya & Vieira, 2015, p. 29) and the number of studies on LA “exceeds the literature published over the previous 25 years” (Benson, 2007, p. 21); therefore, there has been a sheer quantity of work on how to define the concept, formulate versions, figure out levels, and develop approaches to foster LA. Before the concept of LA in language teaching and learning is explored through the critical review of definitions, the significance of LA and fostering LA specifically in Education will be analyzed.

### ***3.1.1.2. Importance***

In the broad area of education, LA has been regarded as one of the most important educational goals (Chang, 2020; Ciekanski, 2007; T. Dang, 2010; Huang, 2006a; Hurd, 2005; McDevitt, 1997; Raya & Vieira, 2015; Reich, 2002; Shih, 2020; Sinclair, 2000a; Winch, 2002) because “the ultimate goal of education system is shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education” (J. Gardner, 1963, p. 21). Acting autonomously, which, in my opinion, is another expression of LA, has officially become one of the key competences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (OCED, 2005). Citizens need this competence to take part in the societal advancement effectively and well operate various life domains such as working environment, family life, and social life. Notably, it is of importance to them because instead of following the crowd, they have to develop their identity without being influenced or controlled by others. The summary report also classifies the competence of autonomous acting into three sub-competences including “act in the big picture”, “form and conduct life plans and personal projects”, and “defend and assert rights, interests, limits and needs” (OCED, 2005, p. 14). Also, in European countries, LA has been highly appreciated and fostered by the utilization of several assessment programs such as European Language Portfolio, which is considered the mediator for Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) launched by the Council of Europe (Little, 2010). Besides, being aware of the prominence of LA, CEFR proposes teaching methods which emphasize the importance of “raising the learner’s awareness of his or her present state of knowledge; self-setting of feasible and worthwhile objectives; selection of materials; self-assessment”, resulting in ability to learn (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 6) and lifelong language

learning promotion (Raya & Vieira, 2015). More importantly, there is an increasing number of researchers who show great interest in LA based on three main arguments of its importance (Ciekanski, 2007).

Firstly, the argument of ideology contends that the choices from the institutions do not frustrate individuals from exercising their choices. This may be the result from the theory that autonomy is seen as a right of a person to act on his/her choice in the culture of Western liberation (Kara, 2007; Foblets, Graziadei, & Renteln, 2018; Raya & Vieira, 2015). Hence, politically speaking, autonomy has had a great impact on modernist thinking about the individual who has the right to belong to a specific nation, and the freed person in the democracy, positing that autonomy and emancipation have been the principal educational aims in a lot of Western countries so far (Schmenk, 2005). Also, learning by means of autonomous practices is crucial for “full citizenship in democracy and for moral decision-making in a rapidly changing world” (Raya & Vieira, 2015, p. 18). Autonomous learning can be regarded as a practice of emancipation which contributes to “the good of the individual and of the society” (Ciekanski, 2007, p. 112) because “a person is highly appraised in society depends on his/her ability to do things autonomously” (Ryan, 1991, p. 74). As such, autonomy plays an important role for the researchers on the socio-interactive position in research on problem-solving and learning (Komorowska, 2012).

Secondly, advocates of psychological argument postulate that when being responsible for their own learning, people learn better with support of cognitive, social, and affective factors in the learning process such as memorization, motivation, and significance (Broady & Kenning, 1996). To illustrate, those who are called autonomous learners have intrinsic motivation to take charge of their learning and improve self-management skills, so their learning becomes more and more effective (Q. Le, 2013).

Thirdly, the arguments by the economists such as Carre (2005) strongly believed that “society cannot keep providing the high level of instruction required by industrial and commercial development through educational institutions, especially in view of rapid technical changes” (cited in Ciekanski, 2007, p. 112). As a result, individuals need the ability to “provide for their own learning needs, either individually or cooperatively”, so autonomous learning can be viewed as lifelong learning (Ciekanski, 2007, p. 112). In the other words, LA becomes essential to the promotion/advancement of lifelong learning in such a learning society (Raya & Vieira, 2015) and contributes to the economic development (Q. Le, 2013).

I will summarize all the points by the claims of Breen and Mann (2013) who announced that “autonomy as a quality of a person, [is] a way of being in the world” (p. 7), and Wall (2003)

who postulated that “it applies to a person’s whole life or to large stretches of it” (p. 308). The statements strongly emphasize the significance of autonomy. This means that autonomy is vital to the existence of a person on the Earth.

### ***3.1.1.3. Differentiation***

To define the construct of autonomy is not only comparing and contrasting various previous definitions but also differing autonomy from other relevant concepts (Llaven-Nucamendi, 2014). The concept of LA has been somehow interchangeably utilized with the concepts such as self-instruction, individualization, self-regulated learning, and self-directed learning. Although they are all proven to be relevant to LA, they are not the same at all.

Self-instruction is believed to be “situations in which a learner, with others, or alone, is working without the direct control of a teacher” (Dickinson, 1987, p. 11). Specifically, it necessitates intentionally instigating, planning, and conducting a learning project in a long-term process (Jones, 1998). However, without the teacher’s presence in the learning situation, s/he is still able to make major decisions about what to learn, how to learn, and how to assess learning (Nunan, 1997). Therefore, it can be easily seen that self-instruction fails to reach the expected standards of LA’s goals and characteristics in terms of capacity and control (Llaven-Nucamendi, 2014) and LA is widely confused with self-instruction, thereby becoming problematic (Little, 2003).

According to Benson (2001, 2011a), individualization and LA were closely associated with each other during the period of time from the 1970s to the 1980s. They are considered overlapping because their concerns are about meeting the individual learner’s needs. Chaix and O’Neil (1978) delineated individualization of learning or individualized instruction as “a learning process which (as regards goal content, methodology and pacing) is adapted to a particular individual, taking this individual’s characteristics into consideration” (p. 8). Therefore, this mode of learning corresponds to the fact that learners are different in many ways and freedom should be allowed without the teacher’s absence or withdrawing. Tudor (1996) observed that practically, individualization excesses material-centeredness and teacher-centeredness and does not adequately empower learners to control over their own learning. Consequently, it does not fully develop LA capacity. The association of LA and individuals throughout the 1970s and the 1980s appears to be a myth.

Self-directed learning (SDL) is considered synonymous to autonomous learning by some researchers such as Tudor (1996), and Lai (2017), whereas some others (Dickinson, 1987;

Candy, 1988; Little, 1990) did not have the same viewpoint. The former group of researchers argue that these concepts can be used interchangeably and they have the same dimensions and goals (Lai, 2017). Tudor (1996) defined SDL as “the strategic and attitudinal traits of a learner who is able, or who is in the process of developing the ability to make informed decisions relative to his language learning, and who accepts the responsibility in a free and willing manner”. This indicates that SDL is in line with autonomy in terms of meaning as a long-term self-initiation process. It can also be inferred from Tudor (1996) that SDL refers quite much to both capacity and control aspects of LA. However, I agree with the latter group of researchers that although they share some similarities, they are not totally synonymous. They are different in terms of origins, SDL comes from the humanistic approach of adult education in North America, and it is labelled as “a particular mode of learning in which the learner makes the important decisions about content, methods, and evaluation”, which entails a capacity to experience such kind of learning effectively (Benson, 2001, p. 34). Meanwhile, LA stems from the politics and philosophy, and it is connected to an attribute of the learner – a capacity with various degrees. Moreover, Llaven-Nucamendi (2014) posited a learner can be self-directed and involve in conventional class led by a teacher or follow any self-instructional modes of learning. That is not the same as what LA expects from the learner.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is defined as “the degree that they [students] are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process” (Zimmerman, 1989, p. 329). In this regard, learners are called active when they set goals, monitor, regulate, control their cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects (Panadero, 2017). This process is driven by the goals and contexts (Pintrich, 2000). It can be evident that LA and SRL share some common points such as issues of setting goals, monitoring, and controlling. I concur with Murray (2014b) that it is challenging to differentiate between two constructs. However, interestingly, the first difference can be found in their roots. LA has witnessed its development from the liberal theory of learning since the 1970s in Europe, whereas SRL had its roots from the social cognitive theory and became a section of educational psychology from the 1960s. Its typical processes are associated with “self” including self-reinforcement, goal-setting, self-efficacy, and self-evaluation (Lewis & Vialleton, 2011). The second distinction is announced when the dimensions of each construct is considered. Benson (2012) and Huang and Benson (2013) identified two major elements of LA which are *capacity* and *control*. The former includes three sub-elements, namely, *ability* – knowledge and skill to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning; *desire* to learn languages; and *freedom* – the degree of permission to control learning. Arguably, L. Nguyen (2012) worked on a model of LA with

two components which are self-initiation – reasons and efforts to learn, and self-regulation highlighting metacognitive strategies and skills (planning, monitoring, and evaluating). Murray (2014b) postulated that SRL maintains a close association with the first sub-element of ability. Benson (2011a) came to believe that studies on SRL may help LA researchers to better understand the (meta)cognitive factors of control over learning and SRL is narrower than autonomous learning or the concept of LA, even though Murray (2014b) argued that it needs more research and comparisons between SRL and LA to confirm which concept is narrower or broader.

To summarize, the interchangeable use of LA and the terms above can be regarded as the myths and needs clarification. Thanks to the efforts of researchers, they are differentiated and go into different future research directions. The next section will provide an in-depth overview of LA in language learning, from which it can be linked to the context of English language learning and teaching investigated by this study.

### **3.1.2. Learner autonomy in language learning**

In the field of language learning and teaching, LA is hardly a new concept. Also, it is not in other areas, but the field of language education that the theory and practice of LA has recently witnessed a development (Benson, 2007b). This can be evident that over the past decades, the concept of LA in language learning has been of interest in various directions and at a variety of levels (Esch, 2009); also, there is a great number of researchers, teachers, and classroom practitioners who have studied LA (Teng, 2019). The developments are illustrated by a gradual rise in the number of academic publications (Benson, 2011b; Little, 2007; Palfreyman & Benson, 2019). Specifically, according to the statistics by Benson (2009), the number of research on LA, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been excessive, compared to that of 25 years ago, and there have been over 20 publications in the length of a book, a substantial quantity of chapters in books as well as presentations under the heading of LA. There were 17 conferences on autonomy and relevant topics in less than two years (Reinders, 2011). The expansion of literature on LA in language education provides cogent reasons for the roles of LA. This following section is devoted to the discussion of the roles of LA in second and/or foreign language learning and teaching.



### ***3.1.2.1. Roles of LA in language teaching and learning***

In this section, the significance of LA is specified in the language learning and teaching field. There is a general consensus that LA makes great contributions to the success of language education (Çetin & Çakır, 2021; Chang, 2020; Little, 1994) or effective second language learning (Oxford, 2008; Palfreyman & Benson, 2019). LA is “an educational goal of teaching English as a foreign language” (Teng, 2019, p. 1) and its role is confirmed by the work of Farrell and Jacobs (2010) entitled “Essentials for Successful Language Learning”. Accordingly, LA “sets the tone for the whole book” of eight essentials (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010, p. 17). This affirms the importance of LA in ELT, as claimed by Little (1994) that “all genuinely successful learning is in the end autonomous” (p. 431).

Farrell and Jacobs (2010) properly clarified the reasons why LA becomes the first and foremost essential out of eight essentials for successful language learning. Firstly, LA plays an especially important role in the success of communicative language teaching (CLT). The world of ELT saw the evolutionary development of CLT which has increased its popularity since the 1970s and has become “the driving force that affects the planning, implementation, and evaluation of ELT throughout the world” (p. 3). That approach puts emphasis on the role of learners more than the external stimuli from the environment such as teachers or materials. It signifies the focus shifted from the external (teachers, materials, or environmental factors) to the internal (students themselves). This is also the movement from teacher-centered approach to learner-centeredness, which corresponds with LA focusing on the learner role rather than that of the teacher and emphasizing active participation in learning (Benson, 2007a; N. Bui, 2018; Teng, 2019). If learners follow the trend of CLT, they need to have a certain level of LA and actively participate in communicative activities. This is because LA helps them improve communicative language competences and get ready to take risks (T. Dang, 2012). Secondly, Farrell and Jacobs (2010) stated that second or foreign language education lies in a continuum in which a learner will start as a beginner who depends very much on teachers. S/he, then, works to the end of that continuum where s/he is independent of them as this person gradually develops his/her LA. This point of view probably supports the four-control model towards LA proposed by Hsu (2005) including other-control, self-control, collective self-control, and self mastery.

From another perspective, LA is practically, pedagogically, and philosophically important (Porto, 2007). In terms of practicality, teachers cannot help students individually all the time especially when there is an increasingly large number of students. Regarding pedagogy, fostering LA will bring about enthusiasm and stimulate learners to make efforts and spend

more time on language activities. Philosophically, autonomy corresponds with both students' rights to make decisions and the view of language teaching that is to develop their capacity to deal with problems without available solutions, obtain tools to work on their own, and become independent of the teachers.

However, it is strongly argued that LA is a “multidimensional, complex, and variably manifested” construct (Benson, 2013, p. 840) which can be construed in different ways in different contexts by different people (Balçıklı, 2010; N. Bui, 2018; Y-R. Tsai, 2021). Therefore, not only defining but also operationalizing and evaluating LA are really problematic (Czura, 2014; Hamilton, 2013). The next part will make efforts to scrutinize various definitions of LA in the literature.

### ***3.1.2.2. Diversification of definitions of LA***

It is widely acknowledged that LA has “a myriad of different meanings” (Oxford, 2008, p. 42). However, the scholars usually start their argumentation of LA by the seminal definition of LA from Holec (1981) who stated that LA is an “ability to take charge of one's own learning” in his Modern Languages Project report to the Council of Europe (p. 3). This definition, which was offered nearly four decades ago, is old but still useful, and becomes a “useful starting point for closer scrutiny of the concept” (Hamilton, 2013, p. 17) and a “foundational definition” of the field (Little, 2007, p. 15). It sketches the direction and way of thinking about LA (Komorowska, 2012). As the time went by, the original “ability” was substituted with “capacity”, and “take charge of” was replaced by “take responsibility of” or “control over”, which does not change the aspects of construct semantically (T. Dang, 2010). However, arguably, the notion of “capacity” is more preferable because it necessitates what an individual has potential to do more than learning behaviors (Benson, 2011a). The word “control” is more favorable as it refers to the power of making choice and acting (Teng, 2019) and can be recognized through observable behaviors associated with LA (Benson, 2010).

Definitions of LA have been developed by scholars adding more layers to the initial concept (Hsu, 2005). These layers are chronologically ordered, including responsibility, willingness, freedom, a decision-making process, and attributes in which attitudes, learning styles, and personalities are exemplified. For example, Dickinson (1987) made efforts to provide a definition for LA, stating LA is “the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. In full autonomy there is no involvement of a ‘teacher’ or an institution. And the learner is also

independent of specially prepared materials” (p. 11). From my perspective, Dickinson may accentuate LA in an ideal way when learners are totally independent. This viewpoint corresponds with self-mastery by Hsu (2005) or the end of the continuum by Farrell and Jacobs (2010). Gathercole (1990) also delineated LA as a situation “when the learner is willing to and capable of taking charge of his own learning” (p. 16). This definition covers both of the most acknowledged views of LA in the new era. Sharing the same opinion but giving more details, Little (1991) regarded LA as “a capacity”, but clarifies it by different actions - “for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (p. 4). LA in the opinion of Cotterall (1995a) means an ability to control one’s learning activities. Littlewood (1996a) labeled LA as “a capacity to make and carry out choices” (p. 428). Scharle and Szabó (2000) attempted to explain the relationship between LA and responsibility. They argued it is not easy at all to differentiate these two concepts and “they are apparently very much interrelated” (p. 4), also reaching a conclusion that developing a sense of responsibility and encouraging students to get involved in their decision-making process for their own learning are doubtlessly essential.

Therefore, LA has been understood, perceived, and performed in quite a few ways, which relies very much on the different contexts (T. Dang, 2012). Nevertheless, central to the definitions is the capacity to successfully manipulate learning processes with own responsibility. It can be evident that various definitions of LA indicate “a normal developmental trend” when LA needs adaptation in accordance with the social changes such as beliefs, theories, and objectives (T. Dang, 2012, p. 25). In the other words, in order to figure out and make sense of LA, researchers need to shed light on LA in particular contexts (Benson, 2011b), which necessitates local conceptualization or “ethnographies of autonomy and autonomy-oriented practice in particular settings” (Smith & Ushioda, 2009, p. 248). This study is contextualized in Vietnam, so it seems essential to review how LA has been conceptualized in the context of Vietnam.

Firstly, L. Trinh (2005) elaborated on four major factors of LA, namely cognitive (capacity), affective (attitudes, motivation, self-confidence, readiness), social (interaction, scaffolds), and metacognitive (setting goals, choosing materials, planning activities, monitoring, and evaluating progress). After making announced distinctions among these factors, L. Trinh (2005) also argued that in language education there is no definition taking all of them into account, and then proposes a definition of an autonomous language learner who holds positive attitudes to autonomous language learning (willing and ready to take over her role in successful learning as crucial), has motivation to learn the language (with a purpose of communication),

and has ability to control her own learning (planning, monitoring, and evaluating their communicative and learning acts) to work independently and cooperate with others (L. Trinh & Rijlaarsdam, 2003, as cited in L. Trinh, 2005). In my opinion, although the definition above considers all four factors, it fails to clarify what autonomous language learning is, whereas L. Trinh and Rijlaarsdam (2003) are defining an autonomous language learner. Secondly, L. Nguyen (2009) described LA in terms of capacity or ability; qualities; responsibility; strategies, knowledge, and attitudes; and readiness, and willingness. Thirdly, T. Dang (2012) attempted to systemize the construct of LA in terms of attribute – psychological perspective; reflection of learning situation – technical perspective; outcome of interaction with the environment – socio-cultural perspective; and desire for more access, agency, and power in the community – political-critical perspective. Afterwards, he thoroughly investigated dimensions of LA as the internal part including initiating, monitoring, and evaluating. Meanwhile, the external part of LA called mediated factors consists of preference, motivation, and attitude. Fourthly, Q. Le (2013) examined the construct of LA in detail when emphasizing two important components of capacity and willingness as well as LA's complexity.

Next, N. T. Nguyen (2014) mentioned the role of teachers in her own definition, stating that LA comprises “learner's willingness and ability to take responsibility, to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate his/her learning with tasks that are constructed in negotiation with and support from the teacher” (p. 21). From a very specific viewpoint, T. Phan's (2015) definition deduced from the literature that LA characterizes “learners' attitude and ability to take responsibility for his/her own learning in the target language” (p. 52). Accordingly, the former is divided into awareness of responsibility and willingness to communicate, whereas the latter has four factors transitioned from teacher to student which are goal setting, planning, implementing, and evaluating. Standing from the quintessential pole, V. Q. Nguyen (2019) defined LA as “learners' willingness and ability to take responsibility for their learning within and beyond the classroom, including setting goals, planning, practicing, monitoring and evaluating their learning in interaction and cooperation with others and especially with the support of and through negotiation with the teacher” (p. 33). I find this definition noteworthy because it analyzed LA based on its components and promoted better understandings of LA in different aspects. Last but not least, H. Tran (2019) classified LA into three types which are autonomy capacity, autonomy offered, and autonomy demonstrated. The first type refers to Benson's (2011a) definition regarding capacity to take control of one's learning. The second one connotes the extent of freedom and opportunities to which students control their learning. The third type refers to how students use their capacity to control their learning in different

situations. In general, when students have ability and desire along with freedom provided, their autonomy capacity is exercised. An autonomous learner, according to H. Tran (2019), is independent in the way that s/he is aware of responsibility for learning, able to make decisions in terms of objectives and plans, cognitively and metacognitively strategic, and motivated to learn. However, each student displays LA in different degrees subject to many factors such as task difficulty, motivation, and competences.

Although scholars in the field, who devoted a great deal of effort in providing a comprehensive overview of LA, have not arrived at a complete agreement on a consistent definition of LA, thirteen aspects of LA synthesized by Sinclair (2000b) have gained widespread acceptance in ELT. They are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** *Characteristics of LA by Sinclair (2000b, pp. 7 – 13)*

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 1.  | Autonomy is a construct of capacity.  |
| 2.  | Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning.                 |
| 3.  | The capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate.                           |
| 4.  | Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal.  |
| 5.  | There are degrees of autonomy.  |
| 6.  | The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable.  |
| 7.  | Autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent.                      |
| 8.  | Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process – i.e. conscious reflection and decision-making. |
| 9.  | Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies.   |
| 10. | Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom.  |
| 11. | Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension.   |
| 12. | The promotion of autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension.   |
| 13. | Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures.  |

### **3.1.2.3. Operational definition of LA**

In this part, the aspects of LA which come from diverse definitions and presentations of the concept will be discussed. Because I follow the quintessential strategy which attempts to find out what is the most essential to LA (Benson, 2009), the first and second points indicated by Sinclair (2000b) above will be arguably selected as components of LA and given priority for an operational definition of LA. This seems to be in line with Hsu (2005) who emphasized that the most widely accepted views of LA belong to “capacity” and “willingness” which will be discussed later. The eleventh and twelfth points out of thirteen points above complement the concept of LA to prove that it is a complex construct, whereas the other points will be discussed

further in other sections as important features of LA.

### **3.1.2.3.1. LA is a construct of capacity – an attribute of learners**

My discussion will start with the definition offered by Holec (1981) which is “a springboard for the conceptualization of learner autonomy as an ability, and as a capacity subsequently” (Q. Le, 2013, p. 31). He defined LA as “ability to take charge of one’s learning...to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning” (p.3), which has been one of the most cited definitions so far (Benson, 2007; Hamilton, 2013; Lai, 2017; Teng, 2019). An autonomous learner is capable of

- determining the objectives;
- defining the content and progressions;
- selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- monitoring the procedures of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.);
- evaluating what has been acquired

(Holec, 1981, p. 3)

The focal point in this definition which characterizes ability or capacity to make decisions about learning becomes the emphasis of many other following definitions in ELT. LA should not be considered inheritable or innate because the story “will be that of learners who are not yet autonomous but are involved in the process of acquiring the ability to assume responsibility for their learning” (Holec, 1981, pp. 25–26). However, Benson (2007a) asserted that although Holec’s “definition explained WHAT autonomous learners are able to do, it did not explain HOW they are able to do it.” (p. 23). It is seemingly unjust because under Benson’s (2007a) circumstance, there may be a really lengthy definition of LA.

Little (1991) delineated LA to be “a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action. The learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning” (p. 4). He posited that how the learners learn and transfer the knowledge learned into wider contexts will show the capacity for autonomy. This point from Little shows a connection with the theory of metacognition. Coming from developmental psychology, this theory claims that metacognition, or “personal thinking about cognition” (Veenman, 2011, p. 197), includes knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition or metacognitive skills. The latter called “control aspect of learning” (Magno, 2010, p. 142) consists of planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning activities and processes. So,

what Little (1991) said about the capacity for autonomy as the process and content of learning stresses the role of these metacognitive skills above.

From the literature available, Aoki (1999) also believed the centre of LA is a psychological construct and theorized LA as “a capacity to take control of one’s own learning in the service of one’s perceived needs and aspirations” (p. 144). To specify what “control” means, Aoki (1999) referred to domain-specific skills and knowledge which are needed to make choices about what, why, and how to learn; proceed the plan; and evaluate the outcome. This corresponds with the theory of metacognition aforementioned and seems to be broader than the view of Little (1991) related to metacognitive skills because Aoki (1999)’s point covers both knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition.

In her review, Sinclair (1999) summarized two different views on LA in which the second one claims LA is “a capacity for making informed decisions about one’s own learning”, adding “learners may develop this capacity, or knowledge, about their learning” (p. 311). From this perspective, they merely refer to knowledge of cognition without taking metacognitive skills into account.

CEFR (2001) portrayed LA as “the abilities to recognize one’s own strengths and weaknesses, the abilities to identify one’s own needs and goals, or the abilities to use one’s own strategies and procedures to pursue these goals, in accordance with one’s own characteristics and resources” (pp. 107–108). This depiction of LA merely identifies the ability to learn and thus, seems to be insufficient to define LA only with such a set of components.

It is apparent that although the definitions do their best to conceptualize LA, their viewpoints are fragmentary to some extent (Czura, 2014). Dealing with this issue and standing from the view of critical approach, Benson (2011a) redefined and sharpens the existing definitions. He suggested that LA is “the capacity to take control over one’s own learning” (p. 58). In his joint work with Huang Jing in 2013, Benson further explained what capacity and control are.

Firstly, capacity is what a learner can do, rather than his/her actual behavior. They analyzed Holec’s work to figure out the concept of capacity which is called “nature of LA” by Lai (2017). Holec (1981) stressed that an autonomous learner “is not automatically obliged to self-direct his learning either totally or even partially. The learner will make use of his ability to do this only if he so wishes and if he is permitted to do so by the material, social and psychological constraints to which he is subjected.” (p. 8). Benson (2012) italicized three words in Holec’s piece of writing which are *ability*, *wishes*, and *permitted*. Accordingly, three components of a capacity to control over learning are ability, desire, and freedom. Benson (2012) and Huang and Benson (2013) visualized them into 3 overlapping circles to show their developmental

directions. Ability covers knowledge and skills about study and language. A learner should have study skills referring to planning, monitoring, and evaluating. These can be called regulation of cognition or metacognitive skills. Also, s/he needs sufficient knowledge of the target language, or English in this case to handle the language tasks. Desire specifies “the intensity of the learner’s intention to learn a language or carry out a particular learning task and it is assumed to be informed by particular purposes” (Huang & Benson, 2013, p. 9). This lends itself to the view that desire is expressed through different aims and varies across persons or tasks. However, I do not agree with Murray (2014b) that desire here implies motivation because they are not quite the same and motivation is a more complex construct (Benson, 2012). The last component, freedom implies the extent to which the learner is allowed to take control over his/her language learning by social agents particularly and by learning situations generally. In my opinion, it is really difficult to investigate freedom either quantitatively or qualitatively, but like LA, it can be observed via the activities a learner does during the language learning process. This illumination of the term “capacity” will be a useful reference for my argumentation of how LA is conceptualized.

Secondly, Huang and Benson (2013) defined control as “the power to make choices and decisions and acting on them” (p. 9). They see that control can be formed in different types and levels, claiming LA is multidimensional in different forms for different people, and even for one single person, it may be different in different contexts. Bending his mind to LA in language learning, Benson (1996) analyzed the notion of control based on three interrelated levels. They are control of the learning process, control of resources, and control of language. The first level accentuates the certain power teachers have to give to learners, the learners’ awareness of social constraints, and the social context of language learning. That social context includes both the functions of language in the society and the learners’ attitudes to those functions. Control of the learning process, accordingly, enables learners to make informed decisions about what, how, and why they learn a language. The second level involves a wide range of issues from teachers (native or non-native) to content of textbooks, from learning materials to time and workload. Learners also need to be critically aware of resource constraints. Control of language refers to the knowledge-based component of LA with the aim to transform a language learner into a language user or producer.

Benson (2011a, 2012) formulated three independent dimensions of control over learning, including learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. Specifically, learning management which consists of control over when, where, and how to learn languages pertains to practices for language learning on a day-to-day basis. In other words, it is the control



over the decisions about planning, implementing, and evaluating learning processes. A study plan is an instance of this dimension of control. Control over cognitive processing is connected to control over how languages are learnt in a cognitive way or how learners get involved in the learning process mentally. Accordingly, they need to be able to have reflection on every learning stage and be willing to change towards effective education (Czura, 2014). Learning content refers to what and how much to learn languages, so the control over this aspect is dependent on learners' ability to set goals, choose appropriate materials, methods, and techniques to achieve those goals. Benson (2011a) argued that this control depends so much on whether the learners are provided with freedom of independent choice in different situations by the educational authorities.

These explanations of control in language learning by Benson (1996) are consistent with Benson's (2012) and Huang and Benson's (2013) clarifications of control. Control over learning management can be related to control of the learning process. Control over cognitive processing can be relevant to control of the learning process. Control over learning content can be inferred from control of resources and language.

#### **3.1.2.3.2. LA involves a willingness on part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning**

As the time went by, the researchers thickened and deepened the literature on LA conceptualization and definitions by taking more components into account. To be more specific, during the period of advent in the 1980s, responsibility and decision-making became "the flavor of the month" (Hsu, 2005, p. 13). In the next decade of the 1990s, several individual attributes were added (Hsu, 2005). To name some were attitudes, willingness, and confidence, which are named "affective factors" by L. Trinh (2005). Hsu (2005) indicated the addition of learning styles, beliefs, and motivation into the list. He also emphasizes that willingness is one of the most significant components of LA. In his opinion, willingness and capacity constitutes two most crucial components to take into serious account for the development of LA. Accordingly, one of the common features of successful language learners is their willingness to explore learning opportunities along with engagement with languages on their own (Griffiths, 2008). Therefore, investigating learners' willingness in particular and readiness in general for autonomous learning performs a critical role for educators to develop LA (Ming & Alias, 2007; Q. Le, 2013). This important factor is elaborated on the Bergen definition, stating that LA "is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of

one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in-cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person" (Dam, 1995, p. 1).

Littlewood (1996a) held a conviction that LA is an "independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her action. This capacity depends on two main components: ability and willingness." (p. 428). Specifically, "ability" represents knowledge about alternative choices and skills to carry out the most suitable choices. "Willingness" manifests motivation and confidence to be responsible for the choices needed. From my perspective, I support the argument of Hsu (2005) that disagrees with Littlewood (1996a). Hsu believed that the "willingness" categorization of Littlewood is too ambiguous and does not take a right priority. Hsu further partitioned willingness into beliefs, attitudes, and intrinsic motivation, in which the two first factors are persistent, whereas the other is changeable.

Sinclair (2000b) agreed with the Bergen definition and accentuated the necessity of willingness by saying "irrespective of their capacity, learners will not develop autonomy unless they are willing to take responsibility for learning" (p. 4). Sinclair (2009) went on to explain that "willingness to control varies time to time and task to task depending on a range of variables, including psychological (e.g., depression, irritation), physiological (e.g., headache), contextual factors (e.g., too much noise, not enough resources) which can influence learners any time" (p. 185). She summarized her theoretical analysis by concluding LA is a construct of capacity with the presence of willingness.

Swatevacharkul (2009) investigated readiness for LA of university students and conceptualizes LA with three components which are attitudes, motivation, and capacity based on the work of Wenden (1991). Specifically, attitudes contain willingness for responsibility and ability to be confident. Capacity depends very much on knowledge and skills learners have to learn autonomously. I support the view that LA may cover three aspects of attitudes, motivation, and capacity, but it is impossible for me to reason out why "ability" and "willingness" are under the umbrella of attitudes, so this point should have been clarified by the authors.

In his study on LA in mainland China, Zhu (2014) offered an operational definition of LA with two factors which are willingness and ability. He prioritized the role of willingness when putting it before "ability". However, apparently, he did not clarify the concepts of willingness and ability. Besides, it would be more convincing if the author could provide a more detailed theoretical background of LA rather than merely showing his belief and listing several authors without indicating the link between their work.

Investigating stability and variability of pre-service language teachers' beliefs, Werbin'ska (2016) put emphasis on the role of readiness to autonomous learning and remained adamant that "autonomy can be at risk when confronted with learners' lack of readiness to assume it" (p. 47).

#### **3.1.2.3.2.1. LA and motivation**

As the literature has already implied, there is broad consensus that LA and motivation are closely related. For a group of researchers, LA leads to enhanced motivation, whereas the others believe motivation is a precondition of LA. The former group whose representative is Dickinson (1995) argues that learners' success and enhanced motivation depends so much on the characteristics of LA. Dickinson (1995) reiterated that "success in learning appears to lead to greater motivation . . . for those students who accept responsibility for their learning success – personal effort is within the control of the learner" (p. 171). This reveals that learners' responsibility brings about learning success and hence, entails stronger motivation. Sharing the viewpoint akin to Dickinson's (1995), Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) perceived LA as one of the ten "commandments" to motivate learners. Ryan and Deci (2000) labeled LA as one of three basic psychological needs (along with competence and relatedness) to understand and foster intrinsic motivation. They believed that an autonomy-supporting context will be the condition for developing intrinsic motivation. However, Littlewood (1996a) above delineated the relationship of LA and motivation in the way that LA includes ability and willingness, and willingness depends on motivation and confidence. In this regard, motivation is a forerunner of LA. Ushioda (1996) argued that learners themselves will bring a certain level of motivation to the learning situation and "without motivation, there is no autonomy" (p. 40). Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) concluded their study in Hong Kong that motivation is a principal factor that influences how ready learners are to learn autonomously and teachers should make efforts to motivate students before training them to enhance LA. Hsu (2005) pointed out that willingness, one of the most essential factors of LA, comprises intrinsic motivation, positive attitudes, and beliefs. He regarded motivation as a "locomotive" of LA and LA as a "manifestation" of motivation but they are "mutually inclusive" (p. 54). Swatevacharkul (2009) pondered that motivation is one of the components of LA. Tok (2011) suggested from his study that the more motivated or highly motivated students appeared to be, the more they engaged in autonomous learning activities. Zarei and Elakaei (2012) corroborated their evidence that learners who have greater motivation are more autonomous.

It can be easily seen that there exists an argument among the researchers toward the question “Which one comes first and which one depends on which one, motivation or autonomy?”. I strongly agree with Ushioda (2011b, 2014) that M. Lamb (2011) convincingly elucidated the question above. Specifically, he started with a metaphor of “which came first, the worm or the cocoon?”, and then distinguished two senses of autonomy.

The first sense is shed light on by the self-determination theory and this sense of autonomy represents “the psychological need to experience one’s behavior as emanating from or endorsed by the self” (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004, p. 31). Besides competence and relatedness, autonomy is a fundamental which needs satisfying if students want to learn and grow up. Thus, they should be provided with choices and feedback and then the motivation will be promoted. In the other words, their “actions and behaviors are freely chosen and self-determined rather than controlled by others” (Ushioda, 2014, pp. 39-40). Little (2007) explained that autonomous learners with volition in their learning will be happy and then motivated. Inspired by M. Lamb (2011), Ushioda (2014) criticized this notion of autonomy for not necessarily resulting in effective modes of learning. She exemplified a student who is freely and autonomously engaged in irrelevant activities during the practice time without teacher’s supervision and another one who spends a lot of time autonomously practicing her enjoyable language activities but pays little attention to necessary language aspects. Hence, as a result of this autonomy, the motivation is not sufficient to deal with the increasingly challenging cognitive and linguistic learning.

The other sense of autonomy refers to taking responsibility for manipulating one’s own learning. Ushioda (2011a, 2014) postulated that this notion of autonomy is learner autonomy or language learner autonomy in the words of Little (2007). It entails a willingness for responsibility and a capacity for “detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (Little, 1991, p. 4). Accordingly, an autonomous language learner can employ metacognitive skills and strategic thinking processes to overcome challenges in language learning. However, a prerequisite is willingness or motivation to exercise the metacognitive skills and ability above. Thus, this sense of autonomy depends on motivation. That is, if learners have motivation or willingness, they will self-regulate their language learning or exercise their autonomy to learn the language beyond the basic requirements (M. Lamb, 2011; Ushioda, 2011b). In short, if autonomy in the sense of taking responsibility is autonomy 1 and the other is autonomy 2, the relationship between them and motivation can be visualized in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1:** *The relationship between two senses of autonomy and motivation (M. Lamb, 2011)*

From my perspective, in this study, I adapt the latter view of the researchers such as Littlewood (1996a), Ushioda (1996), Spratt, Humpreys, and Chan (2002), Hsu (2005), L. Nguyen (2008) and Zarei and Elakaei (2012). I believe that motivation is one of the tools with which learners equip themselves to enter the learning situation and enhance LA. As a result, motivation is investigated in the broader term of “willingness”. This point will support the thrust of my argument toward a theoretical framework of LA in this study.

### **3.1.2.3.3. LA is a complex construct with diverse dimensions**

In the late 1990s, the socio-cultural and political dimensions of LA were introduced to the literature (Hsu, 2005). Pennycook (2013) denied the fossilization of “psychologised, technologised, and universalised concept” of LA at that time (p. 35). This voice indicates that psychological and technical approaches are not sufficient to investigate such a construct of LA; moreover, LA is not a universal concept that is the same in all the contexts because the forms of LA depends very much on the individuals and the contexts (Benson, 2011a, 2011b).

Regarding the social dimension of LA, the notions of “social learning” and “social responsibility” are embedded in the Bergen definition (Sinclair, 2009, p. 185). It can be inferred that the researchers have recently acknowledged the role of the social dimension of LA. This dimension argues that LA is not only relevant to “learning in isolation” (Esch, 1997, p. 165; T. Lamb, 2017, p. 173). It is inadequate to fathom social interaction when either the individual is in isolation or they interact face-to-face with parents, teachers, or other social agents. In the truest sense of words, human activities and social interaction must be institutionally, politically, culturally, and historically contextualized (Sinclair, 2009). As such, LA is considered “independent” which should be opposite to “dependent”. In that sense, independence is not the synonym of learning in isolation. This entails interdependence which is proceeded during the negotiation of meanings, appropriate scaffolds, and cooperation (L. Trinh, 2005). The undeniably important role of social interaction in learning in general and language learning in particular is stressed by those who advocate Vygotskian perspective and characterize learning as a “socially mediated process” (Murphy & Hurd, 2011, p. 44). One of them is Little (1996). According to him, the development and internalization of a capacity to fully and critically take part in social interactions conditions the development of reflective and analytical capacity – at the heart of developing LA.

In terms of the political dimension of LA, Benson (2001) highly valued “the essentially political and transformative character of autonomy”, as “control over learning necessarily involves actions that have social consequences” (pp. 49-50). LA appears to be freedom and right to overcome the imposition of political and social constraints (Benson, 2000; Hsu, 2005; Pennycook, 2013). It entails power and control which are two major topics of interest to critical theory (Hsu, 2005). This political dimension is based on the argument of the critical theory that:

Critical theory is primarily a way of doing philosophy, integrating the normative aspects of philosophical reflection with the explanatory achievements of the social sciences. The ultimate goal of its program is to link theory and practice, to provide insight, and to empower subjects to change their oppressive circumstances and achieve human emancipation, a rational society that satisfies human needs and powers. (Audi, 1999, p. 324)

The theory entered language learning and became critical language pedagogy, including critical language awareness, critical discourse analysis, and critical applied linguistics (Hsu, 2005). They took the barriers between language learners and target language communities into account, and “raise[d] awareness of the explicit and implicit oppressing political/social/cultural ideologies inherent within the language” (p. 20). Therefore, the political dimension of LA is associated with the political version of LA in the following parts.

Interestingly, several scholars have recently delved into some other dimensions of LA including emotional and spatial. O’Leary (2014 ) revised the previous framework, model, and definition of Benson (2001) and predicated that LA depends on “the development of learners’ psychological and emotional capacity to control their own learning through independent action, both within and outside the classroom, and to contribute to the creation of an informational and collegial learning environment, in partnership with their teachers and other learners” (p. 20). She added an affective/emotional intelligence dimension to Benson (2001)’s model of LA. Her project especially highlighted the role of emotions in developing LA in the formal context of language learning. Also investigating the emotional dimension of LA, Lewis (2014) posited that LA can be viewed via a set of competences rather than a single capacity. He emphasized that learners need to show empathy and respect for others’ LA. With regard to spatial dimension, Murray, Fujishima, and Uzuka (2014) suggested adding “space” into three dimensions of control proposed by Benson (2011a). They ascertained that the learners’ imagination of the place, their perception, their definition, their understanding articulation transferring from place to place will determine their activities there and influence LA. It can be a place to speak English, meet, make friends, give and take help, take risks, learn about the

world, get information, and exercise agency.

To sum up, the purpose of this small part is to affirm that LA is a complex construct with multidimensionality (Benson, 2009). For a profound understanding of the concept, the researchers should delve into its different perspectives or versions as well as the common misconceptions of LA. The next section will discuss the relevant misapprehensions of LA.

#### ***3.1.2.4. Misconceptions of LA***

Although LA has been the main concern among the community of language teaching and learning, its nature is often clouded by quite a few misconceptions. Many scholars such as Little (1991), Esch (1997), and Aoki and Smith (1999) sought to identify how LA is misunderstood.

Attention has been drawn to five common misconceptions about LA proposed by Little (1991). The first fallacy is that LA has the same meaning as self-instruction. This means LA is misunderstood to be working alone (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010) and students learn without teachers. However, “total detachment is a principal determining feature not of autonomy but of autism” (Little, 1991, p. 5). LA has no meaning of studying in isolation (T. Lamb, 2017) or being totally independent of teachers’ instruction (Little, 1995). Instead students need trainings to be autonomous (Dickinson, 1996; Illés, 2012). More importantly, students’ learning is considered autonomous when social situations and settings with interactions and communications are available (Murray, 2014a, 2014b) and interdependence is of great significance in LA (Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014; Little, 2020; Palfreyman, 2018). Specifically, Palfreyman (2018) emphasized the significance of collaboration and interdependence towards fostering LA in Asian contexts. Many of those contexts are collectivistic societies (Benson, Chik, & Lim, 2003; N. Bui, 2018).

The second mistaken belief is that any interventions from teachers may cause destruction to students’ attainment of LA. In reality, teachers play an important role in promoting LA (Ludwig & Tassinari, 2021) and their role is not weakened but also they should be the supporter of the learning process because LA “is unlikely to be effectively realized without teacher intervention and guidance” (Hurd, 2008, p. 29). To enhance LA, teachers should facilitate the processes of negotiation that enable learners to identify learning goals, activities and materials, and thus new responsibility (Little, 2004). They can also create “a social learning space...where students come together in order to learn with and from each other” (Murray, Fujishima, & Uzuka, 2014, p. 81).

Thirdly, LA is falsely assumed to be a new teaching and learning methodology. Little (1991) argued that even though teachers' encouragement is essential to autonomous learning, LA will never be prepared or available in the lesson plans. The fourth myth is that LA can be easily realized via one single behavior. Behaviors will reveal autonomous learners, but LA "take[s] different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times" (Benson, 2013, p. 47). This means LA lies in a variety of forms and depends on plenty of factors.

Last but not least, another misconception is that LA once gained is not likely to change. However, LA seems to be hard to win and its stability cannot be firmly promised. An autonomous learner in one field may not be autonomous in other fields (Murray, 1999).

There is a concurrence between Little (1991) and Esch (1997) in analyzing misconceptions about LA. Esch (1997) indicated three main misconceptions. The first one is the danger that autonomous learning will be reduced to a set of skills. Specifically, to promote LA, learners are trained with language learning skills, which leads to a reduction to a certain set of techniques and a display of LA. However, "to support autonomous learning, it is necessary to face the radical aspects of the concept and the question of teacher control versus learner control in particular" (Esch, 1997, p. 166). Secondly, some people may think that the notions of LA in language education and other fields are similar, but language has its specific characteristics which need attention (Esch, 1997). The third misconception is that LA means "learning in isolation" (p. 167), which is akin to the first misconception from Little (1991). This misconception totally denies the role of interdependence with peers, teachers, and social environments.

When there are several questions about how valid LA is in a specific cultural setting, Aoki and Smith (1999) presented three misconceptions of LA and cultural issues. Firstly, a culture and a political unit such as a nation have a common boundary. In fact, even in a nation, there are different cultures such as individual culture or family culture. Besides, the educational culture may reflect the national cultural values, but not evidently the same. Due to the complexity of cultures, it is advisable that cultural unsuitability of a phenomenon should be announced or considered and this case is the cultural inappropriateness of LA in different contexts.

Secondly, culture is viewed as unchangeable and static. Meanwhile, the political, social, and economic contexts, which are subject to change, contribute to nurturing a culture. This misinterpretation seems to correspond with the last misconception proposed by Little (1991) because LA also evolves and develops in these contexts.



Thirdly, the influence of one culture on another one is considered inevitably unfavorable. In the context of education, especially language education, the fact that teachers and learners have influences on each other's cultures is unavoidable. Moreover, they may work together to develop a concept of "negotiated culture" (Aoki & Smith, 1999, p. 21) which would facilitate the fostering of LA.

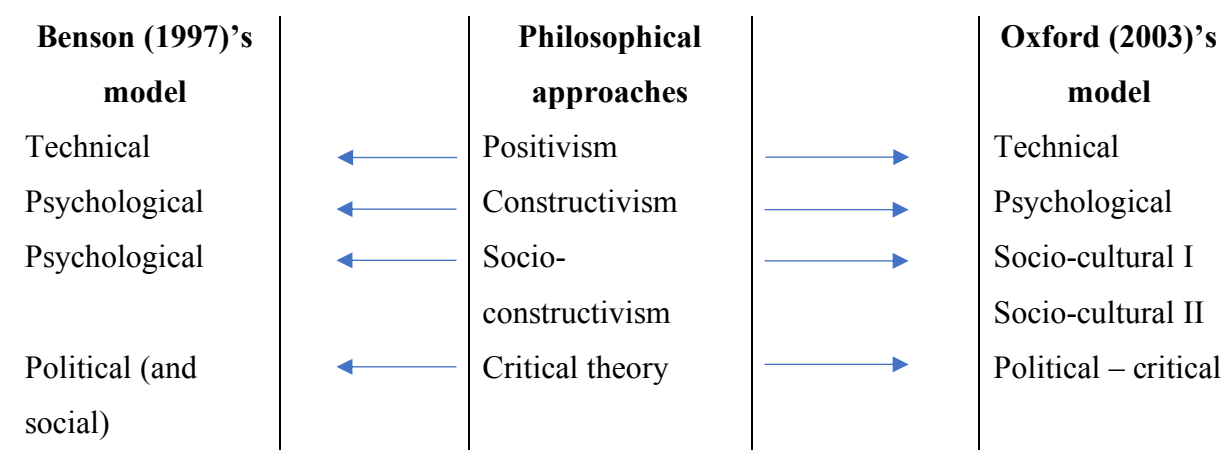
To sum up, it is worth noting that the dearth of information about LA may result in misconceptions about LA from both learners and teachers. The efforts to enhance autonomous learning may have been hindered by these misunderstandings (Llaven-Nucamendi, 2014). Therefore, when the researchers are about to conduct studies on LA, these misconceptions should be taken into consideration (T. Yang, 2005) and the subjects' perceptions of LA have become more and more important. In order to deepen an understanding of LA, the researchers need to investigate its versions or how it is conceived from different perspectives. The next section will undertake that mission.

#### ***3.1.2.5. Versions of LA***

In the discussion of the previous parts, LA shows its complexity and multidimensionality. As a result, there are some models of versions of LA in the scholarly community. To the best of my knowledge, the researchers who try to identify the versions of LA employ a strategy called "Kaleidoscopic". It means "shaking up a number of objects, in this case components of a capacity for autonomy, until they fall into some meaningfully ordered pattern" (Benson, 2009, pp. 18-19).

The most acknowledged model belongs to Benson (1997). According to his model, LA in language education can be illuminated by three major versions, namely psychological, technical, and political. Espousing his model, he believed that it tallies with three main approaches to knowledge and learning in the field of humanities and social sciences which are positivism, constructivism, and critical theory, respectively. However, it is criticized for being "fragmentary" or incomplete by Oxford (2003, p. 18). Oxford (2003) asserted that this model did not delineate the relationship between its components and other important factors such as context, agency, and motivation. Importantly, the socio-cultural version of LA is missing, so she added the socio-cultural perspective into the model and modified the political version. She also separates socio-constructivism from constructivism and refers to two branches of Socio-cultural I & II. The philosophical approaches, Benson's (1997), and Oxford's (2003) models will be visualized in Figure 2 below adapted from Hsu (2005, p. 17). Hsu (2005) commented

that Benson’s categorization above seems to be “rough and confusing” (p. 16), but Hsu (2005) failed to explain the reasons for that roughness and confusion above. Besides, Q. Le (2013) articulated his thoughts that three versions are “narrowly defined” and the boundary between them is “not clear-cut but rather overlapping” (p. 40). The criticisms notwithstanding, Benson’s (1997) model should be given great credit for the first attempt to introduce the ideas of versions/perspectives and systemize the construct of LA.



**Figure 2:** Philosophical approaches and versions of LA

Following will be the discussions of the perspectives in Oxford (2003)’s model and the expansion of the different versions of LA.

### 3.1.2.5.1. Technical autonomy – the values of situational aspects

As described in the graph above, according to Benson (1997), technical version of LA is developed from positivism which believes that knowledge is the reflection of the objective reality of the world (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018), so language can be directly interpreted as a representation of objective reality. This approach, therefore, establishes an underlying framework for structures, drills, and practices in ELT. He also labeled technical autonomy as “the act of learning a language outside the framework of an educational institution and without the intervention of a teacher” (p. 19). I, to some extent, do not agree with Benson in the point that teachers will not intervene in learning processes. In fact, there is a necessity to provide students with a set of skills/techniques/strategies so that they can manage their learning outside formalized classrooms, so I believe it is teachers that help them with those skills and strategies in their first stages and enable them to achieve full autonomy without teacher intervention in their later stages. Benson (1997) added that the studies employing this technical version appreciate attributes from the learning environment.

Stressing the values of external factors, LA's technical mode may provide insights into physical conditions and better understanding of a learning situation politically, psychologically, and socially (Oxford, 2003). Adopting this perspective, Dickinson (1987) highlighted that LA is "the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. In full autonomy there is no involvement of a 'teacher' or an institution. And the learner is also independent of specially prepared materials" (p. 11). This means it puts an emphasis on the situational aspects – "other-created situations – not conditions initially generated by the learner" (Oxford, 2003, p. 81). Those situations or learning environments such as self-access centers, classrooms, home settings, or travel environments can be regarded as the determining factor which influences students' activities. In that sense, as resource-rich environments, they enable students to decide on what, when, and how to reach their goals (Oxford, 2003), enhances their motivation, and gives them more control to employ appropriate learning strategies (T. Dang, 2012). The learners called "autonomous" in this way do not need teacher involvement, consultancy, facilitation, and prepared learning materials (Dickinson, 1987), which I think is the form of a fully autonomous learner and can rarely be attained.

However, Oxford (2003) doubted the appropriateness of this version of LA. She argued that it may be motivating or demotivating on the basis of learner goals and learning styles. She exemplified her points by an introverted person and an extroverted one. The former who prefers working alone will find solo reading motivating, whereas the latter who enjoys interaction will be demotivated by solo learning. In the similar vein, T. Dang (2012) pointed out that many of situational attributes do not differentiate the learning methods. LA is not an object which can be simply gifted to students merely by changing the external factors of the environment. Hence, the other-created situation, by itself, is not adequate to foster LA. From the technical perspective of LA, learners' personal variations are not taken into consideration.

If the researchers simply put LA into technical perspective, it would be fragmentary because there are many other factors to take into account and specifically, "without psychology,.... the technical perspective would be inert" (Oxford, 2003, p. 82). The next section documents the psychological dimension in detail.

#### **3.1.2.5.2. Psychological autonomy – the values of learners' attributes**

As described in the graph above, the psychological version of LA has its roots in constructivism. This approach to teaching and learning evolved from psychology and information processing theories (Kaufman, 2004). It signifies the nature of knowledge and the

way knowledge is created. Unlike the positivists, the proponents of constructivism affirm that reality depends on the mind. The father of constructivism, Immanuel Kant posited that the human mind creates new experience rather than passively getting perception. Only by the internal construction of cognitive rules can a person gain experience and broaden knowledge, he believed. Another prominent figure of constructivism is Jean Piaget. He postulated that children utilize their mental structures to make sense of the world. These available structures are determined by their biological readiness and life experiences (John, 2018). Besides, the constructivists regard learning as a conscious, intelligent, and active process and it is stimulated by means of understanding the meanings of things in the way that can be transferred into solving new problems (Hsu, 2005). Therefore, as one can argue, constructivism and psychological autonomy have a close relationship, in which they both accentuate individual differences and knowledge-constructing ability.

Specifically, LA's psychological mode focuses on mental and emotional characteristics inside learners (Oxford, 2003). In that regard, LA is "the internal psychological capacity to self-direct one's own learning" (Benson, 1997, p. 25). Two key figures in the field of LA who adopt this perspective are Holec (1981) and Little (1991), as discussed in the previous sections. Benson (1997) highlighted that central to this version, which is learners' attributes such as motivation, learning style, or attitudes, corresponds with constructivist approach to language teaching – internal process of constructing knowledge. The psychological perspective denotes autonomous learners as those with high motivation, self-efficacy, a sense of agency, positive attitudes, a need for achievement, and a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Oxford, 2003; Benson, 2007b).

However, as argued by T. Dang (2012), standing either on technical or psychological perspectives is not sufficient to fully understand the construct of LA. The former values learning situations, whereas the latter acknowledges individual psychology. Therefore, the combination of both two seems to provide a more comprehensive overview because they are complementary to each other. However, the context where a learner is working plays an important role to the language learning process and socio-cultural LA investigates the interactions between learners and such a context on fostering LA. The next part will discuss that version of LA.

### **3.1.2.5.3. Socio-cultural autonomy – the values of social interactions**

As mentioned in the graph above, this version of LA has its origin in the approach of socio-constructivism whose father is the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. His theory in 1978 underlines the influences of social and cultural contexts on learning and constructing knowledge. Learning is mediated by the social interactions with the environments such as parents, teachers, peers, and other social agents in the community (Kaufman, 2004).

Oxford (2003) criticized Benson's (1997) model for missing out on socio-cultural autonomy. In her model, LA's socio-cultural mode includes two sub-versions, namely Socio-cultural I and Socio-cultural II. To be more specific, socio-cultural I mainly focuses on Vygotskian theory in second or foreign language learning which emphasizes the role of contexts in two ways. First of all, learning is contextualized in a socio-cultural setting for specific people at a specific time. Secondly, context includes a special type of relationship. That is of "mediated learning" (Oxford, 2003, p. 86), which necessitates the interaction between learners and more capable social agents around them. In this sense, the role of those more capable others such as teachers and parents is clearly indicated. They want and probably help the learners to develop abilities to act independently and intentionally.

Turning to Socio-cultural II, it is grounded from the study of Rogoff, Lave, Wenger, and other colleagues in many years (1984, 1991, 1996, 1998, and 2002). Both Socio-cultural I and II concern mediated learning, but Socio-cultural II prioritizes the context of LA rather than the individual who exercises it. According to this perspective, context includes "the community of practice...., the relationships that occur in that community, and the larger social and cultural environment" (Oxford, 2003, p. 87). Learners or newcomers take part in the community of practice through cognitive apprenticeships with practitioners. These old timers are willing to help them with knowledge, practice, and strategies so that they can become a member of the community of practice.

To put it in a nutshell, both socio-cultural perspectives proposed by Oxford (2003) highly appreciated the significance of social interaction towards the learners' development of LA which Smith and Ushioda (2009) called a "socially situated" view (p. 244). Supporting this version of LA, Kohonen (1992) characterized LA as "being responsible for one's own conduct in the social context; being able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways" (p. 19). As a result, an autonomous learner is a responsible social person, a good cooperator, and a constructive problem solver. Also stressing social interactions, Kerr (2002) claimed that LA "is best understood as describing a particular kind of relation between individuals and their community" (p. 15). Holding the same perspective, Palfreyman (2003)

argued that although LA has had associations with individual learners, sociocultural context and collaboration with others remain important roles in not only education but also human lives.

The studies adopting this perspective are concerned about contextual choices, dialogic negotiations, interactive activities, and critical reflection to foster LA (N. Bui, 2018; Little, 2009; Sinclair, 2009). However, LA's socio-cultural mode is said to be insufficient to rationalize the individual development of LA at a more philosophical level (T. Dang, 2012). Therefore, the construct of LA should be shed light on from the political-critical perspective. The next section is dedicated to the detailed discussion of that perspective.

#### **3.1.2.5.4. Political-critical autonomy – the values of power, access, and ideology**

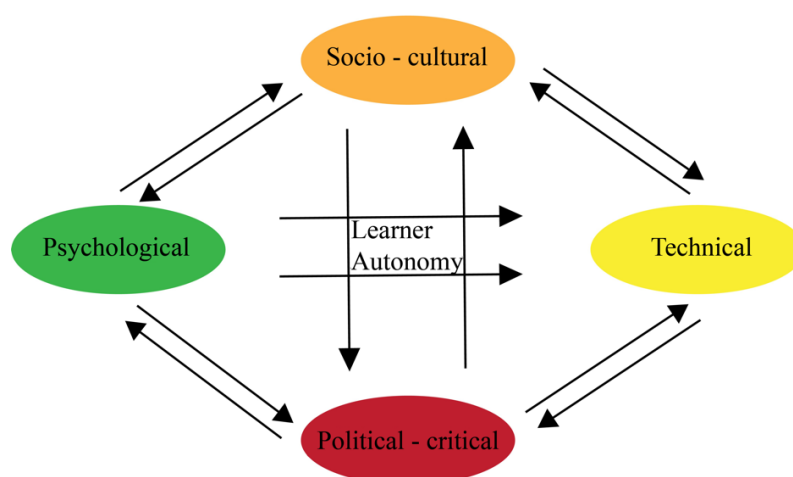
This version stems from critical theory, as briefly discussed in part 2.3.3. Accordingly, LA refers to issues of power, access, and ideology (Oxford, 2003; Pennycook, 2013). Sinclair (2000a) provided details on critical theory in LA and argued that it “relates to the uncovering of the learners’ inhibitions and constraints in relation to the learning process and to enabling them consciously to construct approaches which maximize their own learning and personal potential within their own context” (p. 82). This context, according to Oxford (2003), is connected to ideologies and attitudes in particular locations, situations, institutional and socioeconomic levels, or ethnographic characteristics (age, gender, religions, and cultures). As a result, LA is influenced by such forms of contexts above, which makes it “situation-biased and non-universal” (T. Dang, 2012, p. 36). Simultaneously, autonomous learners are supposed to have power to control their learning processes, have choices in learning content, and have freedom from oppressiveness in these contexts (Oxford, 2003). In this regard, learners desire for better learning outcomes and better life quality. Studies employing this perspective concentrate on providing learners with more power and freedom to make informed choices in their learning process (N. Bui, 2018; Pennycook, 2013).

LA's political-critical mode is praised for giving a philosophical overview of LA. It appreciates ideological, social, cultural, and ethnographical factors, which affirms that LA should be locally, regionally, and globally taken into consideration. The level or degree of perception of LA depends very much on the local – regional – global situations. However, this perspective is probably criticized for not giving a full description of LA and its dimensions.

To summarize, researchers should make efforts to cover as many versions of LA as possible because they are not antithetical to each other (Oxford, 2003) and from my viewpoint, they are

supplementary to the others so that the construct of LA can be fully explored, and researchers may have more comprehensive description of this concept. The personal attributes – psychological perspective and the situational aspects – technical perspective are interrelated to form and gradually develop LA. These personal characteristics and the situational environment have impacts on the learners’ social interactions because apparently, they mainly determine whether the negotiations or interactions are successful or not. They are also indicators of the degree of desire for ideologies, access, and power which depends on the learners’ own ability and situations.

Besides, I believe that their desire and social interactions, as motivators, may help the learners to foster their ability and manipulate the situations/environments or even hinder them from developing. Furthermore, social interactions between the learner and his/her surrounding environment – socio-cultural perspective is directed by a desire for power, access, and ideologies – political – critical perspective. Meanwhile, that desire (political-critical version) is also influenced by social agents from the socio-cultural version in the way that the old-timers or more capable others cooperate with the learners to make them more desirable or not. As it turns out, the perspectives of LA are interrelated and equally important, as shown in Figure 3. In this study, all of them will be taken into consideration to explain the points in the findings.



**Figure 3:** *The relationship among four versions of LA*

Elaborating on the misconceptions and the versions of LA, I would like to argue that LA is not learning in isolation and without teachers. The teachers at school are direct and immediate agents who more or less work with and influence students’ learning. However, their roles need

changing due to the shift from traditional teacher-centered approach to learner-centeredness (Thanasoulas, 2000). The upcoming section will discuss teacher's roles in advancing LA.

### ***3.1.2.6. The role of teachers in fostering LA***

In the context of many Asian countries in general and Vietnam in particular, where English has not become a second language yet, teachers/instructors of English play an important role in the language classrooms as well as enhancing LA among students, especially non-English majors. As postulated by Little (2000), "the growth of autonomy requires the stimulus, insight and guidance of a good teacher" (p. 4) and as Benson (2000) put it, such a teacher should perform "the key role of explaining and justifying these constraints to his or her learners." (p. 116). By "constraints", Benson (2000) believed they will hinder the promotion of LA. Despite the constraints, LA will possibly exist in case teachers can explain and justify those constraining factors (Huang, 2006a).

"Teaching is often described as being either teacher-centered or learner-centered" (Killen, 2015, p. 94). The former approach is the traditional one in which teachers manipulate mostly the learning process in class. Meanwhile, the latter associated with LA emphasizes the active role of learners in their own learning. However, this does not mean that the role of teachers is either excluded or eased. Their job becomes "a difficult one requiring great skill and sensitivity" (Sheerin, 2013, p. 64) in the way that they need to pay great attention to whether they provide learners with too much or too little help.

Little (2009) outlined three pedagogical principles that shape a teacher's role in autonomous learning. The first one is called learner involvement in which learners need to be fully involved regulation of cognition or planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning process). Secondly, it is the principle of learner reflection. That is, teachers have to encourage students' continuous reflection on learning process and their engagement in self-assessment. The third principle is about target language use. Accordingly, the target language must be used as the medium of communication and the learning goal. Little (2009) drew other researchers' attention to the fact that a framework is established so that each teacher must choose and apply an approach that works with learners in terms of age, proficiency, focus, and goals. It is concluded that teachers' roles in class are "to create and sustain a community whose language learning is a function of its language use" (Little, 2020, p. 4).

In a quantitative analysis, Fumin and Z. Li (2012) concluded that teachers perform manifold roles such as learning resources, study guide, classroom organizer, and learning regulator. T.



C. Nguyen (2012) also indicated that the roles of teachers in enhancing LA is really seminal because they have to create a supportive environment, act as learners, understand the learner's bibliography, maintain the relationship between them and students, and retain flexibility in fostering LA.

Breen and Mann (2013) portrayed a teacher of autonomous learners as a person with three outstanding attributes. Firstly, it is self-awareness which refers to the ability to raise awareness of themselves as learners. That is, teachers are able to know when learners act autonomously or not, which beliefs they have about learning and teaching, how their experiences form assumptions, perceptions, and practices in class (T. Phan, 2015). This point is shared by T. C. Nguyen (2012) above. Secondly, it is belief and trust in learners' capacities to learn and exercise their LA. Teachers should bear in mind that each individual student is able to learn languages autonomously. Thirdly, teachers should have a desire to foster LA in classrooms and be prepared to face up to the consequences for their practice of the current position.

Voller (2013) classified teacher roles into three categories, namely facilitator, counselor, and resource. As a facilitator, teachers provide learners with technical support such as analyzing needs, setting goals, choosing materials, and the like, so that they can plan, carry out their independent learning. Teachers also psycho-socially support learners by being supportive, guiding them to overcome difficulties, raising their awareness of autonomous learning, and so forth. As a counselor, teachers act as a supervisor interacting one-to-one to help learners with self-directedness. As a resource, teachers make their knowledge and expertise available. Also, they orient their students towards a variety of other knowledge resources. This role is especially for those who are endeavoring to learn independently but still need help (Alonazi, 2017). N. T. Nguyen (2014) asserted that teachers need to raise awareness of their responsibilities because they are shifting their role from knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators.

Learners are expected to be aware of the roles of teachers and their own roles because their beliefs as regards their roles may strongly influence their exercise of responsibility in or out of class and their readiness to learn English autonomously. This point is strongly supported by Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys (2002), Cotterall (1995b, 1999), Dişlen (2011), Hozayen (2011), Q. Le (2013), Mousavi Arfae (2017), Swatevacharkul (2009), and Tomita and Sano (2016). It can be argued that students' beliefs about language learning are underpinned by the behaviors of teachers. Those who believe that teachers are facilitators of learning are ready for autonomous learning; by contrast, learners who think that teachers should tell them what to do, offer help, and explain everything are not yet ready for LA (Rungwaraphong, 2012). Hence, students' expectations of teacher authority can impede teachers from transferring responsibility

to them (Cotterall, 1995b).

There is a strong conviction that learners' beliefs about their own roles and their teacher's roles will make a great contribution to their willingness to embrace LA. This will be another main point in my argumentation to a conceptualization of LA. Notwithstanding the new roles of teachers to foster LA, each individual learner will achieve LA differently from others in different activities, different specific-domain subjects, different contexts, and so on. The following part will systematically present and discuss the models of LA degrees.

### ***3.1.2.7. Levels/Degrees of LA***

As aforementioned in the previous part, LA is a multidimensional construct and it means differently for different people in different contexts. Arguably, one person may be autonomous in learning this area, but not that autonomous to learn another one. Therefore, it is believed that exercising LA will vary by degree not only in each individual during his/her life but also across different people (Reich, 2002). This point of view is strongly supported by Nunan (1997) who claimed that LA is not an "all-or-nothing" concept (p. 92); therefore, "there are levels and degrees of learner autonomy" (Nunan, 1996; Nunan, 2003, p. 195). In this part, several models of levels of LA will be presented and analyzed.

The first model was proposed by Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1990), in which three stages of task performance were identified. Although this model was not intentionally for describing the degree of LA, I believe it is a useful reference. At the first stage, learners are in "dogged practice and repetition" and they totally depend on the content/task despite some certain degree of competence gained. The second stage is detachment from the task and reflection on it. Learners still focus on the task. The last stage is "the crucial trigger to total self-organization of learning" and learners shift their focus to the learning process (p. 213). The authors contended that it is not easy at all to reach the last stage for most students. This is aligned with the comment that probably learners cannot enhance LA without expert help (Little, 1991).

Another model by Littlewood (1996a) not only presents three levels of LA control but also emphasizes three goals of autonomous learning. These levels are autonomy as a language learner, autonomy as a language user, and autonomy as a person. Autonomy as a language learner is related to the acquisition of the ability to engage in self-direction inside and outside the classroom through collective experience. This goal includes the control over the direction, content of language learning, and the management of language learning process. Autonomy as a language user involves students' capacity for using language creatively and their ability of

using suitable language communication strategies. Autonomy as a person refers to the ability to communicate thoughts, express personal meanings, and develop personalized learning contexts. These three levels describe the processes of decision-making and action in language learning, use of target language, and use of language to “make difference in oneself and in society” (Lai, 2017, p. 11).

The third model constructed by Nunan (1997) consists of five levels of actions which are awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence. Nunan (1997) admitted that “fully autonomous learners are a rarity” (p. 201). This model offers a supportive index of the order of LA development because behaviors and processes of learning in each phase are expressly indicated (T. Dang, 2012). However, it is criticized for “overlaps and learners will move back and forth among levels” (Hsu, 2005, p. 99) since this developmental order may not be always true for students in various contexts (T. Dang, 2012).

Littlewood (1999) divided LA into two levels of degrees. The first one is reactive autonomy. Although it cannot create directions, learners are enabled to organize resources autonomously to achieve their goals after the directions are initiated. Littlewood (1996b) argued that students in Asia possess a high level of reactive autonomy, as they follow authority to a high degree. As a preliminary step to the second one, this level is considered lower than proactive autonomy. This level of LA is reached when learners are able to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. In other words, learners can manage their learning with metacognitive skills.

Proactive autonomy is usually thought to belong to students in Western countries, but Asian students achieve a high level of proactive autonomy when they work in groups because they are said to be group-oriented (Littlewood, 1996b). Littlewood (2002) suggested that to shift from reactive autonomy to proactive autonomy, cooperative learning needs to move to collaborative learning. Specifically, cooperative learning, which is associated with reactive autonomy, allows students to work independently from tasks but somehow they depend on teachers for the learning agenda. Meanwhile, collaborative learning, which is a response to proactive autonomy, provides learners with more choices of content and methods. Littlewood (1996b) noted that the institutional controls and authorities prevent Asian learners from moving from reactive autonomy to proactive autonomy. Although the categorization is very broad with only two categories, these points from Littlewood become important in this study in the context of Vietnam, a typical Asian country when it delves into the perceptions and the factors influencing LA among students.

In their guide to develop responsibility, Scharle and Szabó (2000) designed a model with three stages including raising awareness, changing attitudes, and transferring roles. The first

stage is a cognitive process with teacher's control because "they need to be told what to do" (p. 9). Then, learners choose appropriate techniques/methods, practice their new role and habits from their old behaviors in the second stage. In the last stage, learners are given more freedom to control the tasks. However, it is worth noting that this model shares a lot of similarities with Nunan's model but with fewer stages.

In his project to foster LA, Hsu (2005) made great efforts to construct a model of developmental LA. There are five stages in a hierarchy including paying attention, consciousness raising, reflective thinking, critical thinking, and metacognitive proficiency. He argued that students start with low level of LA and then move to the next stages. He concurred with Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1990) and Nunan (1997) that it is difficult for students to reach the last stage because it requires the highest level of autonomy and subject matter. Shed light on by the theoretical and pedagogical principles and approaches, stages of this model share some similarities with Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1990)'s, Nunan (1997)'s, Scharle and Szabó's. (2000), but Hsu's (2005) model provides more details and more strong rationales.

Macaro (2008) illuminated the shifting dimensions of LA in language education and designs a model of three dimensions including autonomy of language competence, autonomy of language learning competence, and autonomy of choices. Illustrated by two examples of teachers and students in real life, the first dimension mentions the ability to communicate in the target language after a certain extent of mastery of language rules. In other words, students "are moving from the language of others to the language of the self" (p. 51). The second one shows the ability to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies effectively. Specifically, Macaro (2008) described an autonomous learner of language learning competence. S/he has potential to develop knowledge and awareness of strategies. Besides, that learner has a learning environment, potential to develop experience, confidence, and application of metacognitive knowledge/awareness. In addition, s/he has opportunities to experience the transfer of strategies to the tasks. The last dimension covers the ability to control over the language learnt, the goal, and purpose of learning. This model can be compared and contrasted with Littlewood (1996a). Autonomy as a language learner can be referred to autonomy of language competence. Autonomy as a language user is not much different from autonomy of language learning competence. Autonomy as a person seems highly similar to autonomy of choices. These comparisons can be explained because the nature of LA is multidimensional and its aspects are interrelated and supplementary to each other.

In conclusion, as clearly shown in T. Dang's (2012) critical review, the literature has studied the models of levels of LA on the basis of two criteria, namely stages of development and areas

of control. Specifically, Thomas and Harri-Augstein's (1990) (my own analysis), Nunan's (1997), Littlewood's (1999), Scharle and Szabó's (2000)'s, Hsu's (2005) (my own analysis) reveal developmental stages, whereas the others focus on areas of control. They are all useful as references to plan the curriculum and develop LA. Each of them has its own pros and cons and the researchers are advised to critically analyze them before adapting or using them. I would like to comment that the degree or level of LA obtained by learners are ranged by factors which have impacts on LA and how LA is perceived by learners themselves. The next two parts will be my endeavours to carefully scrutinize related research on these two issues.

### **3.2. Review of previous empirical studies**

This section discusses previous research on perceived LA and factors that influence the development of LA to provide a comprehensive overview of the research problem and to clarify the contribution of the current study to the field of EFL. The following criteria for inclusion and exclusion were established for the relevance of the review:

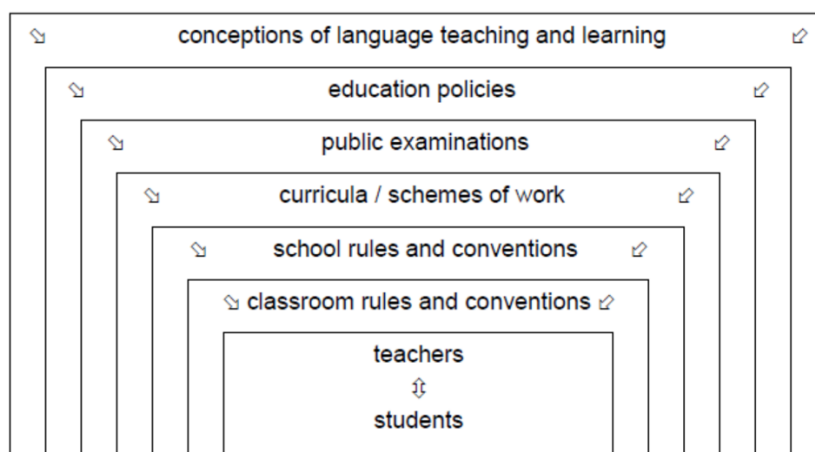
- Date of publication: from 2000 to 2021
- Type of publication: journal articles
- Language of publication: English
- Settings: EFL and ESL contexts
- Level of education: tertiary
- Keywords: language learning, learner autonomy, perceptions, factors, influence

The electronic search included SCOPUS, Science Direct, Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR. The search terms employed while searching for articles were learner autonomy in ELT, constraints and affordances, and perceptions.

#### **3.2.1. Factors that influence LA**

LA has been widely studied for several decades, but the number of studies which systematically delves into factors that influence LA is still limited. When the literature is reviewed, there are two categories of influencing factors which I find important, namely internal factors and external ones. The former is associated with the learners themselves, whereas the latter is linked to the environmental factors from the outside world.

Benson (2000) scrutinized four major categories of constraints to LA. Firstly, the broad policies on language education may hinder the development of LA. Secondly, impediments can come from institutional rules or regulations, curriculums, examinations, certification, schools' physical and social organization, and classroom practices. Thirdly, conceptions of what the target language is, how it is organized, and how it is used correctly will influence fostering autonomous language learning. Lastly, it is the language teaching methodologies which include assumptions about how English is learned, and related resources and activities. All the factors above will externally influence the exercise of LA. Elaborating on this four-category model, Benson (2012) formulated another model to illustrate the constraints to autonomous learning in ELT in Hong Kong. The model is demonstrated in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4:** Benson (2012)'s model of constraints to LA in ELT in Hong Kong

It can be easily seen from the figure that the changes from each layer outside will impose constraints on both teachers and learners. From students' point of view, their LA will be influenced by all of the nested layers above in which teachers are "both part of the context that constrains their autonomy and the immediate agents of these constraints" (Benson, 2012, p. 9). All the factors presented in this model are external constraints/aid to the learners' LA development. Despite speaking of constraints to LA, both Benson's (2000) and Benson's (2012) models provide a comprehensive portrayal of external factors which may bring either positive or negative impacts on autonomous language learning development. They will be referred to so much in this study.

Chan et al. (2002) highlighted one of the conclusions that the learning environment at tertiary level in Hong Kong is under high pressure, and factors such as heavy dependence on

teachers and huge workload will constrain LA from developing. As an internal factor, learners' dearth of autonomous learning experience hinders LA's advancement.

Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, and Turner (2004) analyzed three types of affordances to LA including organizational, procedural, and cognitive support. Specifically, if LA is organizationally fostered, learners are permitted to make decisions about classroom management such as group members, evaluation procedures, and classroom rules in the formal lessons. Procedural LA support emphasizes learners' choices of how to present their ideas such as selecting materials, and displaying work. These two affordances to LA appear to refer to external factors influencing LA. LA is supported cognitively in the way that learners are provided with opportunities to evaluate their work on the self-referential basis. Some exemplified strategies are asking questions, finding different solutions, and re-evaluating errors. In my opinion, this LA support is related more to internal factors impacting LA. The authors commented that cognitive LA support "truly leads to the psychological investment in learning that educators strive for" (p. 101). Stefanou et al. (2004) made efforts to categorize the types of LA- supporting factors and specifically illustrate each type with respective real-life examples. However, this classification does not seem to cover all the aspects of influences and the categories themselves are overlapped and not-clear-cut. The examples of strategies need more explanations.

Huang (2006b) carried out a project to further improve reflection and LA in EFL learning for learners at a Chinese university. He identified several externally constraining factors such as institutional pressures, societal expectations, tensions and conflicts in teachers' and students' agendas. Besides, the internal factor is what students prioritize as their short-term and long-term plans for learning.

From focus group interviews and her own arguments, the study by Nakata (2011) provided additional support for the constraints on LA. Accordingly, LA development, from teachers' perspective, is hindered by the institutions in the way that they are not adequately flexible and they limit teachers' perceptions of allowing students to set goals. In addition, the data indicated that the pressure from entrance exams impedes fostering LA. This can be called exam-oriented study. These two factors are both external to the development of LA.

T. Dang (2012) collected data from questionnaires, log records, and semi-structured interviews to understand the factors that mediate LA in the context of Vietnamese higher education. Interestingly, he found out several correlations among LA and mediating factors including gender, computer proficiency, teaching in general. In the offline learning environment, T. Dang (2012) discovered three factors which mediate autonomous learning,

namely motivation, preference, and attitudes. Briefly, students who are flexible in their learning preference can employ various methods to learn autonomously. Regarding motivation, participants in the study reveal three sources of motivation which are personal interests – internal factor, friends' achievement – external factor, and desire for an outstanding achievement profile – a both internal and external factor. In terms of attitudes - important roles in mediating LA, they are under negotiation during the learning process and they are different towards different learning behaviors.

In the online learning environment, three factors mediating LA are computer competence, attitudes, and goal orientation. Specifically, the more competent students are, the more liable they are to engage in the online environment. The more positive their attitudes are, the more engaged they are in the online learning environment. Turning to goal orientations, task-oriented learners only wish to fulfill course requirements, whereas content-oriented ones tend to search for learning opportunities and resources. Community-oriented students have a tendency to socialize in the online environment. It is suggested that although content –oriented students may gain the most effective learning, students should be simultaneously all-three-goal-oriented for online learning.

Using case studies of Asian students in Australia, T. C. Nguyen (2012) classified the potential constraints in the process of developing LA into three main groups. The first one is from the learners themselves. They do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to foster their LA. He also spoke of their learning styles in collectivistic communities in the Asian context which characterize Asian students. Secondly, the obstacles may come from teachers. Specifically, teachers demonstrate their importance in fostering LA. It depends a lot on their willingness to enhance autonomous learning. The third group of factors stems from social and cultural hurdles, in which Confucian cultural heritage is criticized for influencing learners' styles. Its educational model is teacher-centered; as a result, students are excessively dependent on teachers.

T. C. Nguyen (2012) stressed that the behaviors and attitudes in Confucianism are seemingly against the principles of LA which value decision making, independence, and responsibility. It can be apparent that the first group of obstacles in his study makes reference to internal factors. The second and the third groups, meanwhile, tend to focus on external factors, but the third one of social and cultural constraints argued by T. C. Nguyen (2012) may turn the external aspects into the internal ones, because the ideology and cultures contribute to the formation of learning styles. However, as far as I am concerned, the argumentation of the author for this part is intuitive, experience-based, and not really well-developed.



Extracting a small part from the project's findings, Q. Le (2013) identified some cultural obstacles to developing LA in Vietnam. Firstly, promotion of LA takes place in the context of exam-oriented education with time constraints and strict syllabus. Secondly, the power distance between teachers and learners hampers LA from developing. This is so because the larger the distance, the more it represents teacher dependence and views of teachers' supremacy.

In a qualitative study, Micallef (2016) utilized semi-structured interviews, observations, teachers' written reflections and explored the constraints for LA from teacher participants' viewpoints. The internal obstructions are learners' shortage of learning responsibility, engagement, and commitment, their passivity, their lack of respect for others' LA, and their dearth of cross-linguistic knowledge. By contrast, the external ones include backwash effects of exam-oriented education, traditional system of education, summative testing and assessments, and unsupportive familial backgrounds.

In her mixed-method study, N. T. Nguyen (2014) sought to address teachers' beliefs about LA. She highlighted that there are a lot of barriers to the development of LA in Vietnam. They can be bereft of resources, educational policies, curriculum, technology, teacher training, testing and assessment system. She further showed the data that teacher participants in her study have had almost no professional training in LA before. ELT in her research setting is test-oriented and textbook-based. Most academic content, including minimum knowledge requirement, main objectives, time for theory and practice, and the like, is centralized and controlled by MOET. These can be categorized into the external factors, whereas students' lack of motivation and/or low English language proficiency internally contribute to the impediment of developing LA. The results from this research shared many points in common with other studies on LA conducted in Vietnam. They can be a useful source of reference for my study.

Mousavi Arfae (2017) in his study in the ESL context of Ontario, Canada argued that there exist organizational and individual barriers to the promotion of LA. The former refers to external factors including time allocation, class size, requirements, policies, and resources. The latter mentions internal challenges with learner resistance, self-efficacy beliefs, and cultural differences.

Investigating the constraints on LA from the teachers' perspectives in Pakistan, Yasmin, and Sohail (2018) used qualitative approach to dig deep into the phenomenon and present clear thematic results. They reached the conclusion that teachers in the study lack awareness of LA and show authority reflected by Asian culture. Besides, the teachers lack willingness to transfer control to learners and tolerance towards learners' opinion. Notably, they show bias for learners in terms of cognitive abilities, social class, gender, religious and political tendency. From my

point of view, these socio-cultural constraints above are external factors which have impacts on fostering LA. The authors revealed other socio-cultural constraints. The study found that learners depend on teachers and expect teachers to direct them wholly. It can be explained by the fact that students get familiar with teacher-centered classes and have no experience of LA before. One more barrier in promoting LA is students' shyness in interactions with peers of opposite sex, which hinders language learning. Teachers endeavor to get learners involved in target language use, whereas they avoid that opportunity. Dependence on teachers and shyness in interaction with peers can be regarded as internal factors influencing LA.

Using the qualitative approach, H. Tran (2019) examined LA in relation to assessment in higher education in Vietnam and suggested that limited understanding of LA among teachers and students, and washback effect of assessment systems are among the major factors which contribute to low levels of LA demonstrated by students. The former is an internal factor while the latter is external.

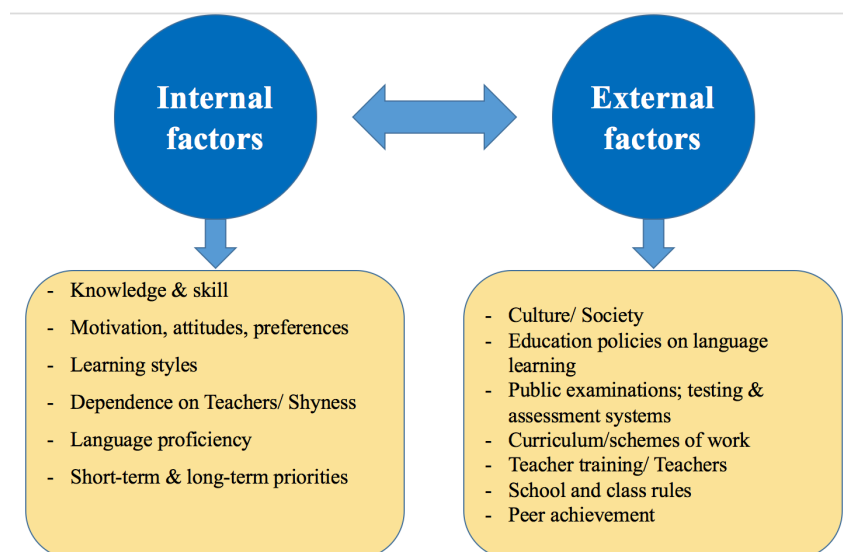
In a qualitative study investigating both teachers' and learners' perceptions in Cyprus, Basri (2020) concluded that several factors which hinder LA practice and support include backgrounds of participants, mismatched expectations between teachers and students, teachers' spoon-feeding tendencies, lack of teacher autonomy, and large-sized classes. Backgrounds and expectations are internal factors that influence LA, whereas the others are external factors limiting LA.

Using mixed methods of questionnaires, observation, and semi-structured interviews, Ahmadianzadeh, Seifoori, and Tamjid (2020) explored teachers' beliefs and their practice of LA. The remarkable result to emerge from the data is that as for teachers, the obstacles in developing LA mainly come from policy makers and learners. The limitations are imposed by the policy makers. They may be standardized curriculum, exam-oriented courses, facilities, or philosophy of language learning and teaching. Additionally, teachers have incompetent professional initiatives and lack experience. These can be seen as external factors which have influences on LA. Learners, from teachers' views, are not familiar with the concept of LA, and lack language proficiency, which are internal factors influencing LA.

In a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with EFL lecturers, Yasmin, Naseem, and Abas (2020) sought to explore the constraints in fostering LA in the Pakistani context. The findings revealed three main themes. Firstly, socio-cultural factors included little known about LA, teachers' work, learners' dependence on teachers and shyness. Secondly, psychological constraints were teachers' and learners' attitudes and motivation. Thirdly, institutional barriers manifested themselves in syllabus, examination system, and teacher and learner training.

Accordingly, learners' shyness, dependence on teachers, attitudes, and motivation can be categorized into internal factors, whereas the others belong to external factors.

Although some studies reviewed explore teachers' beliefs or perspectives about constraints/mediating factors to LA development, it can be inferred from Benson's (2012) model that what affects teachers will impact learners, so these studies are still of importance for future reference. What is more, most studies signaled external factors. What I would like to argue is that these factors influence learners gradually so that learners will change their perceptions, attitudes, motivation, learning styles, and behaviors, which will sooner or later become internal changes to enhance autonomous language learning. For example, if the policy on language learning puts emphasis on process-oriented approach or student-centeredness, learners' motivation, attitudes, and learning styles may change. In turn, if the internal aspects of learners are already adequate or become better, the external factors will change. A simple example is that if the students are all proficient, motivated, eager to interact, and the like, teachers will change teaching methodologies and testing and assessment will be modified. In the other words, internal and external influencing factors are interactive or bidirectional toward the LA advancement. Their relationship will be modelled in Figure 5.



**Figure 5:** Internal & external factors influencing LA

In conclusion, this part of the chapter contains a selective review of research which illuminates factors which influence the enhancement of LA in different contexts. It is a fact that their aims are not to find out influencing factors, but the authors analyze the results and arrive at a conclusion. This is the gap that stimulates me to conduct this study that seeks to find out the factors directly.

### **3.2.2. Perceptions of LA**

There is a multiplicity of studies on LA. They investigate English-major students' and teachers' perceptions and practices, and intervention or training programs to foster LA.

Chan et al. (2002) used questionnaires and follow-up interviews to collect data and SPSS for Windows to analyze the data based on descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. They explored 508 university students' perspectives on and practices of LA in Hong Kong. The authors revealed learners' perceptions of teachers' and their own roles, of decision-making abilities, of their motivational level, and their language learning activities inside and outside the classrooms. It was concluded that students have a clear view of teachers' dominant role. They are relatively motivated, but not apparently ready to be autonomous, and the performance of autonomous learning behaviors is not really consistent. However, it would be better if the authors could provide more arguments to support each point of result.

T. Lamb (2009) conducted focused-group conversations with four groups of six participants in the UK and came to a conclusion that apparently, participants desire to have some control over selecting learning activities. He insisted that students need to have chances to make choices and to plan their own work. They should be stimulated to be aware of their role in their learning and their control over learning outcomes. For example, they have "opportunities to manage their learning, development of a language to describe it, sharing of learning strategies and reflection on existing beliefs about learning through enhanced metacognitive knowledge" (p. 86).

Üstünlüoğlu (2009) carried out a research to investigate 320 tertiary level students's perceptions of LA at a Turkish university based on responsibilities, abilities, and activities. The 42-item questionnaires adapted from Chan et al.'s (2002) was used to collect data. SPSS version 11.0 with t tests, ANOVA, and Chi square test was employed to analyze data. The results suggested that learners do not take responsibility for their learning, but they are able to learn English autonomously. As a result, the researcher stressed the significance of training program.

Dişlen (2011) conducted a study at a university in Turkey with 210 participants for 47-item 5-point questionnaires and 24 of whom for semi-structured interviews to explore their perceptions of LA based on nine dimensions. Data analysis was done with SPSS. The conclusion drawn was that from different departments, EFL learners at this university show a positive perception of LA although the degrees for each of nine dimensions are different. The

results also indicated that learners do not know how to become autonomous learners. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that the findings presented seem to be descriptive rather than analytical and the data from questionnaires and interviews is not really well-combined.

Hozayen (2011) investigated all of the first-year undergraduates' readiness to autonomous English learning at Engineering College in Egypt by employing the adapted 90-item questionnaires and applying SPSS version 18.0 with 265 valid responses. He concluded that these freshmen are yet to be ready for full LA although more than two thirds of the participants in the study demonstrate a certain level of LA. The study emphasized the role of learners' awareness of cognitive and metacognitive strategies related to the language learning process. Nonetheless, Hozayen (2011) clearly presented the information on participants' parents' jobs as a sign of socio-economic classes, but there was almost no reference to that information in the study.

Joshi (2011) conducted a mixed-method study to investigate 80 Master-level students' perceptions of LA, the main dimensions of which are beliefs of roles, motivation and learning activities. The data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated that learners practice autonomous learning activities well and they are highly aware of their role in language learning. However, in spite of using mixed methods, the researcher seemed to fail to combine two types of data to discuss the issues. Besides, s/he did not describe the methodology in detail and s/he merely relied on descriptive statistics.

T. Dang (2012) carried out an investigation to explore perceptions and performance of LA in the context of Vietnam. There were two sub-studies. To be more specific, study 1 collected data by questionnaires to systemize the dimensions of LA as perceived by 562 undergraduates of 4 universities. Study 2 used semi-structured interviews, log records, and questionnaires to measure perceptions and performance of those LA dimensions from 247 university students of one cohort at a Vietnamese university. Four interrelated factors are discovered, including "monitoring learning processes", "goal setting and evaluating learning", "using ICTs in learning", and "initiating learning opportunities". Perception and performance of LA are bidirectional although their relationship is not so strong.

Q. Le's (2013) study aimed to comprehend how LA is developed in ELT at a university in Hochiminh city, Vietnam. He exploited case study with mixed methods including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focused groups, learning contract, and learning diaries with 373 non-intervention and 30 intervention students. The results revealed that participants conceive LA as self-study, initiation, or efforts. Teachers are regarded as facilitators to give learners guidance and directions. Furthermore, students are psychologically

ready to learn English autonomously, but they need more training and encouragement to reduce their dependence on teachers. They are also reported to be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to study English, which is supported by their beliefs in ability to learn languages well and the desire for SRL.

Abdel Razeq (2014) examined 140 EFL Palestinian undergraduates' perceptions of LA on the basis of three dimensions which are responsibilities, abilities to learn English autonomously, and actual English-learning activities. He employed questionnaires developed by Chan et al. (2002) and interviews to collect data. The data was analyzed by mean comparisons and t tests for quantitative strand and content analysis for the qualitative one. It was found that learners attribute success and failure of language learning to their teacher's responsibility, but they have abilities for autonomous learning if provided with opportunities. They could do many autonomous English-learning activities. Interestingly, the t-test results showed no significant differences among autonomous-learning abilities, gender, and achievement.

Rushidi and Rushidi-Rexhepi (2015) adapted the questionnaires by Joshi (2011) to explore 50 university students' views of LA. The study concluded that learners are highly aware of their own learning and autonomous activities and they think their roles are important in learning. However, it should be criticized for the sample being too small for survey questionnaires.

Tomita and Sano (2016) delved into how 102 EFL undergraduates at a private university in Japan perceive LA and how teachers of English can help students to be more autonomous. The perceptions are based on the responsibilities of learners and teachers, students' abilities to do autonomous activities, and frequency of these activities. They employed online 47-item questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect comparative data. Interestingly, participants were divided into two groups of high-proficiency level (HPL) and low-proficiency level (LPL). Both groups are ready for autonomous English learning, particularly choosing course content and resources. HPL group prefers having more detailed pedagogical explanations on activities so that they can efficiently get involved in self-guided learning. Meanwhile, LPL counterparts would like to engage in making decisions with regard to language learning inside and outside classrooms, assessing the learning process constantly, and using a broader range of learning activities.

The purpose of Mousavi Arfae's (2017) study was to examine the perceptions of LA from TESL trainers, ESL teachers, and ESL learners, LA's feasibility, desirability, challenges, and teachers' roles in the context of ESL Ontario, Canada. He utilized semi-structured interviews

and questionnaires to collect descriptive and inferential data. There were 114 students from 3 colleges and 2 language centers in Ontario who participated in the study. The findings showed that promoting LA in Ontario is highly welcomed by participants, even though most learners do not feel very autonomous in learning. ESL teachers play diverse roles in developing LA in Ontario and most ESL students have a negative attitude towards the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment program. However, the presentation of findings and result in this study is really complicated and hard to follow. It would be much more reader-friendly if the author could provide the answer for each question by combining data from both quantitative and qualitative strands.

Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017) investigated 160 Thai undergraduates' beliefs about autonomous language learning in terms of observable activities of autonomous language learning and they used questionnaires to collect data and SPSS to analyze data. The results indicated that participants show strong beliefs of autonomous learning, but the behaviors outside class are not at such a high level.

Khalil and Ali (2018) examined the perceptions of LA of both EFL teachers and learners. They used questionnaires for 265 student participants, and questionnaires and interviews for teachers to collect data. SPSS helped to generate and analyze quantitative descriptive statistics, whereas qualitative data was transcribed verbatim to classify data. Finally, they reached a conclusion that basically, students have awareness of practices to enhance LA and of teachers' roles in developing LA, but they are not sure about their ability to select materials and use appropriate strategies in learning English, and about the relationship between the cultural backgrounds and LA. In my view, it is advisable to collect more data from students with more instruments. The quantitative data from questionnaires is likely insufficient.

In the EFL context of Melkong Delta in the South of Vietnam, A. Le (2018) explored 60 EFL learners at a university's voices on LA using narrative interviews in groups of five. The results indicated that the students had positive viewpoints towards LA and defined it in three dimensions including ability, responsibility, and attitude. They all were aware of the importance of LA in their lives.

Q. V. Nguyen (2019) employed a mixed methods research with explanatory sequential design with 1,258 English-major students in Vietnam to investigate their perceptions of responsibility and experience of autonomous learning. The instruments included questionnaires, observations, learning journals, and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that the students wanted to share responsibility with their teacher. They were moderately ready for autonomous learning. ICT and computer-assisted language learning were

reported to be important in blended learning and learning beyond classrooms. I think the findings in this study are significant to the development of LA among English-major students.

H. Tran (2019) in a qualitative research employing documents, semi-structured interviews, and class observations with three classes, their teachers and students indicated that the non-English-major students had a positive view toward LA, perceived it at different levels, and understood it consistently. They conceptualized LA in a mainly proactive sense and partly reactive one.

Definitely, the studies vary in contexts, participants, results, and implications. However, it is worth noting that the existing research studies share quite a few similarities. First of all, in terms of research relevance, they all ascertained the significance of exploring learners' perception of LA. It will make useful reference for teachers as immediate agents in their attempts to foster LA (Chan et al., 2002) and related stakeholders to make any necessary modifications to curriculum, methodologies, and training programs. Secondly, regarding the concept construction, they more or less took into account the dimensions such as "willingness/readiness", "teacher's role", "ability", "responsibility", "motivation" or "decision making", and the like. These will be important points in each study on LA, and probably my study is not an exception. Thirdly, methodologically, these studies reiterated using certain methods or instruments to elucidate research questions. To exemplify, both qualitative and quantitative methods are widely adopted. They were specified by the usage of semi-structured interviews, focused group interviews, and questionnaires. Many studies above adapted the questionnaire version by Chan et al. (2002). SPSS was widely used in the data analysis process.

These similarities will make great contributions to the bulk of my argument in this study. It is noteworthy that there exist studies investigating learners' perceptions of LA, but the number is not really big in comparison with the literature of LA, particularly in the context of Vietnam where some studies on LA are conducted and few of which dig deep into perceptions of learners. The number of research papers on non-English-major students' perceptions of LA is still truly limited in the Vietnamese context. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the conceptualization of LA in my research.

### **3.2.3. Conceptualization of LA in this research**

There is growing evidence that through the last few decades, the concept of LA in the fields of applied linguistics and language learning has been diffused and adapted all over the world depending on the perspectives underlying them. I will theorize and discuss the idea of LA from



the Vietnamese perspective. Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia which has many points in common with some other nations in East Asia such as China, Japan, or Korea. In the past, it was dominated by Chinese emperors for approximately 1,000 years, and Confucianism was selected as the national religion in several dynasties. Its ideology, therefore, is deep-seated in the Vietnamese culture (N. Bui, 2018; Q. Le, 2013). In addressing education, Confucianism postulated that people have to invariably learn, and only by learning do they arrive at an understanding of life, which emphasizes studying or knowledge—*Trí*— one of five virtues (*ngũ thường*) (T. Truong, 2013). As a result, one of the important traditional values in Vietnamese education is a liking for learning, and respect for learning becomes the abiding characteristic (H. Pham & Fry, 2004).

Generally, Vietnamese people highly appreciate academic achievement and believe that it comes from hard work (Q. Le, 2013). As the Vietnamese saying goes, *có công mài sắt, có ngày nên kim* (literally, if a person is hardworking and persistent enough, he can make a needle out of a metal bar). This saying can be understood as “practice makes perfect.” There are several other equivalent proverbs, including *siêng làm thì có, siêng học thì hay*, which means “the more you work, the more you have; the more hard-working you are, the more knowledgeable you become,” or *cần cù bù thông minh*, which means “hard work compensates for lack of intelligence.”

The values of diligence and academic achievement can be associated with the construct of LA, although it is believed to come from Western countries (Murase, 2012; Pokhrel, 2016; Surma, 2004). According to Usuki (2007), the literature predicated that LA requires students to actively participate in decision-making and knowledge-constructing processes. Furthermore, learners need to interact with the community or to work as hard as possible in real-world situations with materials such as newspapers and magazines. These attributes enable learners to be successful in language learning with their own hard work. I strongly believe that responsibility is a precursor of hard work and success. I am of the opinion that LA in language learning refers to taking responsibility for learning the language, or English in this case. By claiming this point, I share the same viewpoint with Oxford (2008) and Q. Le (2013).

Accordingly, responsibility entails students’ conscious awareness of their main role in language learning. The awareness is necessary for students to make continual progress towards language competence enhancement (Emerson, 2014). Such an awareness, or what is labeled by Emerson (2014) as “mindful” (p. 148), is linked to the meaning of an active learner construed by Asian culture vis-à-vis Western culture. That is to say, learners should make hidden mental efforts rather than overt mental behavioral attempts (Q. Le, 2013; Usuki, 2007). Hence, the

ultimate goal of LA could be “from the viewpoint of internal mental involvement with the content rather than the point-of-view of students learning on their own” (Usuki, 2007, p. 2). Notably, the sociocultural, political, and institutional milieus surrounding learners contribute to the development of LA, but their personal conscious awareness is of paramount importance. This underscores what Hsu (2005) portrayed as willpower and what Q. Le (2013) interpreted as personal determination.

To conceptualize LA, the theoretical underpinning of this study has its roots in the Bergen definition aforementioned. There are three main reasons to choose this definition. Firstly, it is in line with Holec’s (1981) and Benson’s (2011a) seminal definitions. They described LA as a construct of capacity, which refers to the psychological perspective of LA. This capacity is typified by an ability to make decisions about learning, requiring three principles: (a) a certain amount of metacognitive knowledge about the learners themselves, the context, the subject, and the learning process; (b) conscious awareness of this knowledge; and (c) conscious reflection on learning. It also requires the usage of metacognitive strategies such as planning, goal setting, monitoring, self-assessment, evaluation, and using learning resources (Sinclair, 2009).

Secondly, it values the significance of willingness or readiness as regards LA. Indeed LA “is a construct of capacity which is operationalized when willingness is present” (Sinclair, 2009, p. 185). That readiness facilitates successful implementation of LA-based programs by guiding curriculum development and classroom practice (Chan et al., 2002; Lin & Reinders, 2019). Also, investigating willingness for LA enables researchers to leave from the culturist view of LA (Yildirim, 2012).

Thirdly, this definition is suited to the context of Vietnam. Specifically, it does not mention the power in the political perspective of LA which highlights learners’ power and freedom to make informed choices in their learning process (N. Bui, 2018; Oxford, 2003; Pennycook, 2013). It is a fact that both teachers and students in Vietnam cannot choose or take control of their learning content which is one of three dimensions of control over learning (Huang & Benson, 2013) because they must follow and implement the learning content predetermined by institutional and national curricula.

The present study stands on the pole of the quintessential strategy which focuses on analyzing components of a construct (see more at Benson, 2009). Hence, the study will conceptualize its view of LA on the basis of its two most essential components: willingness and capacity (Hsu, 2005; Littlewood, 1996a, 1999; Sinclair, 2000a, 2000b). Students need

willingness as well as capacity so that they can take on responsibility for their language learning, and enhance LA. The explanation about these components will be as follows.

### ***3.2.3.1. Willingness***

As the time went by, the researchers thickened and deepened the literature on LA conceptualization by taking more components into account. To be more specific, during the period of advent in the 1980s, responsibility and decision-making became the most popular (Hsu, 2005). In the next decade of the 1990s, several individual attributes were added such as attitudes, willingness, and confidence, which are named “affective factors” by L. Trinh (2005). Willingness is emphasized to be one of the most significant components of LA (Hsu, 2005). Affective factors like willingness play an important role in the development of LA (Cotterall, 1995b; Hsu, 2005; Q. Le, 2013; Lin & Reinders, 2019; Ming & Alias, 2007; Sinclair, 2000a, 2000b; Wenden, 1991). As regardless of their capacity, students will not enhance their LA if they are not willing to take charge of their learning (Sinclair, 2000b). Willingness to engage in autonomous learning consists of two components, namely beliefs about teacher’s role and motivation (Chan et al., 2002; Dixon, 2011; Hsu, 2005) which will be explained below.

#### **3.2.3.1.1. Beliefs about teacher’s roles**

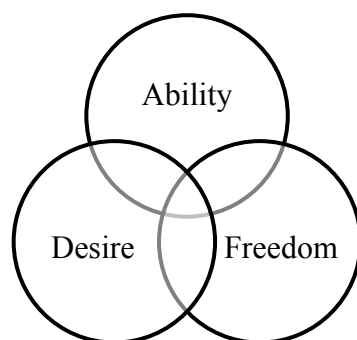
Learners are expected to be aware of the roles of teachers and their own roles because their beliefs as regards their role may strongly influence their exercise of responsibility in or out of class and their readiness to learn English autonomously. This point is strongly supported by the scholars such as Chan et al. (2002), Cotterall (1995b, 1999), Dişlen (2011), Hozayen (2011), Q. Le (2013), Mousavi Arfae (2017), Swatevacharkul (2009), and Tomita and Sano (2016). It can be argued that students’ beliefs about language learning are underpinned by the behaviors of teachers. Those who believe that teachers are facilitators of learning are ready for autonomous learning; by contrast, learners who think that teachers should tell them what to do, offer help, and explain everything are not yet ready for LA (Rungwaraphong, 2012). Hence, students’ expectations of teacher authority can impede teachers from transferring responsibility to them (Cotterall, 1995b). There is a strong conviction that learners’ beliefs about their own roles and their teacher’s roles will make a great contribution to their willingness to embrace LA.

### 3.2.3.1.2. Motivation

As discussed in 3.1.2.3.2.1, autonomous learners are motivated and reflective learners, which results in efficient and effective learning (Little, 1991). Further, the development of motivation is the locomotive of LA, conducive to the development of LA (Hsu, 2005). Indeed, motivation is essential in promoting autonomous learning (Benson, 2007b; H. Liu, 2015). It has been seen as one of the components of LA (Chan et al., 2002; Dixon, 2011; Henri, Morrell, & Scott, 2017; Hsu, 2005; Q. Le, 2013; Littlewood, 1996a; Macaskill & Taylor, 2010; L. Nguyen, 2008, 2009; Swatevacharkul, 2009; Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021; Tassinari, 2012; Ushioda, 1996; Zarei & Elakaei, 2012). I believe that motivation is one of the tools with which learners equip themselves to enter the learning situation and enhance LA. I agree with Littlewood (1996a), Hsu (2005), and Swatevacharkul (2009) that motivation is best conceptualized when it is subsumed under the notion of willingness.

### 3.2.3.2. Capacity

As for the concept of capacity, I will adopt the conceptual framework developed by Huang and Benson (2013). Accordingly, capacity consists of ability, desire, and freedom (see Figure 6). These are discussed in the following sections.



**Figure 6:** Venn diagram on What is capacity of LA? (Adapted from Huang & Benson, 2013)

#### 3.2.3.2.1. Ability

Ability represents knowledge and skills related to studying and language (Benson, 2012; Huang & Benson, 2013). This study is not aimed at measuring linguistic knowledge or skills, or knowledge of English, nor is it designed to examine English language skills, such as reading or writing, so knowledge of English components (i.e., pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) and English skills are not taken into consideration.

Knowledge of studying is nothing but metacognitive knowledge. Generally, like declarative knowledge, it differentiates between knowledge about person, task, and strategy (Flavell, 1979; Veenman, 2011). Knowledge of task includes characteristics of task and when to use a strategy, whereas knowledge of strategy refers to how to use a strategy and why. In language learning, metacognitive knowledge is specified to comprise knowledge of self as a language learner; knowledge of the socio-cultural, political, and physical learning context; knowledge of the subject matters; and knowledge of language learning processes (Sinclair, 2000a). The three aspects of metacognitive knowledge are “(a) awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the tasks; (b) an understanding of the tasks they are engaged in; and (c) knowledge of strategies which can help them undertake such tasks” (Cotterall, 2009, p. 88). Drawing on insights from these views, this study argues that the classifications developed by Sinclair (2000a) and Cotterall (2009) are consistent with the influential definition of metacognitive knowledge offered by Flavell (1979). This consistency is illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3:** *Metacognitive knowledge in language learning*

| Flavell (1979)        | Sinclair (2000a)  | Cotterall (2009)   |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Knowledge of person   | Knowledge of self as a language learner   | Awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to tasks |
| Knowledge of task     | Knowledge of socio-cultural, political, and physical learning context;<br>Knowledge of subject matter | Understanding of tasks they are engaged in                       |
| Knowledge of strategy | Knowledge of language learning processes  | Knowledge of strategies which can help them undertake such tasks |

Study skills refer to planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Huang & Benson, 2013), which can be technically summarized as metacognitive skills (L. Nguyen, 2009). It is consistent with Little’s (1991, 2020) and Murray’s (2014b) arguments that those skills are included in the capacity of autonomy. They are closely related to the improvement of LA (García Magaldi, 2010; L. Nguyen & Gu, 2013; Wenden, 1991) and even central to autonomous ability (Hsu, 2005). Without them, students basically do not have directions and ability to monitor their progress, attainment, and future paths (O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985). Hence, with regard to LA in language learning, ability is characterized by metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills.

#### **3.2.3.2.2. Desire**

Informed by specific purposes, desire is how intensely learners intend to learn English, and complete a learning task (Benson, 2012; Huang & Benson, 2013). Those purposes, as I argue, should be culturally suitable in the context of Vietnam where English language learning happens, and students' desire should be expressed by specific thoughts and actions. To exemplify, if English courses were not conducted at university, students would attend English lessons somewhere else. The university represents the context in this case. The specific purpose may be interest in English language, university's requirements, or future job prospects. Those students show their desire by obtaining lessons in other places. Generally speaking, that action can be seen as the embodiment of LA.

Notably, desire and motivation are sometimes used interchangeably (Murray, 2014b), but as Benson (2012) put it, they are not quite the same and motivation is more complex. Arguably, motivation encompasses reasons for doing something and it manifests itself in many different aspects and categories such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Meanwhile, desire refers to strong feelings when people want to do something. Therefore, a person may have motivation to do something, but he does not want to do that thing.

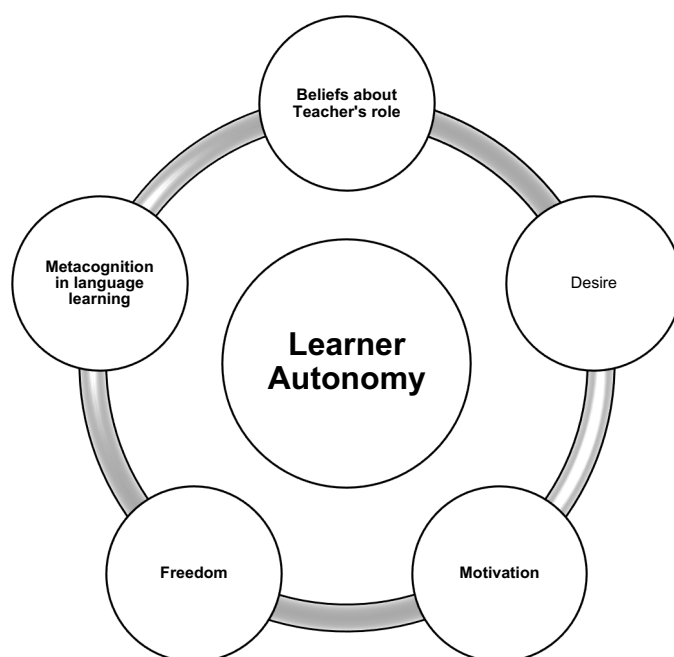
#### **3.2.3.2.3. Freedom**

Freedom is denoted as "the degree to which learners are "permitted" to control their learning, either by specific agents in the learning process, or more generally by the learning situations in which they find themselves" (Huang & Benson, 2013, p. 9). The researchers (e.g., T. Lamb, 2009) believed that freedom can be demonstrated through a variety of observable activities which learners are allowed to do and which they do in reality to take charge of their own learning. For example, students have chances to ask their English teachers when they do not understand something or make suggestions to English teachers. The real autonomous activities they do can be writing emails or Facebook statuses, or listening to English frequently (Chan et al., 2002). However, it is noteworthy that in Vietnam, due to the prescribed syllabus and program, it is impossible for students to choose learning materials, and learning activities. They are not allowed to decide on what they would like to learn. In other words, control over learning content is not accessible to EFL learners.

In conclusion, willingness and capacity are important components for students to take over responsibility for learning English. Willingness includes two factors, namely beliefs about teacher's role and motivation. Capacity comprises ability, which encompasses metacognitive

knowledge as well as metacognitive skills, desire, and freedom. To conceive LA, metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills are termed into metacognition as a component of LA. This is consistent with Dixon (2011), Haque (2018), and Reinders (2011) which indicate that metacognition is a crucial part of LA. As a result, LA in my study is characterized by four components: beliefs about teacher's role, motivation, desire, metacognition, and freedom. This understanding is illustrated in Figure 7.

In this study, I conceptualize LA as students' willingness and capacity to take control of their foreign language learning. The former manifests itself in learners' beliefs about teacher's role and motivation to learn languages. Importantly, I believe learners must possess metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills to effectively acquire English language and fulfill their language needs in the world of the fourth industrial revolution which is changing rapidly. To that end, I argue they must also possess desire as well as a certain freedom to involve themselves in the language teaching and learning process. The classification of components of LA in this study is basically aligned with that in previous studies such as Cooker (2012), Dixon (2011), and Tassinari (2012). The aspects as well as dimensions of LA are action-oriented (e.g., freedom and metacognitive skills), cognitive (e.g., beliefs), metacognitive (e.g., metacognitive knowledge), affective and motivational (e.g., motivation and desire). Theoretically, they positively interact with each other and show a balance themselves in different contexts, which typifies a characteristic of LA in a dynamic model (see more at Tassinari, 2012; Tassinari, 2015; Tassinari, 2018). This provides theoretical fundamentals for discriminant and convergent validity later discussed in this study.



**Figure 7:** *Conceptualization of Learner Autonomy in this study (S. Nguyen & Habók, 2020, p. 126)*

### 3.3. Chapter summary and research questions

In this chapter, a review of relevant literature on LA has been presented and in essence, a conceptualization of LA used in this study has been outlined. The chapter started with LA in general. How it is defined by a variety of researchers was expressly presented. I also emphasized its prominence in life and education. Then, the concept of LA was distinguished from other relevant and easily misunderstood terms. The next part was dedicated to LA in language learning and teaching. I went on to discuss its role in the success of language learning. Afterwards, I analyzed how definitions of LA in language learning are coined, redefined, and developed. An operational definition was selected so that I could present LA's characteristics, from which I regarded willingness and capacity as the most essential components of LA. I also dug into the popular misconceptions of LA and provided the readers with available perspectives/versions of LA. The role of teachers in the development of LA was reviewed and argued to be important and as a result, learners' beliefs of teacher's roles play an important role in their willingness for autonomous learning. As a characteristic of LA, its level/degree was shed light on by various models. The next two parts were devoted to reviewing studies on perceptions of LA and factors influencing LA to show the literature gap. The most salient part in this chapter was how LA in this study was conceptualized. Accordingly, I strongly argued that LA embodies *learners' beliefs of teacher's role, motivation and desire, metacognition in language learning, and freedom*. It will be operated in the formulation and development of research tools in the next chapter where I present the research design and methodology. In



brief, the research gaps from the literature review and the conceptualization of LA enabled me to come up with three main research questions as follows:

1. *What are the psychometric properties of the Learner Autonomy Perception questionnaire?*
2. *What are the non-English major students' perceptions of learner autonomy?*
  - 2.1. *Do genders affect the perceptions of LA in terms of its components?*
  - 2.2. *Do years of study affect the perceptions of LA in terms of its components?*
  - 2.3. *Do marks in the previous English course affect the perceptions of LA in terms of its components?*
3. *What are the factors that influence students' learner autonomy, as perceived by the students?*

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*This chapter aims to describe the research methodology in this project. Firstly, it discusses the reasons why the mixed-method approach was used in the study. The next part of the chapter presents the research sites and the participants in the sample with their basic demographic information. Then, the chapter deals with the research instruments as well as the process to develop them. The fourth part provides details of the data collection process, followed by the fifth part of the data analysis procedures in which different stages for different types of data are presented. The chapter ends with the ethics in the study.*

### 4.1. Research approach

Mixed methods research (MMR) has drawn the researchers' attention in the literature as the third approach besides purely quantitative and purely qualitative methods (Aramo-Immonen, 2011). As "a new star in the social science sky" (Mayring, 2007, p. 1), MMR collects, analyzes, and mixes or combines both qualitative and quantitative data in a study to better understand the issues than only one approach (J. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Lund, 2012; Morse & Niehaus, 2009). This means MMR facilitates expanding and strengthening research conclusions, thereby contributing to the extensive literature (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

A mixed-methods design was adopted because it helps the researcher to enhance the study's quality (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). It provides more insights into the problems, facilitates an expanded understanding of those problems (J. Creswell, 2014), and addresses many aspects of research questions in academic studies when used (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). There are a variety of definitions towards MMR; however, for the purpose of this study, the definition offered by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) would be used. Accordingly, MMR is defined as "the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (p. 123). MMR was employed in this study for two main reasons.

Firstly, MMR helped to bridge the gaps in either quantitative research or qualitative research (J. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Riazi & Candlin, 2014). The former's purpose is to explain the reasons for changes mainly through objective measures and quantitative analytical procedures, thereby producing generalizable results (Firestone, 1987). Meanwhile, the latter aims to provide rich descriptions and comparisons of the issues (Malina, Nørreklit, & Selto,

2011). Having both quantitative and qualitative research in a single study would promote the best of them for more adequate answers to research questions. It is suggested that a MMR study makes the conflict between the advocates of qualitative research and those of quantitative one become neutral by providing deep details to quantitative data and making it more complete (Dörnyei, 2007).

Secondly, because it converges “a numeric trends from quantitative data and specific details from qualitative data”, MMR facilitated a better understanding of a complex phenomenon (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 45). Specifically, LA is really a complicated construct, as stated in the previous sections. Hence, combining both quantitative and qualitative data in this study would enable me to understand LA from both individual students and broader contexts.

When it comes to an approach, there are three components involved in it, namely philosophical worldviews, designs, and methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All of those components will be discussed in this chapter. Regarding the philosophical worldview, four popular worldviews include: (1) positivism which sees reality as something to measure and quantify and is usually associated with quantitative research; (2) constructivism which emphasizes objectivity in the reality and is usually linked to qualitative research; (3) transformative worldview which highlights the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged people in the society and is normally referred to in emancipatory and participatory studies; and (4) pragmatism which values the effectiveness of any research methods employed to address the research questions and is usually applied in mixed methods research (see more at Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McKinley, 2020; Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015).

The paradigm from which I have a philosophical worldview in this study is pragmatism. Specifically, according to Phakiti & Paltridge (2015), in terms of ontology, pragmatic worldview prioritizes the use of various methods from different paradigms to deal with the problems. Regarding epistemology, the pragmatists believe that research is conducted in a social context and is subjective or objective subject to social acceptance. Concerning methodology, the proponents of pragmatism use many different methods to address the research problems. The pragmatic paradigm had some benefits in this research project.

Firstly, it accommodated flexibility in using a variety of methods and procedures to answer different research questions about perceptions, influencing factors, and differences. Secondly, employing both qualitative and quantitative data enabled me to make use of both types to inform each other. Thirdly, the pragmatic worldview reflected my viewpoint of knowledge and meaning. In fact, mixing both quantitative and qualitative research in one single study allowed

me to more deeply understand the issues related to the perceptions of LA and mediating elements or barriers to its' cultivation in a "bi-focal lens...to zoom in to microscopic detail or to zoom out to indefinite scope" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005, p. 383).

There are several designs of MMR including convergent design, explanatory design, exploratory design, embedded design, transformative design, and multiphase design (J. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Halcomb & Hickman, 2014; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). After critically reviewing those designs, I decided to choose the convergent parallel design. Accordingly, it aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a topic, validate quantitative measures, and get different but complementary data to answer a research question. The qualitative and quantitative data was collected concurrently. The priority was put on neither qualitative nor quantitative components, which means they were equally important. Two sets of data were analyzed separately and then merged. However, some potential challenges were noted including required efforts and expertise, difficulties in merging two sets of different data, and challenges in interpreting inconsistent data (see more at J. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). These issues would be considered during the research procedures.

## **4.2. Research sites & participants**

### **4.2.1. Research sites**

In Vietnam, the majority of higher education institutions are based in large cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city. There are about 60 public universities in Hanoi in various areas of study such as economics, CE, law, IT, and ME and most of the universities train non-English-major students. Each of those institutions, despite being multidisciplinary themselves, has one specialized area of study and they share three main points in common.

Firstly, the time allocated for English language courses is rather limited. Specifically, the universities are professionally administered by MOET; as a result, they need to follow a core curriculum issued by MOET. The number of credits for those courses accounts for no more than 10% of the total number of credits in the curriculum, which represents a small percentage. Secondly, as previously mentioned, the non-English-major students's English language proficiency at those universities may be low and uneven. If students wish to enter such universities, they need to take entrance examinations in the subjects (i.e., Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, History, Literature, and sometimes Arts) other than English. Consequently, they focus on the subjects for the exams most of the time and other subjects including English are not paid proper attention to. This may lead to the fact that they struggle

to learn English at tertiary education later on. Thirdly, English language education at the universities faces many challenges aforementioned such as facilities, class sizes, and exam-oriented systems.

In this study, the non-English-major universities in Hanoi were selected as its research sites due to the commonly shared features above. I employed the Occupational Outlook Handbook launched by the federal government's Bureau of Labour and Statistics (2021) to categorize the universities into different groups on the basis of fields offered. However, some groups were excluded due to their inappropriateness in the context of higher education in the way that they were not trained at universities such as building and grounds cleaning, food preparation and serving, material moving, and protective services. The final groups include architecture and engineering; arts and design; business and financial; community and social service; computer and information technology; construction and extraction; education, training, and library; entertainment and sports; farming, fishing, and forestry; healthcare; installation, maintenance, and repair; legal; life, physical, and social science management; Math; media and communication; military; office and administrative support; personal care and service; production; sales; and transportation. As presented previously, the universities were multidisciplinary so there may be many different fields in a single university.

After consideration, I sent requests to universities in other parts of the country in which many universities were based, but only ten institutions replied to me. Then, I listed those ten target higher education institutions that could be research sites and emailed the rectors and/or the heads of department of foreign languages. One university did not answer my email and I got replies from nine universities, two of which did not accept my request. Finally, seven of them became the participating universities in this study. Each of the participating universities was de-identified and coded by numbers from one to seven. The details on the recruitment will come in the data collection procedures.

#### **4.2.2. Participants**

##### **4.2.2.1. Quantitative strand**

A sample of 1,565 university students in total were voluntarily recruited from seven public universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Those students whose mother tongue was Vietnamese were from 19 to 22 years old. The foreign language they knew was only English and their English proficiency varied from elementary to intermediate. According to the students, the grades in the previous English course were A, which is the best grade (14.9%;  $n = 233$ ); B (30%;  $n =$

469); C (26.9%,  $n = 421$ ); and D (18.2%,  $n = 285$ ). Of the participants, 157 (10%) did not provide this information. The description of the grades and equivalencies is presented in Table 4. They were learning English as a minor part in their curriculum and studying the following subjects: information technology (IT) ( $n = 339$ ; 21.7%), economics ( $n = 184$ ; 11.8%), civil engineering ( $n = 124$ ; 7.9%), electrical and electronic engineering ( $n = 259$ ; 16.5%), mechanical engineering ( $n = 191$ ; 12.2%), law ( $n = 188$ ; 12%), and various other fields ( $n = 280$ ; 17.9%).

**Table 4:** *The grades and equivalent*

| Grade | Out of 10.0 | Out of 4.0 |
|-------|-------------|------------|
| A     | 8.5 - 10.10 | 4.0        |
| B     | 7.0 - 8.4   | 3.0        |
| C     | 5.5 - 6.9   | 2.0        |
| D     | 4.0 - 5.4   | 1.0        |

The sample consisted of 62% students in their second year ( $n = 971$ ), 23.7% third-year students ( $n = 371$ ), 11.9% students in their fourth year ( $n = 186$ ), and 2.4% fifth-year students ( $n = 37$ ). The respondents reported an average of over 11 years of formal instruction in English (11.7,  $Sd = 1.4$ ). Among the students, 62.2% were male ( $n = 974$ ), and 37.8% were female ( $n = 591$ ). As regards students' place of residence within Vietnam, Hanoi is the most popular city, with 28.7% of the students coming from there ( $n = 449$ ), followed by Nam Dinh Province ( $n = 172$ ; 11%) and Thai Binh Province ( $n = 109$ ; 7%). The participants hailed from 34 out of 64 provinces in Vietnam, thus showing a geographic diversity. They have studied English at universities for at least one semester in order to make sure that they were more familiar with and experienced in the tertiary language education environment than their peers in their first year. This enabled them to reflect on themselves and provide in-depth information on their LA. The average English class size was 37.6 students ( $Sd = 1.18$ ). The participants' diverse demographic background information might enable the researchers to improve the generalizability of the results to a broader population (T. T. Tran, Richard, & Karen, 2013).

#### **4.2.2.2. Qualitative strand**

Based on convenience sampling, 13 out of 1,565 participants agreed to participate in the interview phase. The reason for the number of interviewees will be presented in the data collection. The interviewees' profiles are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** *Profiles of the interviewees*

| Gender (%) |        | Year of study   | Major (%) |       |       |       |       |      |      | Years spent studying English |
|------------|--------|-----------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------------------------------|
| Male       | Female |                 | IT        | CE    | E     | EEE   | ME    | L    | MM   |                              |
| 53.8       | 46.2   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 15.38     | 15.38 | 15.38 | 15.38 | 15.38 | 7.69 | 7.69 | 12                           |

*Note: IT = Information Technology; CE = Civil Engineering; E = Economics; EEE = Electrical and Electronic Engineering; ME = Mechanical Engineering; L = Law; MM = Multi-media.*

### 4.3. Research instruments

Two types of data have been collected: quantitative from survey questionnaires and qualitative from semi-structured interviews. The critical review of literature formed the basis of the questionnaire's scales and the interview's questions.

#### 4.3.1. Quantitative strand

To develop the questionnaire, I consulted the relevant literature and critically investigated the accredited questionnaires. I borrowed and modified items from frequently used questionnaires that have been established with psychometrically sound properties. This is an important step to generate items, thus aiding in the improvement of the validity and reliability evidence (Dörnyei, 2010). After the literature was reviewed, an initial pool of 87 self-reported items was compiled (see Appendix E). The details of numbers of items, and their sources are presented in Table 6. Eight items were shared by Chan et al. (2002) and Q. Le (2013), seven items were used by both Hsu (2005) and Swatevacharkul (2009), and five items were employed by Cotterall (1999) and Hsu (2005).

**Table 6:** *Sources of items in the pool*

| Number of items | Sources                        |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| 37              | Hsu (2005)                     |
| 19              | T. Dang (2012), T. Yang (2007) |
| 18              | Chan et al. (2002)             |
| 08              | Q. Le (2013)                   |
| 07              | Cotterall (1999)               |
| 07              | Swatevacharkul (2009)          |
| 03              | Ming & Alias (2007)            |
| 02              | Dixon (2011)                   |
| 02              | Cotterall (1995)               |
| 04              | Researcher in this study       |

The items and their sources can be found in Appendix F. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The items were arranged in random order, instead of a scale-by-scale order, so that the data collected could be more objective and not scale-oriented.

The *beliefs about teacher's role* (BTR) scale contains eleven items adapted from Ming and Alias (2007), Chan et al. (2002), and Q. Le (2013). There are eight items on the *motivation* (M) scale. I added item 65 to refer to one dimension of motivation to learn English. The others were adapted from Hsu (2005) and Swatevacharkul (2009). The *desire* (D) scale consists of nine items, which were all adapted from Hsu (2005). Metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills are subcomponents of metacognition.

*Metacognitive knowledge* (MK) covers metacognitive knowledge about self (MKS), language (MKL), context (MKC), and learning process (MKP). MKS consists of eight items from Cotterall (1995b, 1999) and Hsu (2005). MKL is made up of seven items, which were adapted from Hsu (2005) and Dixon (2011). MKC contains six items, which were adapted from Hsu (2005), and MKP has six items from Cotterall (1999) and Hsu (2005). However, MKS, MKL, MKC, and MKP were not investigated separately, but together under the *metacognitive knowledge* scale. There are three *metacognitive skills* (MS – planning, monitoring, and evaluating). *Metacognitive skill – planning* (MSP) consists of seven items from T. Dang (2012) and T. Yang (2007). Items 18, 45, and 80 were added by me. *Metacognitive skill – monitoring* (MSM) has ten items which were adapted from T. Dang (2012) and T. Yang (2007). There are five items in *metacognitive skill – evaluating* (MSE), all of which were adapted from T. Dang (2012) and T. Yang (2007). These skills are examined on the *metacognitive skills* scale. The *freedom* (F) scale contains ten items which were all adapted from Chan et al. (2002).

In terms of exploring which factors influence the development of LA, the survey was established on the basis of the review of the previous studies in section 2, part 2, chapter 3. I designed this part of the questionnaire using rank-ordering questions. This type of questionnaire asks participants to “compare values across variables [...] to take account of the other variables” and it is useful for researchers to indicate the extent to what responses vary (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, p. 479). Accordingly, a list of factors that were reviewed and believed to affect LA was set out and they were classified in two columns labeled *internal factors* and *external factors*. Students were required to place those factors in a rank order subject to their priorities in each column. They also had chances to add any factors which were not mentioned in the list. The survey can be seen in Appendix E.



#### 4.3.2. Qualitative strand

The second instrument used to answer the research questions using qualitative data was a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews would “allow respondents to say what they think and to do so with greater richness and spontaneity” (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p. 167). Additionally, the interviews gave me the flexibility to change the sequence of questions as well as get more information about both LA perceived by students and any influencing factors (Miller & Brewer, 2003). I conducted face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews. The questions were framed based on the previous studies and the conceptualization of LA in these studies manifesting *beliefs about teacher’s role, motivation, desire, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive skills, and freedom*. During the interviews, many questions arose, subject to the conditions in each interview. The 13 interviews were held individually and face-to-face, entirely in the Vietnamese language, with the protocol designed in advance. The main interview questions included:

- (*General questions*) What is learner autonomy? Who are autonomous learners?
- (*Beliefs about teacher’s roles*) What are the roles of teachers in English classes? What are your roles in English classes?
- (*Motivation & desire*) How do you describe your motivation to learn English? What are the reasons that motivate you to learn English?, and How willing are you to learn English?
- (*Metacognitive knowledge*) As a learner, do you know your own strengths and weaknesses in studying English? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What do you believe about the English language? What do you think about the environment where you study English at your university, around you, in Hanoi and in Vietnam?
- (*Metacognitive skills*) Do you often include goals in your learning plans? Why/Why not? Do you often stick to a learning plan? Do you make modifications to your original plans such as changing the deadline of a task or replacing an activity with another? How often do you do that? Do you often check your learning progress such as asking friends to evaluate your pronunciation, comparing your work with others, talking to teachers about the evaluation of the tasks, and taking practice tests that you see?
- (*Freedom*) How much freedom do you feel you have to practice your own way of learning English (objectives, materials, planning, monitoring, evaluating)? How much control does your EFL teacher have on your studies? Does your English teacher encourage you to think about your learning, that is, how you learn?
- (*Factors that influence LA*) From your perspective, which internal factors and external factors influence your LA? Can you explain more about them?

#### **4.4. Data collection procedures**

Both types of data were collected in the second half of 2019 prior to the COVID 19 pandemic which led to a shift to online learning and teaching all over the world. This data collection period allowed me to deliver the questionnaires in paper-and-pencil format and conduct face-to-face interviews and I preferred those formats due to their benefits (see more at Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The detailed collection procedures are presented as follows.

##### **4.4.1. Quantitative strand**

After the survey was established, it was revised through discussions with my supervisor whose comments and feedback were very helpful and contributed a great deal to the development of the survey. Back-translation method was used to enable the participants to understand the questionnaire (see more at Behr, 2017; Brislin, 1970; Liamputtong, 2010; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011).

The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese so that all the respondents, who are native speakers of Vietnamese, could understand all the contents of the survey and the validity of the data could be improved. The Vietnamese version was translated back into English with the help of a small group of peers. As part of this process, known as back-translation, it was sent to one Vietnamese-American in the US, to one PhD and two PhD candidates in Australia and New Zealand, and to three instructors who hold Master's degrees currently in Vietnam. All of them have expertise in ELT and have been working as instructors of English for many years. All the differences between the new English versions were critically reviewed, compared, and contrasted with the original English version. Clarification was requested on any ambiguous points and as a result, several minor word choice modifications were made.

Finally, a trial version of the survey in Vietnamese was produced. It was emailed to several other ELT experts to read and provide remarks on face and content validity. They offered comments on the wording of the items in terms of meaningfulness and interpretability. I also sent the trial questionnaire to four Vietnamese undergraduates majoring in different fields, who did not participate in the study. It took them around 30 minutes to read and complete it. The trial showed that they did not encounter any difficulties in understanding the survey and that the design was friendly to its users. Therefore, no changes were made to that Vietnamese version and it was officially used in this study.

After obtaining an ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and permission from the universities, I came to the classes to talk to the students about the study in terms of aims, significance, methods, and, importantly, ethical issues. The participants were fully informed that their responses would not be detrimental to them in any way and would be treated with confidentiality and utilized merely for research purposes. The printed questionnaires were delivered to the participants, and any questions regarding the research were satisfactorily elucidated. The participants spent approximately 20 minutes reading and completing the questionnaire. Of the 1,600 questionnaires that were distributed, 1,565 students completed them and returned them to me. 35 were discarded due to incompleteness and/or the students' wishes. This represents a nearly 98% response rate.

#### **4.4.2. Qualitative strand**

To collect qualitative interview data effectively, I developed the interview protocol including the procedures, questions, and spaces for notes (if necessary) (J. Creswell & Guetterman, 2018) so that the interviews would be professionally, consistently and appropriately conducted. I had the experts aforementioned who helped me with the questionnaires review the interview questions. They commented on readability, understandability, and content of the questions. Then I made some revisions based on the experts' feedback. For example, the original question was "Are you aware of your own personalities in learning English?". The comment indicated that the question was too ambiguous and it could mislead students' response in the way that the interviewees could say many irrelevant things about themselves. It could be changed into "Do you know your own strengths and weaknesses in learning English? What are your strengths and weaknesses?". I myself found the suggestion constructive and helpful; as a result, I agreed with it. Then, the questions were translated into Vietnamese with help from back-translation method. The translational procedure was the same to that of the questionnaire as discussed above. Afterwards, the interview questions were piloted with help from two undergraduates who would not participate in the study. They acted as if they were interviewed and I took notes on their performances with their permission. Accordingly, some minor changes in terms of Vietnamese wording were made before the questions could be employed.

As the convergent parallel design model suggests, qualitative data was collected concurrently with quantitative data. To be more specific, there were 164 students who also completed the questionnaires and provided emails at the end of the questionnaires where I asked them to write their email addresses if they were willing to participate in the interviews

later; however, 59 of them left wrongly typed email addresses. Among the other 105 students, 67 did not want to get involved in the interviews, 25 did not reply to my emails, and 13 from different universities were selected for the interviews, which were audiotaped with their consent. Each interview was approximately 40 minutes in length and in Vietnamese language, which provided us with more insights into the student's thoughts and opinions. The interviewees could freely choose the appropriate interview schedules (i.e, time and public venue at their university).

The interview data was then transcribed by me along with one of my Vietnamese fellows. Then I reviewed her transcriptions and vice versa. Next, I translated the transcriptions in Vietnamese into English employing back-translation method again (see more at Liamputtong, 2010). Afterwards, I hired a lecturer in translation at a language-specialized university to translate the first Vietnamese version of the transcriptions into English and she did not know that version. Two versions of Vietnamese transcriptions were compared and contrasted for similarities and differences on the basis of content analysis. As a result, the sentence-level similarity rate between two versions was 96.2%. Finally, I sent the English version of transcripts to the ELT experts who helped me review the instruments so that they proofread it before it could be used. I decided to analyze the qualitative data applying the English version of transcripts for further conveniences in terms of language in publications and presentations.

## **4.5. Data analytical procedures**

### **4.5.1. Quantitative strand**

I entered the quantitative data into SPSS version 24. The softwares of SPSS AMOS and SmartPLS3 utilized the SPSS input data. The first step was that I analyzed the data in order to recognize missing values and assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. In the second step, data was calculated and then categorized in order to make generalizations and reach conclusions about the population (J. Creswell, 2014).

#### ***4.5.1.1. Validity & reliability of the questionnaire***

To examine whether the questionnaire is reliable and the data is valid to use, the framework of validity proposed by Messick (1995) was employed in order to evaluate validity. It includes six aspects, which are content, substantive, structural, generalizability, external, and consequential, but this study only elaborated on five of them (excluding generalizability). The

reliability was assessed on the basis of Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability (CR), and rho\_A reliability.

Validity is defined as the property of the meaning of the test scores and regarded as a unified construct framework which integrates dimensions of content, criteria, and consequences (Messick, 1995). Messick (1995) added that as a unitary construct, validity can be differentiated into distinguishable aspects to "provide a means of addressing functional aspects of validity that help disentangle some of the complexities inherent in appraising the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of score inferences" (p. 5). Six aspects highlighted include content, substantive, structural, generalizability, external, and consequential. These aspects serve as a framework of general validity criteria and standards for educational and psychological measures (Messick, 1989), which will be described as follows. This study appraised five out of six aspects of validity and excluded generalizability because I did not gain access to other populations to generalize the interpretation across settings and groups.

The content aspect consists of evidence of content relevance, representativeness, and technical quality, which is usually evaluated by experts (Wang & Bai, 2017). The substantive aspect focuses on theoretical rationales for consistencies of responses to items. The generalizability aspect highlights how properties and interpretations generalize across tasks, contexts, and groups. The consequential aspect appraises the implications of score interpretations and test use.

The structural aspect examines how the internal structure is reflected in the scores. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were employed to evaluate this aspect of validity. EFA enables the researchers to examine the relationships between latent variables and observed ones. There are several factors in EFA that call for research attention. They are the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity, extraction, rotation, variance, and particularly, results in parallel analysis (PA). PA developed initially by Horn (1965) and further by Glorfeld (1995) is considered one of the precise methods to determine the number of factors to retain; however, it has been under-investigated by researchers (Çokluk & Koçak, 2016; Hayton, Allen, & Scarpello, 2004; Henson & Roberts, 2006; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). In this method, eigenvalues extracted from a random dataset are compared to those extracted from the original dataset and these two datasets are parallel (Loewen & Gonulal, 2015; O'Connor, 2000). The factor is retained if the eigenvalue generated from the actual data is higher than the

corresponding eigenvalue from the parallel data (Dinno, 2009; Franklin, Gibson, Robertson, Pohlmann, & Fralish, 1995; O'Connor, 2000).

CFA uses a certain set of goodness-of-fit indices, such as Chi-square  $\chi^2$ , the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the normed fit index (NFI), the root mean square residual covariance (RMS\_theta), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). It is advisable for the researchers to calculate and report different fit indices in their studies because of the lack of global agreement on the acceptable values of those indices (Martens, 2005; Teo, L. Tsai, & C. Yang, 2013).

In this research, model fit was assessed on the basis of four absolute fit indices: Chi-square, SRMR, RMSEA, and RMS\_theta, along with three incremental indices including TLI, NFI, and CFI in comparative fit. Specifically, as regards absolute fitting, a significant value of  $\chi^2$  highlights the inappropriateness of the proposed model to the sample data (Teo et al., 2013). However, this very much depends on the sample size (Cangur & Ercan, 2015), so Chi-square cannot be regarded as the only indicator of model fit. To remedy this sample dependence, Glynn, Brickman, Armstrong, and Taasobshirazi (2011) divided Chi-square by the degree of freedom ( $\chi^2/\text{d.f.}$ ); as a result, the researchers arrive at a normed Chi-square value (Kline, 2015). It should be more than 2.0 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) and less than 5.0 (Wheaton, Muthen, Alwin, & Summer, 1977).

SRMR refers to the degree of error due to estimation of the specified model, and its adequate level of model fit was no more than .06 (Teo, 2013) or .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). RMSEA “corrects the tendency of the  $\chi^2$  to reject models with large same size or number of variables”, and should be .05 or less with a confidence level of 95% (Teo et al., 2013, p. 15). Both SRMR and RMSEA are not greatly affected by sample size (F. Chen, 2007; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004). RMS\_theta signifies the extent of correlations between the outer model residuals (Lohmöller, 1989), and Henseler and the colleagues (2014) suggest that a well-fitting model has a RMS\_theta value below .12.

Turning to comparative fitting, NFI, proposed by Bentler and Bonett (1980), calculates Chi-square value and compares it to a meaningful standard value.<sup>1</sup> NFI falls between 0 and 1, and the more it approaches 1, the better the model fit. The preferable level is .9. TLI, also known as Bentler–Bonett non-normed fit index (NNFI), is used to compare our model to the baseline model, and a well-fitting model has a TLI closer to 1.0. The higher the TLI value, the better

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.smartpls.com/documentation/algorithms-and-techniques/model-fit>

the model. CFI assesses the lack of fit of the proposed model over a null model (Kline, 2015). Teo et al. (2013) comment that CFI is popular due to its strength, thus indicating that CFI is not sensitive to the complexity of the model. The cut-off value of CFI is .9 to achieve goodness of fit (Basu & Miroshnik, 2019; Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008); however, the cut-off is not perfect all the time despite being widely used (Teo, 2013).

In this study, EFA is of paramount importance because it enables us to consider which items to exclude from the questionnaire for better reliability and validity. It also provides a comprehensive overview of the questionnaire structure. CFA allows us to inspect the hypothesized model of LA. Hence, if it were not confirmed, more validation analyses would be necessary. As indicated by the literature (e.g. Cabrera-Nguyen, 2010; Fokkema & Greiff, 2017; Hinkin, 1998; Izquierdo, Olea, & Abad, 2014; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006), EFA and CFA should be carried out on different samples. Therefore, the sample above was split into two sub-samples in a random way. The first sub-sample included responses of 780 students to conduct EFA and the other one of 785 students was used to perform CFA.

The external aspect refers to convergent and discriminant evidence. The former demonstrates the degree to which items are related to each other, and it is confirmed by average variance extracted (AVE), factor loadings, and CR which is calculated by the total amount of true scale variance divided by the total variance scale score (Brunner & Süß, 2005). CR uses standardized loadings to explore the reliability of scales (Chin, 2010; Raykov, 1997). Specifically, AVE should be higher than the threshold of .5. However, if AVE is lower than that threshold, and CR is higher than .6, convergent validity will be acceptably established (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). AVE is criticized for often being too strict, and convergent validity can be evaluated by CR only (Malhotra & Dash, 2011).

The latter provides evidence of whether items on a scale can be differentiated from those on other scales. It is assessed on the basis of Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, cross-loadings, or heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). According to Fornell and Larcker's seminal article (1981), discriminant validity can be confirmed if the square root of AVE is higher than the correlation of one latent variable with other latent variables. In terms of cross-loadings, correlation with another latent variable should not be better than that with its own latent variable (Garson, 2016). HTMT is denoted as "the average of the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of indicators across constructs measuring different phenomena), relative to the average of the monotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of indicators within the same construct)" (Henseler, Ringe, & Sarstedt, 2015, p. 121). Henseler et al. (2015) offered two ways of using HTMT for discriminant validity. The

first is employing HTMT as a criterion compared to a threshold. The second involves HTMT serving as a statistical test. I applied the first in this study, and the threshold was set at .9 (Gold, Malhotra, & Segars, 2001; Teo, Srivastava, & Jiang, 2008). The HTMT ratio should thus be under .9 so that discriminant validity can be accepted.

After I obtained the revised version of the questionnaire, internal consistencies in the instrument and each scale were examined with Cronbach's alpha. Also, I employed CR to analyze reliability. Additionally, reliability was assessed by rho\_A, which evaluates the weight of the constructs, not their loadings, and is remarked by "the off-diagonal elements of a latent variable's indicator correlation matrix are reproduced as well as possible in a least squares sense" (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015a; Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015b, p. 300). Moreover, average inter-item correlations among the sub-scales were used to investigate whether the items are related to the other items in the scale and whether they assess the same construct (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2005). The suggested value of the correlation was between .2 and .4 (Piedmont, 2014) or even between .166 and .830 (Ferrell, Stein, & Beck, 2000).

#### ***4.5.1.2. Descriptive & inferential statistics***

The quantitative data was used to analyze prevailing trends in the participants' responses based on frequency distribution, and descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, produced by SPSS version 24. Those trends would quantitatively describe the respondents' beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation, desire, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive skills, and freedom to learn English. Furthermore, differences among the students' groups (e.g., males and females, years of study, marks in previous courses) were calculated using statistical tests such as ANOVA, Mann-Whitney *U* and Kruskal-Wallis tests. However, normal distribution should be tested before the decision can be made on whether ANOVA or its non-parametric counterpart would be used (see more at Carver & Nash, 2012; Field, 2018). The statistics mentioned above would serve as an important part to answer the first main research question. In terms of the second research question, data in SPSS version 24 was analyzed to offer descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, mode, standard deviation, and median). These statistical analyses aim to investigate the orders that the participants place for each factor that either internally or externally affect the development of LA.



#### 4.5.2. Qualitative strand

The final English version of the transcript was entered into the ATLAS.ti software for recurrent themes. I and my advisor completed the coding process separately and then checked for consistency. We reached approximately 90% of agreement on coding results, which spoke for a high inter-rater reliability. To protect the students' identities, they were each given a code, ranging from S1 to S13 before the coding of qualitative interview data was done. Then, a set of themes regarding general understanding of LA as well as different components of LA conceptualized in this study (i.e., beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation, desire, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive skills, and freedom) marked the beginning of the coding process which was shed light on by the theoretical background of LA and the conceptualization of LA. After the primary themes were identified, the codes were generated to form several emerging subthemes. Next, the codes, subthemes, and relevant remarks were reviewed before all of them were grouped. The analysis of those groups corresponding with the first and second research questions was utilized to elucidate those questions and provide in-depth understandings of LA from learners' perspectives. An illustration of how codes, subthemes, and themes were generated and developed can be seen in Table 7 below.

**Table 7:** *An example of interview codes, subthemes, and themes*

| Quotes   | Code   | Subtheme             | Theme         |
|--|--|----------------------|---------------|
| My objective is to attain 6.5 IELTS and then I plan my learning such as how much time I need, who can help me, and where I can get help.                                 | objective<br>planning                                | metacognitive skills | metacognition |
| When my goals and plans have been set, I try to stick to them. If there is a sudden change, I will change them but I will do my best to be with them to complete them... | goal setting<br>plan setting<br>effort<br>adjustment |                      |               |

One more strategy to make effective use of qualitative data is quantification of qualitative data to measure frequencies of categories and themes, which aids comparing qualitative and quantitative results to reach better conclusions in MMR (Grbich, 2012; Swan, 2013; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

#### 4.5.3. Mixed methods

Owing to the nature of convergent parallel design, after the two strands of data were analysed separately, except for the validation study of the questionnaire, they would be combined,

compared, and contrasted on the basis of themes concerning research questions and components of LA in this study to examine consistencies as well as discrepancies in two datasets and to reach proper conclusions regarding the research questions.

The framework that I chose to direct the analytical process was the model of seven steps proposed by Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) including: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, (3) data transformation, (4) data correlation, (5) data consolidation, (6) data comparison, and (7) data integration. Data reduction was done to reduce dimensionality in qualitative data (e.g., coding and thematic analysis) and quantitative (e.g., EFA and descriptive statistics). The second step involved visualizing data in tables, figures, graphs, and so on. In data transformation and correlation, qualitative data was simply quantified so that it could be quantitatively represented before it was correlated with quantitative data. For example, quantified qualitative data regarding students' motivation would be correlated with the corresponding quantitative data on motivation. This was followed by data consolidation when both qualitative and quantitative data were combined to create a consolidated dataset which provided me with a more comprehensive overview of empirical results. The next step called data comparison included comparing data from quantitative and qualitative sources. In step seven, I reported the integrated or merged results from both qualitative and quantitative data as a whole in the section of interpretations and discussions.

#### **4.6. Ethical issues**

This research project complies with the regulations of IRB of the Doctoral School of Education, the University of Szeged. The IRB issued the ethical approval with the reference number of 12/2019. Some following ethical issues were considered. Firstly, in terms of contacting the research sites, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at universities in Vietnam; therefore, I sent emails to the participating universities to ask for their permissions so that I could approach their teaching staff and students. The information sheets, invitation letters, and permission requests in English which were sent to the participating universities can be found in Appendices A, B, C, and D.

Secondly, the participating students were all fully informed of the research purposes, significance, methods, and ethics. I emphasized the point that participating in my research would definitely cause no harm to their academic and daily life and they could feel free to withdraw if they wished. They were provided with the information sheets, invitations, consent forms, and withdrawal consent forms in both English and Vietnamese (see Appendices A, B,

C, and D for the English version). Reading all the information and signing the consent forms indicated that the participants were well aware of their rights and duties during the research process. Besides, the interviewees were asked for their permission so that I could audiotape the interviews.

Thirdly, regarding anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were not asked to provide any personal information if they did not wish. Moreover, I did not make any efforts to identify the participants and to make their data public. Specifically, real names in the interviews were replaced by pseudonyms and any elements associated with the participants' identities were filtered and removed. Finally, I and my supervisor were the only people who could access the digital and printed materials relevant to this study. The printed documents of the questionnaires and the consent forms were stored in a secure locker in the doctoral office at the university while all the electronic data from the questionnaire and interviews was kept in my laptop protected by passwords. Those materials would be retained within five years after the dissertation's submission.

#### **4.7. Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented the methodology of the study. The chapter began by providing reasons for the mixed method research approach in this study. A mixed method research with convergent parallel design was selected to investigate how LA is perceived among non-English-major students at universities in Vietnam and which factors influence the development of LA. Then the chapter detailed the research sites and the participants in each strand to provide an overview of where the research was done. Then, the chapter discussed the research worldview before it outlined the instruments including a questionnaire with its items and an interview with its question. Data was collected concurrently in a quantitative strand and a qualitative one. The former employed the survey questionnaires designed and validated with 1,565 students from seven universities. The latter used the face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 13 students. The participants who learned English for at least one semester at their university were randomly chosen to complete the questionnaire and 13 of them would be also randomly invited to participate in the interviews.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were separately analyzed before they were mixed to bring findings to the research questions. To effectively analyze quantitative data, validity and reliability of the questionnaire were discussed before descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Qualitative data was analyzed using codes, themes, and quantification. The chapter

ends with a discussion of ethical issues regarding data collection, anonymity, confidentiality, and data storage.

## CHAPTER 5: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

*This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative strand with 1,565 non-English-major students at seven higher education institutions. The strand employed a questionnaire developed and validated to investigate LA defined in this study among those students. The chapter begins with validity and reliability from the data of the survey questionnaire. Then, the descriptive and inferential statistics that the data produced were demonstrated, corresponding with the research questions concerning perceptions of LA in several components and factors ranked by the students to affect their LA.*

### 5.1. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

#### 5.1.1. Validity

There is no statistical data representing content validity, but it is indicated via the process of defining LA, reviewing the literature, and generating items on the basis of sound arguments from the literature. I designed the survey to investigate aspects of LA. All the items were systematically reviewed in the literature, selected from well-established previous studies, changed to be culturally appropriate in the current context, and critically commented on by a group of ELT experts. Therefore, the instrument relatively covered the items it purported to cover, and it demonstrated content validity.

I examined the substantive aspect of validity on the basis of the need for empirical data on response consistencies (Messick, 1995). This was done through a review of both the international and national literature. Then, the gaps convincingly showed that there was a need for more empirical data on questionnaire validation and on how LA is perceived among a certain group of participants.

I used EFA and CFA to obtain evidence of the structural aspect of validity. EFA was necessary in this study to inspect the participants' responses to the questionnaire because the items on the LAPQ were borrowed, rewritten, added, and adapted from different questionnaires so that they would be culturally suited to the Vietnamese context. SPSS version 24.0 was utilized to provide results of EFA. According to Bartlett's test of sphericity, which assesses the significance of all the correlations in the correlation matrix, it was significantly appropriate to conducting a factor analysis ( $n = 780$ ;  $\chi^2 = 27,614.745$ ;  $d.f. = 3,741$ ;  $p < .01$ ). In addition, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy showed that the strength of the relationships between variables was “marvelous” to proceed with the analysis ( $KMO = .933$ ) (Kaiser & Rice, 1974, p. 112). EFA was conducted with the support of PA using principal axis

factoring because factors were assumed to be correlated (Crawford, Green, Levy, Lo, Scott, Svetina, Thompson, 2010). Based on the comparison of eigenvalues between the parallel random data (95th percentile and average eigenvalues) and the actual one, Table 8 revealed that the first five actual eigenvalues were greater than those in both average and 95th percentile columns; as a results, five factors were extracted.

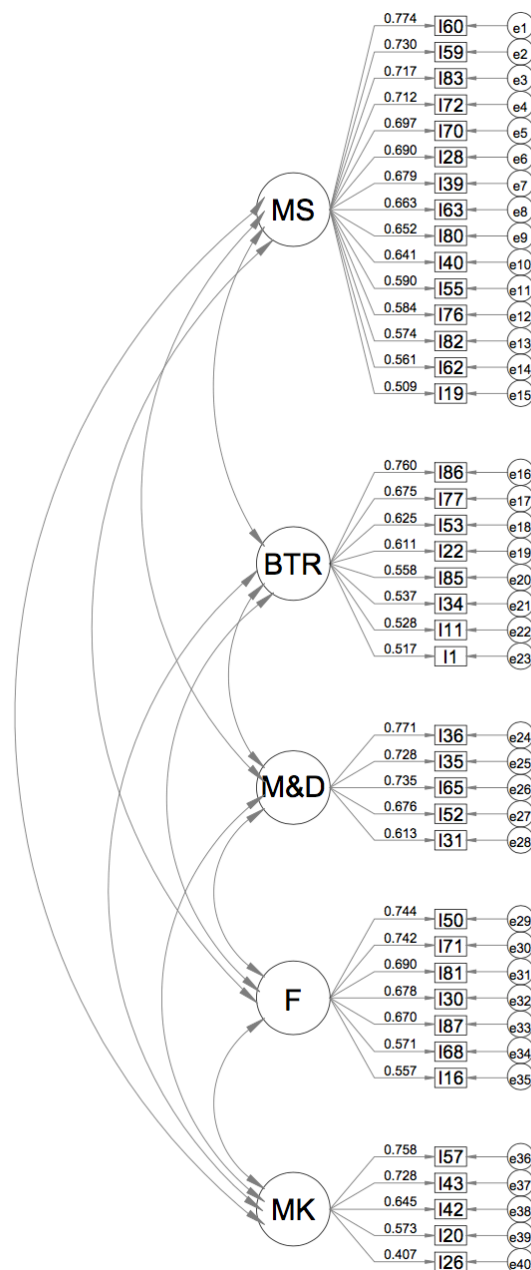
**Table 8:** *Eigenvalues generated from PA*

| Factors | Actual eigenvalues | Average eigenvalues | 95th percentile eigenvalues |
|---------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1       | 16.509             | 1.556               | 1.586                       |
| 2       | 4.617              | 1.524               | 1.545                       |
| 3       | 3.166              | 1.498               | 1.519                       |
| 4       | 1.731              | 1.477               | 1.496                       |
| 5       | 1.502              | 1.459               | 1.478                       |
| 6       | 1.367              | 1.441               | 1.460                       |
| 7       | 1.213              | 1.425               | 1.446                       |

After iterative EFA using principal axis factoring and double oblimin due to the assumption of correlations among factors (Costello & Osborne, 2005), 47 items (i.e., items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 33, 34, 37, 38, 41, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 54, 56, 58, 61, 64, 66, 67, 69, 73, 74, 75, 78, 79, and 84) were excluded because of either ambiguous or low factor loadings. For instance, item 54 entitled “I learn English because I want to be as good at English as someone I know”, which iteratively had ambiguous loadings, was left out. This might be because taking someone else as an example to learn better was not preferred by students and it was not a type of their learning motivation. Some others initially intended to explore a scale (i.e., items 52, 55, 68, 76, and 85) were finally highly related to another scale and had high loadings. For example, although item 85 entitled “I need a lot of guidance in learning English” was intended for examining MK about self, its content was related to the notion of BTR and as a matter of fact, its loading was high in the factor of BTR. The final version consisted of 40 of the original 87 items and accounted for 51.637% of the variance (see Appendix G).

The first factor referred to metacognitive skills (15 items), the second factor consisted of items tapping students’ beliefs about teacher’s role (eight items), the third factor delineated motivation and desire to learn English (five items), the fourth factor contained items referring to students’ freedom (seven items), and the last factor elaborated on metacognitive knowledge (five items). CFA was performed on the revised 40-item questionnaire ( $n = 785$ ), and maximum likelihood estimation was used to examine the model’s parameters, absolute fit indices, and comparative fit indices. SPSS AMOS aided me in conducting CFA to examine the hypothesized model and calculate fit indices including RMSEA, TLI, CFI, and  $\chi^2/\text{d.f.}$

SmartPLS3 brought us with SRMR, RMS\_theta, and NFI. Overall, the fit of the five-factor, 40-item model was not entirely satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 1,633.966$ ;  $d.f. = 367$ ;  $\chi^2/d.f. = 4.45 < 5.0$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $SRMR = .057 < .06$ ;  $RMSEA = .047 < .05$ ;  $RMS\_theta = .104 < .12$ ;  $NFI = .860 \approx .9$ ;  $TLI = .876 \approx .9$ ;  $CFI = .888 \approx .9$ ). Specifically, although Chi-square statistics,  $p$  value, SRMR, RMSEA, and RMS\_theta suggest a reasonable fit to the students' responses, NFI, TLI, and CFI were slightly lower than the recommended value of .9. The standardized five-factor model is illustrated in Figure 8. Big circles represent latent variables, whereas the small ones show measurement errors associated with observed variables. Rectangles indicate the variables observed. Two-way arrows delineate correlations between two observed latent variables.



**Figure 8:** Model for the 40-item LAPQ

The external aspect of validity for the LAPQ was demonstrated by convergent and discriminant evidence. Convergent validity is confirmed by factor loadings, AVE, and CR. The statistics showed that all the items tested had acceptable factor loadings ranging from .407 to .774. AVE values of the scales ranged from .368 (BTR) to .502 (M&D). M&D, which achieved a high level of CR (.834), had acceptable AVE values, which were more than .5, and the AVE for the other scales was below .5. However, the CR values for these scales were very high from .764 to .915. Therefore, it can be stated that convergent validity was established (see Table 9).

**Table 9:** Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE)

|     | CR   | AVE  |
|-----|------|------|
| BTR | .821 | .368 |
| F   | .848 | .446 |
| M&D | .834 | .502 |
| MK  | .764 | .403 |
| MS  | .915 | .422 |

*Note:* BTR = beliefs about the teacher's role; F = freedom; M&D = motivation and desire; MK = metacognitive knowledge; MS = metacognitive skills

Discriminant validity was indicated by three distinguishable criteria: the Fornell–Larcker criterion, cross-loadings, and the HTMT ratio. The data analysis on SPSS 24.0 and SmartPLS 3 showed that, as regards the first criterion, the square roots of the scales' AVE were higher than those correlations of the scales with each other (see Table 10).

**Table 10:** Fornell–Larcker criterion (\*square root of AVE)

|     | BTR   | F     | M&D   | MK    | MS    |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| BTR | .607* |       |       |       |       |
| F   | .245  | .668* |       |       |       |
| M&D | .299  | .382  | .708* |       |       |
| MK  | .295  | .298  | .338  | .635* |       |
| MS  | .223  | .583  | .470  | .400  | .650* |

With regard to the second criterion, all the scales had better correlations with themselves than with other scale variables (see Appendix H). In terms of the third criterion, HTMT ratios were all below .9 (see Table 11). Three points above mean that the discriminant validity was confirmed on all three different evaluations.

**Table 11:** Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT ratio)

| BTR | F | M&D | MK | MS |
|-----|---|-----|----|----|
|-----|---|-----|----|----|



|     |      |      |      |      |
|-----|------|------|------|------|
| BTR |      |      |      |      |
| F   | .288 |      |      |      |
| M&D | .355 | .480 |      |      |
| MK  | .371 | .401 | .464 |      |
| MS  | .247 | .675 | .548 | .474 |

The consequential aspect of validity emphasizes the score interpretation and potential consequences of LAPQ scores. I worked on the descriptive statistics and inferential statistics from the items to investigate how LA was perceived by the participants.

### 5.1.2. Reliability

The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the 40 items affirmed that the questionnaire had achieved excellent reliability,  $\alpha = 0.902$ . The analyses of reliability are summarized in Table 12 below.

**Table 12:** Summary of reliability analysis

|     | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | rho_A | CR    |
|-----|---------------------|-------|-------|
| BTR | 0.767               | 0.798 | 0.821 |
| F   | 0.791               | 0.803 | 0.848 |
| M&D | 0.751               | 0.760 | 0.834 |
| MK  | 0.633               | 0.677 | 0.764 |
| MS  | 0.901               | 0.907 | 0.915 |

The reliability analysis demonstrated that almost all of the scales, BTR, MS, and M&D, achieved good and acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients and rho\_A ( $\alpha$ ;  $\rho_A > .7$ ). The MS field possessed the highest reliability level ( $\alpha = .901$ ,  $CR = .915$ ,  $\rho_A = .907$ ). The MK scale had questionable alphas and rho\_A ( $.7 > \alpha$ ;  $\rho_A \geq .6$ ). However, CR achieved a good value of .764, so the MK scale's reliability level was adequate. The average inter-item correlations among the final sub-scales ranged from .205 to .408 (Table 13), and that of the whole questionnaire was .354. These figures satisfied the criteria of good values (see more at Ferrell et al., 2000; Piedmont, 2014). Among 40 items, there were not any items suggested for deletion to increase reliability because bad items had been omitted during validity analyses above.

**Table 13:** Inter-item correlations for the sub-scales

|     | BTR   | F     | M&D   | MK    | MS   |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| BTR | 1.000 | .279  | .206  | .205  | .295 |
| F   | .279  | 1.000 | .363  | .340  | .373 |
| M&D | .206  | .363  | 1.000 | .391  | .408 |
| MK  | .205  | .340  | .391  | 1.000 | .398 |

|    |      |      |      |      |       |
|----|------|------|------|------|-------|
| MS | .295 | .373 | .408 | .398 | 1.000 |
|----|------|------|------|------|-------|

## 5.2. Perceptions of LA

As delineated in the conceptualization of LA in this study, LA manifests itself in some components including beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation, desire, metacognition (i.e., metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills), and freedom. Accordingly, the results concerning how LA is perceived by participants would be presented on the basis of the components aforementioned.

### 5.2.1. Beliefs about teacher's role

During the data analyses, I first produced the descriptive statistics pertaining to the correspondents' stated beliefs about teacher's roles, as shown in Table 14.

**Table 14:** *Descriptive statistics for students' beliefs about teachers' roles*

| Item   | M    | Sd   |
|--|------|------|
| The teachers should set my learning goals.   | 3.52 | 0.93 |
| The teachers should choose what materials to use to learn English in my English lessons. | 3.84 | 0.75 |
| The teachers should correct all my mistakes.   | 3.67 | 0.96 |
| The teachers should ensure my progress in learning English.                              | 3.47 | 0.93 |
| I need a lot of guidance in my learning English.   | 3.88 | 0.81 |
| The teachers should decide how long to spend on each activity.                           | 3.36 | 0.91 |
| The teachers should decide the objectives of my English courses.                         | 3.25 | 1.04 |
| The teachers should explain everything to us.  | 3.77 | 0.92 |
| The whole scale  | 3.6  | 0.55 |
| <i>Note: M = Means; Sd = Standard deviation</i>  |      |      |

Table 14 provides information on the agreement level of all the eight items and the whole scale. It, taken as a whole, shows that the students regarded their teachers as holders of multiple responsibilities ( $M = 3.6$ ,  $Sd = 0.55$ ), especially selecting materials ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $Sd = 0.75$ ), explaining everything to them ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $Sd = 0.92$ ), and correcting all their mistakes ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $Sd = 0.96$ ). Item 5 had the highest mean ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $Sd = 0.81$ ), which shows that a lot of guidance went into their learning English. Table 15 summarizes the detailed results in terms of the students' views of their English teacher's roles.

**Table 15:** *Students' perceptions of their English teacher's responsibilities (in %)*

|  | SD  | D    | Total<br>(SD &<br>D) | Neutral | A    | SA   | Total<br>(A &<br>SA) |
|--|-----|------|----------------------|---------|------|------|----------------------|
| The teachers should set my learning goals.   | 2.0 | 10.7 | 12.7                 | 34.0    | 39.6 | 13.7 | 53.3                 |
| The teachers should choose what materials to use to learn English in my English lessons. | 0.8 | 2.6  | 3.4                  | 24.9    | 54.6 | 17.2 | 71.8                 |
| The teachers should correct all my mistakes.   | 1.6 | 9.4  | 11.0                 | 30.8    | 37.0 | 21.2 | 58.2                 |

|  |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|--|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| The teachers should ensure my progress in learning English.      | 2.5 | 11.2 | 13.7 | 35.7 | 38.3 | 12.3 | 50.6 |
| I need a lot of guidance in my learning English.                 | 0.6 | 3.9  | 4.5  | 24.4 | 48.9 | 22.2 | 71.1 |
| The teachers should decide how long to spend on each activity.   | 3.1 | 12.1 | 15.2 | 38.5 | 37.8 | 8.5  | 46.3 |
| The teachers should decide the objectives of my English courses. | 4.7 | 19.2 | 23.9 | 34.1 | 30.2 | 11.8 | 42   |
| The teachers should explain everything to us.                    | 0.6 | 7.9  | 8.5  | 29.2 | 38.7 | 23.6 | 62.3 |

*Note: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, A = agree, SA = strongly agree*

The participants' responses clustered on *strongly agree*, *agree*, and *neutral*. The majority of the respondents (71.1%; item 5) concurred that the presence and guidance of their EFL teachers were of great importance to them as they were unable to study without their teacher's support. Most students strongly agreed or agreed that their teachers were responsible for some aspects of their foreign language learning. Generally, they regarded their EFL teachers as being more responsible for the external areas of the learning process. There were five main fields that most participants believed that their language instructors should take charge of. They included:

- Choose what materials to use to learn English in my English lessons (71.8% *agree* or *strongly agree*)
- Explain everything to us (62.3% *agree* or *strongly agree*)
- Correct all my mistakes (58.2% *agree* or *strongly agree*)
- Set my learning goals (53.3% *agree* or *strongly agree*)
- Ensure my progress in learning English (50.6% *agree* or *strongly agree*)

The other two aspects, "decide how long to spend on each activity" and "decide the objectives of my English courses", also had high proportions of strongly agree or agree (46.3% and 42% respectively). Table 15 above shows that a large number of the participants stayed neutral on the issues of teachers' roles, especially in deciding how long for each activity and the objectives of English courses.

In order to answer the questions regarding differences in aspects of LA among students with different genders, different years of training, and different English grades (A, B, C, or D), inferential statistics were utilized. The data did not show a normal distribution with skewness of  $-0.182$  ( $SE = 0.062$ ), Kurtosis of  $0.244$  ( $SE = 0.124$ ), and Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests with  $p < .01$  (see Table 16 below). Therefore, a non-parametric Mann–Whitney  $U$  test was run to compare the responses of male and female students. The non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test facilitated our comparison of students with different English grades and in their different years of study.

**Table 16:** Tests for normality

|                               |                        | Standard error SE |      |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|------|
| Metacognitive skills          | Skewness               | -.194             | .062 |
|                               | Kurtosis               | .553              | .124 |
|                               | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |                   | .000 |
| Beliefs about teacher's roles | Skewness               | -.182             | .062 |
|                               | Kurtosis               | .244              | .124 |
|                               | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |                   | .000 |
| Motivation & Desire           | Skewness               | -.319             | .062 |
|                               | Kurtosis               | .083              | .124 |
|                               | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |                   | .000 |
| Freedom                       | Skewness               | -.321             | .062 |
|                               | Kurtosis               | .461              | .124 |
|                               | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |                   | .000 |
| Metacognitive Knowledge       | skewness               | -.453             | .062 |
|                               | Kurtosis               | 1.060             | .124 |
|                               | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |                   | .000 |

A Mann–Whitney  $U$  test (see Tables 17 and 18) showed that there was a significant difference in beliefs about teacher's role among male and female students ( $U = 260,818.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Specifically, the mean ranks of the male group were higher than those of their female counterparts on the whole scale.

**Table 17:** Ranks - Mann–Whitney  $U$  test

|                               | Student's gender | N    | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------|-----------|--------------|
| Beliefs about teacher's roles | Male             | 974  | 810.72    | 789,640.50   |
|                               | Female           | 591  | 737.32    | 435,754.50   |
|                               | Total            | 1565 |           |              |
| Motivation & desire           | Male             | 974  | 785.06    | 764,648      |
|                               | Female           | 591  | 779.61    | 460,747      |
| Metacognitive knowledge       | Male             | 974  | 809.45    | 788,408      |
|                               | Female           | 591  | 739.40    | 436,987      |
| Metacognitive skills          | Male             | 974  | 811.06    | 789,975      |
|                               | Female           | 591  | 736.75    | 435,420      |
| Freedom                       | Male             | 974  | 835.42    | 813,696      |
|                               | Female           | 591  | 696.61    | 411,699      |

**Table 18:** Mann–Whitney  $U$  test

| Beliefs about teacher's roles | Motivation & desire | Metacognitive knowledge | Metacognitive skills | Freedom |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------|
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------|

|                        |            |         |         |         |         |
|------------------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Mann-Whitney U         | 260,818.50 | 285,811 | 262,051 | 260,484 | 236,763 |
| Wilcoxon W             | 435,754.50 | 460,747 | 436,987 | 435,420 | 411,699 |
| Z                      | -3.123     | -.233   | -2.998  | -3.156  | -5.908  |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .002       | .816    | .003    | .002    | .000    |

a. Grouping Variable: Student's gender

Tables 19 and 20 show the differences in beliefs about teachers' roles among respondents with different English test grades. The highest ranking is for the mark C group at 767.55 [Median (*Mdn*) = 3.75]. Then, there is 767.16 for the mark D group (*Mdn* = 3.63), and 666.95 for the mark B group (*Mdn* = 3.5). The lowest ranking is for the mark A group at 589.92 (*Mdn* = 3.39). The output, shown in Table 20, returned a chi-square statistics that had a probability of  $p < .01$  at three degrees of freedom. I concluded that there were statistically significant differences among the four groups.

**Table 19:** Ranks - Kruskal–Wallis test – Previous grade

| Student's grade in the last English course |       | N    | Mean Rank |
|--|-------|------|-----------|
| Beliefs about teacher's roles              | D     | 285  | 767.16    |
|  | C     | 421  | 767.55    |
|  | B     | 469  | 666.95    |
|  | A     | 233  | 589.52    |
|  | Total | 1408 |           |
| Motivation & desire                        | D     | 285  | 593.16    |
|  | C     | 421  | 662.03    |
|  | B     | 469  | 745.31    |
|  | A     | 233  | 835.30    |
| Metacognitive knowledge                    | D     | 285  | 684.82    |
|  | C     | 421  | 684.05    |
|  | B     | 469  | 716.65    |
|  | A     | 233  | 741.07    |
| Metacognitive skills                       | D     | 285  | 623.23    |
|  | C     | 421  | 687.35    |
|  | B     | 469  | 740.14    |
|  | A     | 233  | 763.15    |
| Freedom                                    | D     | 285  | 694.04    |
|  | C     | 421  | 724.40    |
|  | B     | 469  | 717.48    |
|  | A     | 233  | 655.21    |

**Table 20:** Kruskal–Wallis test statistics – Previous grade

|            | Beliefs about teacher's roles | Motivation & desire | Metacognitive knowledge | Metacognitive skills | Freedom |
|------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------|
| Chi-Square | 39.725                        | 55.438              | 4.107                   | 20.620               | 5.127   |

|             |      |      |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| df          | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    |
| Asymp. Sig. | .000 | .000 | .250 | .000 | .163 |

There was not a significant difference in beliefs about teacher's roles among the respondents in different years of training  $\chi^2(3) = 2.52, p = .36$ . This means years of study did not affect how the students assigned roles in their learning process. The statistics are demonstrated in Tables 21 and 22 below.

**Table 21:** Ranks - Kruskal–Wallis test - Years of training

| Student's years of study      |             | N    | Mean Rank |
|-------------------------------|-------------|------|-----------|
| Beliefs about teacher's roles | Second year | 971  | 822.59    |
|                               | Third year  | 371  | 675.33    |
|                               | Fourth year | 186  | 755.39    |
|                               | Final       | 37   | 962.35    |
|                               | Total       | 1565 |           |
| Motivation & desire           | Second year | 971  | 792.13    |
|                               | Third year  | 371  | 737.56    |
|                               | Fourth year | 186  | 691.06    |
|                               | Final       | 37   | 656.88    |
| Metacognitive knowledge       | Second year | 971  | 810.28    |
|                               | Third year  | 371  | 746.41    |
|                               | Fourth year | 186  | 718.62    |
|                               | Final       | 37   | 697.74    |
| Metacognitive skills          | Second year | 971  | 814.72    |
|                               | Third year  | 371  | 773.15    |
|                               | Fourth year | 186  | 715.81    |
|                               | Final       | 37   | 677.05    |
| Freedom                       | Second year | 971  | 854.14    |
|                               | Third year  | 371  | 740.96    |
|                               | Fourth year | 186  | 694.50    |
|                               | Final       | 37   | 655.27    |

**Table 22:** Kruskal–Wallis test statistics - Years of training

|             | Beliefs about teacher's roles | Motivation & desire | Metacognitive knowledge | Metacognitive skills | Freedom |
|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------|
| Chi-Square  | 2.52                          | 11.380              | 14.954                  | 15.283               | 68.233  |
| df          | 3                             | 3                   | 3                       | 3                    | 3       |
| Asymp. Sig. | .360                          | .004                | .002                    | .002                 | .000    |

### 5.2.2. Motivation and desire to learn English

Based on the analysis of the scale data, the majority of the participants selected the *agree* and *strongly agree* options to explain their motivation to learn English. Specifically, 86.5% of the respondents agreed that English would enable them to succeed in their studies, whereas more than half of the students believed learning English interested them. It is obvious that not many students selected *strongly disagree* and *disagree*, which entails in general, the students had clearly-defined reasons for their language learning (see Table 23).

**Table 23:** Descriptive statistics on students' motivation to learn English

| Statements   | M    | Sd   | SD % | D % | N %  | A %  | SA % |
|--|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|
| 1. I learn English because it will help me to be successful in my studies. | 4.28 | 0.76 | 0.4  | 1.8 | 11.2 | 42.9 | 43.7 |
| 2. I learn English because I find it very interesting.                     | 3.66 | 0.93 | 2.0  | 7.5 | 31.6 | 40.4 | 18.5 |

Moreover, when normal distribution was tested, EM had Skewness of  $-.968$  ( $SE = .062$ ), Kurtosis of  $1.034$  ( $SE = .124$ ), and  $p < .001$ . Meanwhile, IM had Skewness of  $-.428$  ( $SE = .062$ ), Kurtosis of  $-.019$  ( $SE = .124$ ), and  $p < .001$ . This meant the data was not normally distributed. Therefore, Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed and the inferential statistics revealed that there was a significant difference in the scores between intrinsic motivation IM (item 2) ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $Sd = 0.93$ ) and extrinsic motivation EM (item 1) ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $Sd = 0.76$ ) ( $Z = -20.598$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 24).

**Table 24:** Wilcoxon signed-rank test between IM and EM

| IM   |      | EM   |      | Z       | p    |
|------|------|------|------|---------|------|
| M    | Sd   | M    | Sd   |         |      |
| 3.66 | 0.93 | 4.28 | 0.76 | -20.598 | .000 |

Note:  $p < 0.01$

The results of the quantitative analysis showed that the students mainly selected the *neutral*, *agree* and *strongly agree* options. Table 25 presents the findings regarding the *motivational intensity* (MI) of the participants. It can be seen that large percentages of the respondents would prefer to have friends from English-speaking nations (72.3%), to learn English under any circumstances (71.1%) and to use English as much as possible in classes (66.8%); therefore, they showed a high level of motivational intensity or desire.

**Table 25:** Descriptive statistics on motivational intensity

| Statements | M | Sd | SD % | D % | N % | A % | SA % |
|------------|---|----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
|------------|---|----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|

|  |      |      |     |     |      |      |      |
|--|------|------|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| 1. I would like to have friends from English-speaking countries.   | 3.92 | 0.86 | 1.0 | 4.5 | 22.3 | 46.1 | 26.2 |
| 2. If English were not taught at my university, I would try to obtain lessons in English somewhere else. | 3.89 | 0.84 | 1.0 | 3.9 | 24.1 | 46.9 | 24.2 |
| 3. During English classes, I would like to have as much English as possible used.                        | 3.83 | 0.84 | 1.0 | 3.5 | 28.7 | 45.0 | 21.8 |

Correlational analyses were also conducted to examine the relationship between IM and MI and between EM and MI. The results indicated a strong positive relationship between IM and MI ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ) and a weak positive relationship between EM and MI ( $r = .07, p < .01$ ) (see Tables 26 and 27). Moreover, after the coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) was calculated, there was a covariance of 26.7% between IM and MI.

**Table 26:** *Correlations between IM and MI*

|    |                     | IM    | MI    |
|----|---------------------|-------|-------|
| IM | Pearson correlation | 1.000 | .53** |
|    | Sig. (2-tailed)     |       | .000  |
|    | N                   | 1565  | 1565  |
| MI | Pearson correlation | .53** | 1.000 |
|    | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000  |       |
|    | N                   | 1565  | 1565  |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the .01 level

**Table 27:** *Correlations between EM and MI*

|    |                     | EM    | MI    |
|----|---------------------|-------|-------|
| EM | Pearson correlation | 1.000 | .07** |
|    | Sig. (2-tailed)     |       | .000  |
|    | N                   | 1565  | 1565  |
| MI | Pearson correlation | .07** | 1.000 |
|    | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000  |       |
|    | N                   | 1565  | 1565  |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the .01 level

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in the motivation and desire of male and female students. Results of that analysis indicated that there was not a difference,  $U(N_{male} = 971, N_{female} = 591) = 285811, z = -.233, p = .816$  (see Tables 17 & 18).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there was an effect of years of study on motivation and desire. The results indicated a significant difference,  $\chi^2(3) = 11.38, p < .01$ . I, therefore, conclude that there is a difference in motivation and desire to learn English among students in years 2 ( $Mdn = 4.0$ ), 3 ( $Mdn = 3.8$ ), 4 ( $Mdn = 3.66$ ), and 5 ( $Mdn = 3.52$ ) (Tables 19 & 20).

A Kruskal-Wallis test provided very strong evidence of a difference [ $\chi^2(3) = 55.44; p < .01$ ] between the mean ranks of groups of students with different grades in the previous English



course including mark A ( $Mdn = 4.0$ ), mark B ( $Mdn = 3.8$ ), mark C ( $Mdn = 3.71$ ), and mark D ( $Mdn = 3.54$ ). Accordingly, the higher the marks, the higher the mean ranks (Tables 21 & 22).

### 5.2.3. Metacognition in language learning

#### 5.2.3.1. Metacognitive knowledge

The data analysis showed that overall, non-English major students in our study did have a significant level of MK. The summary of the descriptive statistics on MK is presented in Table 28.

**Table 28:** *Non-English-major students' metacognitive knowledge in this study*

| Statements  | M    | Sd   | SD & D (%) | N (%) | A & SA (%) |
|---|------|------|------------|-------|------------|
| I'm responsible for the success of my English learning.   | 4.11 | 0.73 | 2.1        | 13.5  | 84.4       |
| I understand my own personality.  | 3.86 | 0.91 | 7.4        | 21.1  | 71.5       |
| I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English.   | 3.70 | 0.86 | 8.7        | 26.7  | 64.6       |
| There are a lot of opportunities to learn English in Vietnam.   | 3.93 | 0.80 | 4.9        | 19.2  | 76.9       |
| To learn English well, it's important to know one's personality, motivation, personal needs, expectations, learning styles, my strengths, weaknesses, etc., in English. | 4.22 | 0.79 | 3.0        | 11.5  | 85.5       |

With regard to MK about self, a large proportion of students surveyed believed that they understood their own personalities (71.5%), that they took responsibility for the success or failure of their language learning (84.3%), and that they were aware of their strengths and weaknesses in learning English (64.6%). Nevertheless, there existed students who were uncertain of (21.4%) or did not understand their personality (7.4%). A number of respondents remained neutral (26.7%) and did not think that they knew their strengths and weaknesses in learning English (8.7%).

A high percentage of students were aware of the learning context around them. The students in the survey (76%) concurred that currently, there are a variety of English learning opportunities in Vietnam.

Regarding MK about learning process, the majority of students (85.5%) acknowledged the significance of knowing their personality, motivation, personal needs, expectations, learning styles, and so on for betterment of English language learning.

### 5.2.3.2. Metacognitive skills

Many non-English-major students did not possess a certain level of MS (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating), whereas many others felt uncertain of those skills and the others demonstrated a slight degree of the skills (see Table 29).

In terms of planning, students indicated they planned how they learned English (44.9%), made their schedule to have enough time to learn English (52.4%), analyzed task requirements before work or study (55.5%), and set their goals in learning English (61.9%). Quite a large percentage of respondents remained unsure about whether they had planning skills above or not. Many students did not know if they planned their English learning (41.8%) or did not plan how they learned English (13.4%).

Students marked monitoring skills by trying to complete things previously decided (66.8%), and noticing their mistakes for their betterment (65%); however, they did not appear to be confident in fulfilling their learning plans once those plans have been made (36%) and in endeavouring to study English frequently despite time limitations (32.8%). The percentages of the respondents who chose *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, and *neutral* among the items were really high.

Asked about MS of evaluating, students always read their English work again to correct mistakes after getting it back (56.3%), reflected on what they learned and looked for something important (48%), and gave themselves a reward when they did something well in English (32.1%). A large proportion of students surveyed exhibited an uncertainty of the activities aforementioned related to evaluating (33%, 41.1%, and 43.2%, respectively) or they did not undertake those activities (10.8%, 10.9%, and 24.6% respectively).

**Table 29:** Students' metacognitive skills

|               | Statements  | M    | Sd   | SD & D (%) | N (%) | A & SA (%) |
|---------------|---|------|------|------------|-------|------------|
| MS Planning   | I set my goals in learning English.   | 3.65 | 0.80 | 7.5        | 30.6  | 61.9       |
|               | Before I do class work or homework, I analyze what's required.                      | 3.53 | 0.81 | 9.5        | 35.0  | 55.5       |
|               | I make my schedule so I'll have enough time to study English.                       | 3.50 | 0.80 | 9.4        | 38.2  | 52.4       |
|               | I plan how I learn English.   | 3.37 | 0.85 | 13.3       | 41.8  | 44.9       |
| MS Monitoring | I try to complete things I have decided to do.                                      | 3.73 | 0.73 | 4.8        | 28.4  | 66.8       |
|               | I notice my mistakes and use that information for my betterment.                    | 3.66 | 0.82 | 8.5        | 26.5  | 65.0       |
|               | I deal with things related to English but not necessarily related to English class. | 3.64 | 0.86 | 9.1        | 30.3  | 60.6       |
|               | I put great effort into learning English.   | 3.44 | 0.89 | 12.8       | 38.5  | 48.7       |
|               | I check to make sure I understood the lesson.                                       | 3.40 | 0.82 | 12.6       | 39.3  | 48.1       |
|               | I make good use of materials and resources when studying English.                   | 3.38 | 0.91 | 15.9       | 39.1  | 45         |

|                  |  |      |      |      |      |      |
|------------------|--|------|------|------|------|------|
|                  | I carry out the learning plans once they have been made.                         | 3.25 | 0.83 | 14.9 | 49.1 | 36.0 |
|                  | I try to study English regularly even with limited time.                         | 3.16 | 0.87 | 20.2 | 47.0 | 32.8 |
| MS<br>Evaluating | After I get my English work back, I always read it again to correct my mistakes. | 3.56 | 0.88 | 10.7 | 33.0 | 56.3 |
|                  | I reflect on what I learn and look for something important.                      | 3.43 | 0.83 | 10.9 | 41.1 | 48.0 |
|                  | I give myself a reward or treat when I do something well in English.             | 3.10 | 0.96 | 24.6 | 43.2 | 31.2 |

### 5.2.3.3. Inferential statistics

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in the MS and MK of males and females. Results of that analysis indicated that there was a difference in both MS ( $U = 260484$ ;  $z = -2.1934$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{male}} = 811$ ;  $M_{\text{female}} = 736$ ) and MK ( $U = 262051$ ;  $z = -3.0$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{male}} = 809$ ;  $M_{\text{female}} = 739$ ) with male students scoring higher in both constituents of metacognition than their female counterparts (see Tables 17 & 18).

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was carried out to explore the MK and MS scores as students came from years of study (i.e., year 2 to year 5). There was a statistically significant difference between the MK scores and years of training [ $\chi^2(3, N=1565) = 14.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ] with a mean rank MK score of 810 for year 2 ( $Mdn = 4.0$ ), 746 for year 3 ( $Mdn = 3.8$ ), 718 for year 4 ( $Mdn = 3.67$ ), and 697 for year 5 ( $Mdn = 3.44$ ). The MS scores also differed in terms of years of study [ $\chi^2(3, N=1565) = 15.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ] with a mean rank MS score of 814 for year 2 ( $Mdn = 3.6$ ), 773 for year 3 ( $Mdn = 3.51$ ), 715 for year 4 ( $Mdn = 3.47$ ), and 677 for year 5 ( $Mdn = 3.4$ ) (see Tables 19 & 20).

A Kruskal-Wallis test, a nonparametric alternative to a one-way ANOVA, was used to compare four-group means according to marks in a previous English course. The significant difference was regarding MS,  $\chi^2(3, N = 1565) = 20.62$ ,  $p < .01$ , with a mean score of 763 for mark A ( $n = 233$ ;  $Mdn = 3.53$ ), 740 for mark B ( $n = 469$ ;  $Mdn = 3.47$ ), 687 for mark C ( $n = 421$ ;  $Mdn = 3.4$ ), and 623 for mark D ( $n = 285$ ;  $Mdn = 3.33$ ). However, there was not a significant difference in MK based on the marks,  $\chi^2(3, N = 1565) = 4.11$ ,  $p = .25$  (see Tables 21 & 22).

### 5.2.4. Freedom

The aspect of *freedom* in the conceptualization of LA in this study is described as the extent to which students are allowed to control their own learning. Specifically, *freedom* is investigated

through observable behaviors that the students do or have chances to do. The summary of the freedom demonstrated by students in this study is presented in Table 30 below.

**Table 30:** *Freedom in observable behaviors*

| Statements  | M    | Sd   | SD & D (%) | N (%) | A & SA (%) |
|---|------|------|------------|-------|------------|
| I have chances to do English self-study with friends.                           | 3.57 | 0.93 | 11.4       | 32.5  | 56.1       |
| I have chances to work with my classmates in activities in English class.       | 3.55 | 0.92 | 12.8       | 29.0  | 57.2       |
| We use a lot of English in English class at my university.                      | 3.46 | 0.92 | 12.7       | 38.7  | 48.6       |
| I have chances to discuss learning issues with my classmates.                   | 3.36 | 0.91 | 17.0       | 35.5  | 47.5       |
| I can go to see my teachers about my English learning.                          | 3.30 | 0.89 | 16.0       | 42.4  | 41.6       |
| I have chances to make suggestions to the teachers.                             | 3.30 | 0.86 | 14.8       | 43.8  | 41.0       |
| I have chances to ask the teachers questions when I don't understand something. | 3.27 | 0.90 | 17.8       | 41.7  | 40.5       |

Obviously, more than half of the students surveyed agreed that they had chances to self-study English with their friends (56.15%,  $M = 3.57$ ,  $Sd = 0.93$ ) and to cooperate with their peers in English class's activities (57.2%,  $M = 3.55$ ,  $Sd = 0.92$ ). Although not too high, the percentages of *agree* and *strongly agree* in these two items were the highest among the items in the scale. Meanwhile, those in the other items were under 50% and many students stayed undecided. For example, they showed uncertainty when asked whether they could make suggestions to the teachers (43.8%), whether they could meet their teachers to ask about their English learning (42.2%), and whether they could asked questions if something was difficult to understand (41.7%). Notably, there existed students who stated that they did not get chances to do activities listed in the scales. For instance, nearly one fifth of the participants (17.8%) did not support the point that they felt free to ask questions when they did not understand something. In general, the descriptive statistics revealed skepticism and not-much-positive viewpoints among quite a few respondents regarding freedom in their LA.

A Mann-Whitney test indicated that the difference in freedom was statistically significant,  $U(N_{male} = 974, N_{female} = 591) = 236763$ ,  $z = -5.9$ ,  $p < .01$ . Freedom scores of males (835) were higher than those of females (696) (see Tables 17 & 18).

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was performed to examine the freedom among students in years of study (year 2 to year 5). There is a statistically significant difference between the freedom scores and years of study ( $\chi^2_{(2, N=1565)} = 68$ ,  $p < .01$ ) with a mean rank freedom score of 854 for year 2 ( $Mdn = 3.57$ ), 740 for year 3 ( $Mdn = 3.44$ ), 694 for year 4 ( $Mdn = 3.28$ ), and 655 for year 5 ( $Mdn = 3.14$ ) (see Tables 19 & 20).

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to explore the freedom among students with different marks in the English course before (D to A). There is not a statistically significant difference between the freedom scores and marks ( $\chi^2_{(3, N=1565)} = 5.1, p = .163$ ) (see Tables 21 & 22).

### 5.3. Factors that influence the development of LA

To examine which factors have impact on LA internally and externally, rank ordering questions were employed, in which students would write 1 for the factor that was believed to influence their LA the most, 2 for the one that influenced their LA the second most, and so forth and they would leave the option blank if the factor in the option did not influenced their LA at all. As a result, the lower the average rank was, the more the factor was believed to influence the students' LA. This section presents the number of students who chose the factors as the most significant one and who did not select the factors as the influential ones (Tables 31 & 33) as well as the average rankings of those factors (Tables 32 & 34).

#### 5.3.1. Internal factors

The data analysis showed that in the participants' viewpoints, motivation ( $n = 860; M = 1.65$ ), knowledge ( $n = 709; M = 1.76$ ), and skills ( $n = 668; M = 1.78$ ) were assessed the most influential by the respondents, whereas those students ranked their priorities the least influencing to their LA ( $n = 116; M = 3.33$ ). The other factors (e.g., language proficiency) in the list was also selected by quite a few students. Notably, the more votes for the most influential factor, the fewer votes for having no influence at all.

**Table 31:** *The internal factors that mediate or constrain LA*

| Factors                         | selected as<br>the most<br>influential | selected<br>as no<br>influence |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Motivation                      | 860                                    | 97                             |
| My skills                       | 709                                    | 79                             |
| My knowledge                    | 668                                    | 74                             |
| Attitudes                       | 444                                    | 200                            |
| Learning styles                 | 435                                    | 236                            |
| Preferences                     | 418                                    | 276                            |
| Characteristics                 | 321                                    | 258                            |
| Language proficiency            | 301                                    | 273                            |
| Autonomous learning experience  | 235                                    | 340                            |
| Short term/long-term priorities | 116                                    | 359                            |

**Table 32:** *The average rankings of the internal factors*

| Factors                         | Average ranking |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Motivation                      | 1.65            |
| My skills                       | 1.76            |
| My knowledge                    | 1.78            |
| Attitudes                       | 1.86            |
| Learning styles                 | 2.50            |
| Preferences                     | 2.54            |
| Characteristics                 | 2.60            |
| Language proficiency            | 2.55            |
| Autonomous learning experience  | 3.20            |
| Short term/long-term priorities | 3.33            |

### 5.3.2. External factors

The statistics indicated that students perceived teacher's activities ( $n = 593$ ;  $M = 1.82$ ), society ( $n = 567$ ;  $M = 2.04$ ), and curriculum ( $n = 553$ ;  $M = 2.73$ ) as three most influencing external factors on the development of their LA. Meanwhile, testing and assessment were selected as the most influential factor the least ( $n = 224$ ;  $M = 3.94$ ). Many respondents also chose other listed factors (e.g., peers and rules) as the factors which exert greatest influences on their LA. It is worth noting that there were more votes for having no influence in the external factors than in the internal factors; however, regarding three most influencing factors, more votes for having no influence were in the internal factors than in the external counterparts. In general, the average rankings of the evaluations of external factors were higher than those of the internal factors.

**Table 33:** *The external factors that have impacts on LA*

| Factors                                 | selected as the most influential | selected as no influence |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Teacher's activities                    | 593                              | 222                      |
| Society                                 | 567                              | 288                      |
| Curriculum                              | 553                              | 270                      |
| Peers                                   | 528                              | 301                      |
| School rules/Class rules                | 512                              | 210                      |
| Public examinations                     | 468                              | 209                      |
| Educational policy on language learning | 421                              | 233                      |
| Culture                                 | 347                              | 289                      |
| Testing and assessment systems          | 224                              | 382                      |

**Table 34:** *The average rankings of the internal factors*

| Factors                  | Average ranking |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Teacher's activities     | 1.82            |
| Society                  | 2.04            |
| Curriculum               | 2.73            |
| Peers                    | 2.84            |
| School rules/Class rules | 2.87            |

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Public examinations                     | 2.92 |
| Educational policy on language learning | 3.77 |
| Culture                                 | 3.81 |
| Testing and assessment systems          | 3.94 |

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## 5.4. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings of the quantitative stand of the study. Specifically, the chapter reported the reliability and validity of the survey instrument used. Then the chapter described the respondents' beliefs about teacher's roles, their motivation and desire to learn English, their facets of metacognitive knowledge and skills, and their freedom in the language learning process. Afterwards, the chapter delineated the internal and external factors that according to the participants' viewpoints affected their LA.

After the statistical procedures, the 40-item questionnaire was proven to be reliable and the data was valid to investigate LA on the basis of its components including beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation and desire, metacognition (i.e., metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills), and freedom.

The students revealed that they preferred responsibilities from their teachers in many aspects of the learning process. Still, they held a belief that the teachers should be mainly in charge of some learning stages and that the teachers played a really important role in their learning process. The respondents demonstrated high levels of motivation and desire to learn English. The participants had MK about the self and the learning context; however, they did not have adequate MS (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating). The students had chances to learn English with their peers outside classrooms and in groupwork activities in class. English was not used as much as possible in class and they did not frequently visit their teachers for language learning issues and make any suggestions.

Motivation, knowledge, and skills were three most popular internal factors that the respondents believed to affect their LA, whereas the most selected external factors included teacher's activities, society, curriculum, and peers. In general, the average rankings of the internal factors were lower than those of the external factors, which means the influences of the internal factors were more considerable than those of the external ones.

## CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

*The aim of this chapter is to delineate the findings regarding the qualitative strand on the basis of semi-structured interviews with 13 undergraduates who also completed the survey questionnaires. Those interviews were conducted simultaneously when the data in the quantitative strand was collected due to the characteristics of convergent parallel analysis design in a MMR. The chapter first presents the interviewees' perceptions of LA including what, in their opinion, represents LA, how important LA is to them, and which qualities autonomous learners have. The following parts of the chapter respond to the questions of what and how in the aspects of LA defined in this study according to the participants' viewpoints, followed by the last part in which the interviewed students shared their thoughts in terms of factors that influence the development of LA.*

### 6.1. Representations of LA

The analysis of interview data revealed that the interviewees' perceptions of LA were inclined to be the proactive LA as proposed by Littlewood (1999) and no one defined LA in a reactive form. Accordingly, it played a primary role in their learning process. LA, from their perspective, entailed abilities to learn English without teachers or too much direct support from teachers in a self-regulated and self-reliant manner. Specifically, the interviewees put emphasis on the "self" factor in their learning, stating "self-conscious", "self-disciplined", and generally "self-study"; however, LA was not necessarily self-instruction (e.g., S2). They believed that LA was not something that relied too much on teachers who only performed a role as a guide or facilitator. This means they were aware of their own responsibility but regarded their teachers as a crucial part in their learning process.

LA also manifested itself in the desire and motivation to learn English (e.g., S2, S6, S8, S9, S11, S12, & S13). That is whether students want to or are motivated to learn English or not. If their desire and motivation are available, it means the students' LA. Those factors, as a result, were realized by some specific behaviors such as making efforts to understand difficult issues (S2), being interested in learning English (S6), participating in English clubs (S8), and working in teams to learn English (S9).

One important theme emerged from the interviews was so-called metacognition defined in this study (e.g., S5, S7, S9 and S10). In other words, students perceived LA as the awareness of strengths and weaknesses regarding learning for their development, not the others' (e.g., S5). Furthermore, LA signified the skills or ways to formulate objectives, plan the learning,



implement the plan, and evaluate the implementation (e.g., S7 & S9). S9 also highlighted that LA cannot develop without establishment of learning objectives.

The interviews pointed out the interviewees' descriptions of autonomous learners and there were several noticeable themes including observable behaviors, personal characteristics, academic achievements, metacognitive dimension, and affective dimension. In fact, the participants did not talk about only one aspect but a combination of some aspects. Notably, all the students interviewed mentioned at least one activity that autonomous learners do. They might "teamwork with friends" (S1), "self-study learning materials" (S2), "read information in English on the Internet" (S3), "stay focused, not be distracted by other things" (S4), "work at home effectively" (S5), "try every possible way to learn English such as watching films, listening to music or reading stories" (S6), "voluntarily do tasks not assigned" (S7), "take part in English clubs" (S8), "go to class on time and complete all homework" (S9), "learn English words whenever possible even on roads" (S10), "be active in class activities" (S11), "practice speaking English with foreigners if there are chances" (S12), and "spend spare time learning English" (S13).

In terms of personal characteristics, most interviewees ( $n = 12$ ) believed that autonomous learners should have some important qualities including self-reliance, self-discipline, and studiousness. For example, S3 postulated that "autonomous learners are self-reliant in the way that they do not depend on teachers in every task even though teachers can facilitate their studies". S12 expressed her thought that students became autonomous when "they make themselves do things they should do". Having the same viewpoint, S13 shared that an autonomous learner needed to be self-disciplined and proactive in his studies, even asking teachers questions". S4, S9, and S10 prioritized the role of studiousness in fostering LA, as illustrated in the following quotes: "Autonomous learners are really hard working. They learn English whenever possible. They do all the homework and do more tasks..." (S9), and "they work hard and practice learning and using English everyday" (S10).

Turning to the metacognitive aspect, many students interviewed ( $n = 10$ ) agreed on considering metacognitive procedures as one significant feature of autonomous learners. Accordingly, autonomous learners "know how to plan their learning, implement it, monitor it and evaluate it" (S7) and "set plans, stick to those plans" (S10). Regarding academic achievements, from the perspectives of some interviewees ( $n = 9$ ), autonomous students possessed good results in learning English. The example excerpts are as following: "students are considered autonomous if they obtain good results" (S2) and "autonomous learners tend to achieve expected results in their studies" (S5). When it comes to affective aspect, nine

participants commented that autonomous learners were passionate about or felt love with learning English. For instance, S6 and S11 shared the same idea that autonomous learners were described as those having passion for and interests in learning English.

All the interviewees ( $N = 13$ ) contended that LA played an important role in language learning. It seemed that when discussing the importance of LA, the students appreciated it as a way to master English, which means LA would contribute much to their language learning process. Notably, they all explained their opinions in the way that students need to self-regulate and self-initiate their own learning to achieve that success. Also, the language learning process itself which was complex with grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, cultures of English-speaking countries, and different skills would require self-discipline, endeavours, and persistence. As a result, some participants ( $n = 8$ ) confirmed that without LA, language learners could not be successful. The following quotes illustrate the points above.

*“LA is extremely important in language learning. Without it, people cannot be successful learners. It helps them initiate learning on their own and improve lexical resources, grammatical structures, and language skills, so it has a great impact on their academic achievements.” (S5)*

*“LA is really important to any language learners because learning English is not easy and students have to learn many things such as grammar, pronunciation, and skills. Therefore, students must be self-disciplined and make a lot of efforts. They must be patient and persist in practising English everyday. By doing so, they will shorten working time and enhance work effectiveness.” (S10).*

The results of the interview data revealed that students had positive viewpoints towards LA in terms of what LA meant to them, what made autonomous learners, and how important LA was. Although no interviewee could provide a comprehensive overview of LA, they demonstrated different levels of understanding of LA which reflected their own learning processes and experiences. Many points in their answers indicated the alignment with the conceptualization of LA in this study such as metacognition, motivation, desire, teacher roles, and activities outside classrooms.

## **6.2. Beliefs about teacher's role**

In the interviews, 13 students were asked to share their views on which roles teachers had in their EFL classes, the specific responsibilities the teachers should take over in classes, and what they should do more or less in the class. There were more questions that arose in relation to specific conditions of the interviews.

All the students gave their opinion on teachers' roles in the EFL classroom. Eleven of the 13 students said teachers were guidance providers in EFL classes. As S1 affirmed, “the teachers guide us”. S2 regarded his/her teacher as a guide giver who helped his/her learning. S3 viewed

teachers' roles as "giving directions". This was corroborated by S6 who said teachers guided their students towards excellent study of the English language. S8 said:

"Their roles, in my opinion, are very important. They will give us guidance and tell us how to learn English effectively, rather than our self-studying. Of course, we need to self-study but it is necessary to have a teacher to help us." (S8)

S11 postulated that English teachers occupied a really important role in guiding students to learn English well. The student added that, "I believe that without teachers' guidance, students would not be successful even though they can use technological devices and the Internet".

The kind of guidance also varied. "Guiding how to learn" was reiterated nine times, "guiding what to learn" seven times, and "guiding setting objectives" four times. For example, S13 clearly stated that it was the teachers' role to give students directions and guidance based on their experience with learning languages. The "how-to" could be a short-cut, a tip on how to pronounce a word, vocabulary development, grammar, and so on. S7 agreed that the teacher's role was to guide, adding that s/he needed much guidance from and relied on the teachers to learn what s/he did not know. S/he was aware of his/her role in learning what was taught. S4 said, "an English teacher is a person who sets the goals and helps students to achieve those goals". S11 added:

"Why? Well, they have learned English for many years, they studied pedagogy and then they have been teaching English to others for a long time. Therefore, they are very experienced. They can tell students the way to learn better different parts of English such as vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, and so on; and what to learn in class and at home from the textbook, the supplementary materials, and the Internet.

They also aid their students in establishing objectives and guide them to attain those objectives" (S11)

The students tended to conflate "guidance" and "orientation/direction". Some of them asserted that their teachers needed to provide them with direction and guidance. For S12, "they only need to provide students with precise directions of what to know and what to learn". The other two students concurred that they should inspire or motivate them to learn the English language well. According to S9, an EFL teacher was a motivator. S10 went on to explain what s/he thought about inspiration/motivation:

"You need to be inspired by learning that language because you learned a language a long time ago. When you talk to your parents, if you feel happy, you talk to them. If you are bored, you do not want to talk. I think the teachers have to bring students with motivation/inspiration in EFL classes." (S10).

However, it should be pointed out that some of the interviewees were aware of their own responsibilities. They said, "You [students] must be mainly responsible for your learning" (S1), "Teachers contribute a small part, and you [students] need to self-study" (S2), and "I have to

study English on my own, but it is important that a teacher is there to guide me” (S8). This mindset recurred in the views of other respondents:

“Students need to actively prepare the lessons and find out the things in advance to check whether teachers say something correctly or not.....If people do things by themselves, they will know that they need to correct these things. If teachers do everything already, students will be passive and think that teachers will help them.” (S12)

For the second interview question concerning teachers’ specific duties in class, along with the agreements on teachers as guides and motivation providers, there were quite a few roles that the students assigned to their teachers. They perceived their English language teachers as those who taught knowledge, set objectives for them, gave them English exercises, revised lessons, created games/activities, answered their questions, and assessed their learning. S1 put it as follows, “I ask the teachers what I do not know. The teachers give guidance. The study is mainly my responsibility. They are friends. They teach knowledge, guide me in what I do not know, and assign us English exercises”. S4 said, “During that process [achieving goals], if the students have any questions or difficulties, the teachers can explain them. The teachers are guides. The students go to class, acquire knowledge, and use it”. S5 accentuated the belief that teachers were only instructors and activity designers who encouraged students to get involved, communicate with each other, and with the teachers. S2 believed teachers gave instructions, and helped with lesson revisions because they were university students and most of the knowledge had been learned previously. S13 added that teachers could assess their learning, but merely indicate what and where mistakes/errors are. This student said the tasks of correcting them and making improvements were their responsibilities.

However, this question was a challenge for some students who said “how to say?”, “it is a difficult question for me”, or “what a hard question!”. They could not find any particular responsibility of their teachers in class, except for “teaching”, “telling us”, or “guiding”. Interestingly, the beliefs about learners’ role were also presented. The majority of the interviewees (11 out of 13) had the same viewpoint that students followed their teachers’ guide and instructions, completed all the tasks assigned, paid attention to the lessons, absorbed the knowledge and used it. Meanwhile, two other students said that the learners should be hard-working and willing to learn.

Turning to the third interview question, which asked the interviewees what teachers should do more or less in class, the responses were really diverse, some of which seemed contradictory. Three main themes emerged from the data. They signified the use of instructional language, pedagogical issues, and affective issues. Firstly, three opinions were

expressed concerning instructional language. Two of them expected the teachers to speak English more (“the teacher should speak English more” [S1], “I expect my teacher to speak English more” [S2]). Meanwhile, the other called for the use of more Vietnamese [“There is an imbalance in English levels in class, so the teacher must speak Vietnamese a little bit more” (S7)]. The two explained that they need to improve their environment in which English would be used more, and the other said weak students could not keep track in the English-dominant environment.

Secondly, the majority of the views focused on the teachers’ pedagogy. Four ideas were proposed asking the teachers to create a stimulating environment for their students to develop their English knowledge and skills. That environment can be promoted by more discussions, more free talks, more listening and speaking activities, more games or more knowledge. Some interviewees (S9, S11) emphasised the need for updated textbooks, supplementary materials and an improvement in the way teachers deliver their lessons. “If they [the teachers] want us to learn English better, they need to have newer books compared to the outdated ones which will make us bored” (S9). “The way they [the teachers] teach and explain the points must be more interesting and livelier. We know some of those points already, so we need something fun” (S11). According to S6, the teachers should pay more attention to weak students in class. Besides, they should stay focused on the lesson content rather than talking about irrelevant issues (S5 and S6) and going out too much (S12). Thirdly, three students were into the affective aspects of their teachers’ teaching. S13 shared that:

“The teachers should be more open-minded and more approachable so that the students can have more chances to talk and share. If the teachers are more friendly, we will share what we need, what we want, and what we achieved.” (S13)

S10 hoped that the teachers would provide an environment where the students can feel comfortable enough to listen to, speak, communicate in English, and share their views. S5 posited that the teachers can encourage and help their students.

### 6.3. Motivation and desire

The interviewees stated that they were motivated by communicative purposes, their own interests, personal enjoyment, study and career path, and other people such as friends, family people, and teachers (see Table 35).

**Table 35:** *Motivation to learn English among the 13 interviewed students*

|    | Own interests | Communicative purposes | Study & career | Personal enjoyment | Other people |
|----|---------------|------------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| S1 |               | x                      |                |                    | x            |

|     |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| S2  | x |   | x |   | x |
| S3  |   |   | x |   |   |
| S4  |   | x |   |   | x |
| S5  | x | x | x |   | x |
| S6  |   | x |   | x |   |
| S7  | x |   | x | x | x |
| S8  |   | x | x |   | x |
| S9  |   | x | x |   |   |
| S10 |   | x | x | x | x |
| S11 | x | x | x | x |   |
| S12 | x | x |   |   |   |
| S13 |   | x | x | x |   |

Overall, own interests, communicative purposes, and personal enjoyment can be categorized into IM, whereas the others belong to EM. Regarding communicative purposes, 10 students concurred that they learned English because they wanted to communicate in English with foreigners. This was evident in the following illustrative quotes:

*I learn English for communicating with international friends..... Yes, my*

*motivation is communication....I truly want to talk to them in English. (S1)*

*I want to learn English to improve my communicative skills in English. (S4)*

*I really love being able to talk with foreigners when I have chances, so that is why I learn English. (S6)*

There were also five students who regarded their interest in languages as their motivation. For example, S2 expressed the following:

*English is not an important compulsory subject, but I like it. It is not due to my parents, but it is simply my own interest. I find it very interesting. (S2)*

*I learn English because I find it very interesting and I will learn a lot of new things for my life from that language. (S7)*

Similarly, S12 postulated that her only reason for studying English was that she loved learning languages, although she admitted that it may be useful for her future job.

As for the motivation to learn English, five interviewees stated that one of their motives was personal enjoyment. This point is exemplified by the following quotes:

*My motivation to learn English was to listen to music and to play the guitar. If I am good at English, I will be able to get access to the international US-UK music and to understand more about my music idols. (S10)*

*I learn English because I would love to read English stories or watch movies in English. The feeling when I understand the points in stories or movies is so great. (S13)*

Similarly, S6 wanted to listen to English music and watch English films, while S7's hobby was traveling.

Interestingly, one commonly shared motivator among the participants was their study and future career path. For instance, S13 was unsure whether she enjoyed learning English, but she confirmed that she learned the language for her future job:

*Mainly, I study English for my future career. Since my major is multimedia, most of the documents are translated from English. So, I want to read the materials in English. I also want to improve the quality of my job later on. If I have a high level of English, then I believe that there will be more opportunities to work with foreigners. Consequently, my salary and remuneration will be higher. Nowadays, English is something vital, rather than compulsory. (S13)*

*Learning English well will be advantageous to my future job. I believe that if I can use English proficiently, the likelihood that I will get a well-paid job will be definitely higher. (S3)*

*Currently, we are living in the era of globalization, so without English, it becomes difficult to apply for a good job. As a result, I learn English to fulfill the language requirements. (S9)*

Finally, some students were motivated by other people (both in reality and on the Internet) such as family members (e.g., S1, S7, and S10), friends (e.g., S2 and S5), and teachers (e.g., S8). In general, this influence was positive because no one stated that they learned English to please other people. For instance, S4 stated the following:

*During my first year at the university, I realised that many people could speak English fluently and I wanted to be like that.....As for the Internet, many vloggers and those on YouTube record themselves in English. This made me excited to learn the language. (S4)*

*One of my friends could speak English very well, which motivated me to learn English so that one day I could use English as confidently as her. (S2)*

One aspect that drew our attention was that although some of the students wanted to pass examinations, it was not their primary motivation. Notably, the majority of the interviewees presented several reasons why they wanted to learn English. For example, S11 learned English for four reasons: (1) his interests, (2) communicative purposes, (3) study and career, and (4) personal enjoyment. Meanwhile, S13 shared that the main reason was for better communication skills in English and ultimately a better job.

Despite the various reasons why they learned English, all of the interviewees stated that they would take opportunities to learn and improve their English such as trying to understand English tasks, having foreign friends, and using English both in and outside of class. For instance, S3 stated the following:

*For sure, I will take opportunities to learn English because class time is never sufficient. The time to learn English in secondary school, in particular, did not enable me to use the language well. (S3)*

*....Why not? Those opportunities to learn English will definitely facilitate my improvement in English proficiency. Also, they will bring me closer to the world in the way that I will be engaged in international communities. (S11)*

However, several students (i.e., S2, S7, S8, and S9) noticed that it sometimes depended on specific conditions. For example, typically, “there may be too many other things to do at home or in class. There are too many subjects with heavy workloads” (S7) . In addition, seven students stated that they would find a center to learn English if it were not taught at the university, while the other interviewees agreed that they would do more tasks if their teachers asked them to do so. In regard to the latter, S13 shared that although he did not regularly volunteer to do tasks, he never refused them because he knew that they were good for his academic studies. Moreover, eight participants denied that they only learned English to get along and acknowledged the role of English in globalization, as illustrated in the following:

*I particularly want to study English well. No, it is not just to cope with class tasks. It is for my future use of English. (S7)*

*I never think that I learn English merely to pass the courses or the exams. I myself know how important it is to my life and to the fourth industrial revolution. (S6)*

Finally, most of the interviewees were interested in participating in English learning communities, including clubs as chances to practice the language. For example, S1 said, “The English club at my university aims to help students improve their English skills, which is good. I would like to attend the sharing sessions held by that club”. Moreover, S8 expressed his thought that “there is an English club at my university which brings so much fun to its members. I think I am keen on attending it as it is an effective way to practice the language in a fun way”. However, they did not find the activities interesting (e.g., S12) or the schedules did not fit into their daily routines (e.g., S10). More importantly, they could not practice English much inside or outside classrooms because it has not been yet a second language, not many people speak it in daily life, and the students could not meet foreigners frequently to learn English on a regular basis (e.g., S2, S4, S7, and S9). This entailed the obstacle encountered by many students in this study. They claimed that their language instructors and peers who were Vietnamese, the course books, the supplementary materials, and the Internet became the paths that brought them to the world of English.

*The major barrier to English communications is that English is not used much in daily life. Seemingly, people prefer speaking Vietnamese to save time of expression. They do not speak English. The ways that I can be exposed to English are from textbooks, supplementary materials, and the Internet. (S2)*



*Well, we only work with books, our teacher and friends in class and the Internet at home. One pity is that there are not many opportunities to see and communicate with international friends regularly in Vietnam. (S9)*

#### **6.4. Metacognition**

The interview data indicated four important themes corresponding with different types of MK. In terms of MK about self, all the students interviewed ( $N = 13$ ) appeared to well understand their selves. This point manifested itself in the awareness of their characteristics, strong points, weak points, and the responsibility for language learning, and the belief that they could. Specifically, one student reflected, “I am sure that I understand my own personality. I know clearly about my strong as well as weak points in learning English....It is myself, not anyone else who can be responsible for successful language learning or not” (S10). S5 affirmed that s/he could overcome his/her weaknesses if s/he could make more efforts and spend more time studying at home. Another one detailed,

*“My strong point focuses on my ability to understand and translate all the tasks in class, but I am not good at pronunciation and spelling because I sometimes make mistakes in one or two letters in a long word. But I believe that I can overcome that weakness. Evidently, I was so bad at English at high school. My first English course at university was B, but due to my effort, I got A for the second course.” (S1)*

The interviewees shared several points regarding their strong points and weak points. Those points emphasized all the language elements (i.e., grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary) and two language skills (i.e., listening and speaking). Their strengths typified grammar and vocabulary, whereas their drawbacks lay in pronunciation, speaking, and listening skills.

Turning to MK about language issues, all interviewed participants ( $N = 13$ ) believed that learning English is learning four language skills and cultural features with the support of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. They focused more on listening, speaking, pronunciation, and vocabulary. One student commented, “Learning English, in my opinion, refers to learning foreign cultures, listening, and speaking. Listening and speaking are the most important” (S3). Another one said, “I learn four skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and speaking is the most critical. Vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar are also necessary” (S9). Meanwhile, S11 postulated that learning English entailed learning four skills and three components and learning vocabulary is the most vital as a foundation to learn other things. Notably, when asked about differences between Vietnamese and English, the interviewed participants indicated an unconsciousness, as illuminated in the quotes: “Vietnamese and English are different but it is difficult for me to express my points here....”,

or “...I do not see any differences between Vietnamese and English. Vietnamese is my mother tongue, so it is easier. We learn English as beginners, not innately born...” (S5).

In terms of MK about context, the interviews concurred that currently, there were a variety of English learning opportunities in Vietnam, as specified in the following interview quote:

*“...there are a lot of centers teaching English in Vietnam. If you do not want to spend money on English centers, you can go around Sword lake, West lake, or pedestrian zones, meet foreigners, and talk to them to practice English. You may also learn English on the Internet...”* (S4).

However, some interviewees admitted that many English centers merely provided exam-oriented courses (e.g., S10). All the participants interviewed agreed that their university regarded English as an important subject; however, the only reason they provided was that they had to learn English at university and it was compulsory. To illustrate, S13 shared that English was considered important at his/her university because it was one of the subjects s/he had to learn. Having the same viewpoint, S5 said that English played an important role at his/her university because they asked all students to learn English.

Regarding MK about learning process, the interviewed participants recounted what they know about learning process. Their stories were mainly associated with the order of learning what and how of the language ( $n = 11$ ). They presented which element of the language or which skill should be acquired before the others. To exemplify, one participant (S2) shared that, “I think first we learn listening, then writing, next reading, and speaking.” Another (S9) described the process: “...In my opinion, we start with listening. Next, we learn how to speak, then read, and write. The process is like a child learns a language.” Only one student (S7) mentioned two stages of learning process including “....having a plan, monitoring that plan, doing the best for it, and completing it perfectly” without referring to evaluation.

The interviews revealed three main themes concerning three MS of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. When it comes to MS of planning, 13 students in the interviews endorsed the importance of planning in their learning. However, around two thirds of them ( $n = 9$ ) showed that they did not practice metacognitive skills in planning, whereas the others sometimes planned their learning but their planning was exam-oriented and they defined goals without planning. One participant highlighted:

*“For example, my objective is to attain 6.5 IELTS and then I plan my learning such as how much time I need, who can help me, and where I can get help. I think that planning is important especially for big goals.”* (S13)

Another one admitted that “...I rarely plan my study. I do not get used to it...” (S6). One interviewee provided some more details: “I do not often make plans for my study.....I identify some objectives, but not often either and I usually fail to achieve them...” (S9).

In terms of MS of monitoring, generally, there was an uncertainty and shyness among the interviewees. All of them did not say how important monitoring skills were. A student’s response further reported his monitoring skill,

*“...Well, it is a difficult question. I do not know how to talk about it. I just say what I understand...I usually have plans, define objectives in learning English, and do my best to accomplish them. I never give up on them. I aspire to have victory over myself and do better than what I expected...” (S2).*

This echoed most interviewed students’ voices when they shared about monitoring. What they said reflected their limited understanding and practices of monitoring. They indeed neither felt confident when asked about monitoring nor gave details about this MS. They principally reported on whether they made efforts to keep pace with original plans and objectives despite unexpected changes, as illustrated in the following quotes: “....When my goals and plans have been set, I try to stick to them. If there is a sudden change, I will change them but I will do my best to be with them to complete them...” (S10), or “...I keep to my plan and I also make changes in deadlines and activities because there are things happening which do not go according to plan...” (S6).

Asked about MS of evaluating, all the students highly appreciated the role of evaluation in their learning process because evaluating helped them to reflect on what had been done so far and to propose next steps:

*“...I found these activities [evaluating] useful for my learning English. They supported me in detecting mistakes, errors, or what is missing in my learning. I self-corrected these mistakes or deficiencies to learn something and to become a better language learner....” (S1)*

Some students ( $n = 5$ ) revealed in the interviews that they evaluated the efficacy of their work by themselves or with the support of teachers and/or peers. The students asked their teacher to check their work or had their friend compare results to investigate their progress. Their teacher or friend could help them to correct their pronunciation and sometimes they self-recorded their voice to check pronunciation. They also “download[ed] and do [did] tests or exercises on the Internet....then, check[ed] answers” (S11) by themselves to observe progress. Meanwhile, the others ( $n = 8$ ) did not regularly exercise this skill because they had neither been informed of how to practice it (e.g., S3) nor had enough ideas about it (e.g., S8) and in fact, their language learning was mainly about learning some vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sometimes practising some skills tasks including listening, reading, speaking, and writing (e.g., S2).

To sum up, the interviews provided an overview of metacognition among the interviewees. Generally, they had MK about the self and the learning context but they appeared to lack MS of planning, monitoring, and evaluating as well as MK about language matters and learning process.

## 6.5. Freedom

In this part, the interviewees were asked to report the extent to which they were allowed to control their learning. It is represented by the activities that they did to take responsibility for their language learning process. The findings indicated two important themes, namely freedom outside the classrooms and freedom in the classrooms.

In terms of the former, all the participants ( $N = 13$ ) relished freedom in many language learning aspects. Specifically, they could freely plan their learning, choose learning methods they preferred, and self-reflect on their results. Besides, they were not under any pressure from other people including teachers, parents, and friends. In addition, they all had chances to study English together at home. As a representative example, one student said,

*"I am totally free to set a plan for my learning, learn English in the ways I like, do whatever I want in English, and check what I have achieved so far. I am the only one who is in charge of my progress and I, myself, am not influenced by any one that can tell me to do this thing or that thing."* (S8)

Another student noted,

*"In my English class at university, I felt comfortable and free because there were a lot of activities that allowed me to work with my peers and some activities that required us to do at home in groups such as a mini-project or a presentation."* (S2)

When being asked about activities they did outside classrooms to better their language proficiency, all the interviewees ( $N = 13$ ) failed to show confidence in sharing their language learning activities. Although all of them mentioned at least one activity, the activities in the list were inclined to be recreational. Specifically, listening to music and watching movies or videos in English were listed by seven students each, followed by talking to foreigners ( $n = 6$ ) and reading materials in English on the Internet (e.g., Facebook statuses, short news, and headings) ( $n = 4$ ). One interviewee said she worked with online materials and did translation tasks from English to Vietnamese and vice versa, while another student played game and sang songs in English. To exemplify, "I have many opportunities to communicate with foreigners, so when I meet them, I talk to them in English very much" (S7) or

*"When I play a game, I chat with other players in English and sing the US and UK songs. Moreover, I usually go downtown and talk to foreigners there, or near my school there is a small café where I can communicate with international friends and practice English."* (S10)

The interview data indicated that writing and reading were not practiced much by many interviewees ( $n = 9$ ) and even one student claimed that he did not do anything else outside class except for completing all homework assigned by his teacher.

With regard to the latter, despite coming from different universities, the interviewees showed many common points in their freedom beyond the classrooms. They all had chances to team-work with classmates a lot in class. For example, S3 shared that “in my English class, my teacher usually have many activities for us to work in pairs or groups. I can play games and work on discussion tasks with my peers”. Moreover, all the interviewees ( $N = 13$ ) still recognized the teachers’ influences on their learning in the way that the teachers observed and monitored all class activities and students’ homework if necessary. The teachers provoked and guided discussions about learning strategies, or encouraged students to draw up plans and identify learning objectives. Also, the teachers promoted English usage in class, paid attention to students’ progress and provided on-time counselling. However, the teachers could not intervene in any out-of-class activities which were self-determined and self-regulated by students. The following interview excerpts are to illustrate:

*“Sometimes my teacher supervises our work in class but just a little bit. He checks our homework, pronunciation, listening, and speaking skills to see whether we can keep track and make progress or not. Then he gives some weak students useful pieces of advice. However, he does not exert any influences on our learning beyond class.” (S1)*

*“...Our teacher designs many activities that motivate us to speak English as much as possible along with stimulating us to discuss learning methods, establish main goals or plans for learning, and make their own decisions on learning English. One thing that I cannot decide is the learning content in the book decided by the university. He also guided us a lot about how to complete tasks effectively in each session.” (S5)*

It is noteworthy that there were some different opinions regarding how students could approach their teachers for issues of learning English. Nearly one fourth of the interviewees ( $n = 3$ ) said that they were unsure about whether their teachers were approachable or not, so they did not ask their teachers any questions when there was something unclear to them. Importantly, they did not dare to talk to them about class issues in an open-minded way because they thought that it might bring harm to their final results or it might make teachers dislike them. Several students interviewed ( $n = 5$ ) admitted that their teachers seemed to be kind and willing to help but they did not approach their teachers for any queries because they felt shy and losing face. Instead, they asked their friends or searched for answers on the Internet. The other participants ( $n = 6$ ) shared that their teachers were friendly and supportive. Specifically,

*“I feel comfortable and confident whenever I have a problem about learning English because my teacher at university is amazing. She helped me a lot, answered all my questions, and told me how I made progress. She treated every student the same. She always asked the class whether we understood the lesson or not. If we have any ideas, she will take notes and try to solve problems in the next lesson. She is so lovely, too, when sincerely sharing experience with us.” (S7)*

Some participating students ( $n = 7$ ) wished for more English to be used in class due to the fact that “the teacher spoke Vietnamese language more and there were many of my classmates with low and uneven levels of English. If she spoke English all the time, they would not be able to understand and keep track with lessons” (S11).

## **6.6. Factors that influence LA**

The interviews in this part aim to explore the students’ perceptions of factors that may support or hamper the development of LA. Three important themes that emerged from the interviews are internal factors, external ones, and students’ evaluation of the factors’ importance. It seemed that students identified the factors that affected their LA as those that mediated or restrained them to become good language learners.

In terms of the internal factors, there are several sub-themes identified including motivation, desire, learning objectives, self-regulation, and language proficiency. Over three quarters of students interviewed ( $n = 9$ ) emphasized the role of motivation in fostering LA. Accordingly, when learners were highly motivated, they would love learning English and make efforts to learn and master it, as illustrated by the quote:

*“....As students, we need a lot of motivation. I think it is more important than any other factors. If we have a high level of motivation, we will endeavour more and succeed, so the other factors become valueless. For example, I live in Bac Ninh province but I do not rent an accommodation in Hanoi and I come back home after school. Many people may think I do not have much time and I should take a rest. However, I am autonomous in the way that on the way home, I talk to my friend in English, ask her what I do not understand, and tell her to check my exercises and give me feedback. Therefore, I believe motivation is extremely important in my situation. I love learning English and I wish to use English to apply for a good job in the future.” (S2)*

Another important internal factor was desire to learn ( $n = 9$ ). According to what the students shared, motivation and desire appeared to be inseparable and interwoven. They mentioned desire and motivation at the same time. It was highlighted that the stronger the desire, the more determined the effort, and probably the more positive the results, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

*“If people do not want something, they will not do it. If they do it, they do not feel comfortable and the result may not be as expected. If people want to learn English, they will make attempts to do it and likely achieve what they expect.” (S12)*

Some participants ( $n = 5$ ) attributed the impact on LA to learners' self-regulation. They believed that it would familiarize students with the systematic learning process, enable them to forgo instant pleasure, and require them to pursue their objectives. Therefore, they thought that a lot of self-regulation was needed to promote LA. Specifically, in one quote, “I think self-regulation is also important to LA. We, as students, need much self-discipline to make efforts, stick to our goals and avoid distractions such as games so that we can be autonomous and successful” (S5).

Objectives in learning drew attention among four interviewees. They concurred that learning objectives played an important role in the development of LA because when people specified their clear long-term or short-term objectives, they would try to stick to them and strive to achieve them although there might be some other sudden businesses happening in their life. An example is:

*“As for me, whenever I have defined an objective, I will try my best for it. However, sometimes, after my work, I feel exhausted. As a result, I have to have a day off from studies, but I endeavour to manage one-hour self-study for English everyday. In my opinion, objectives affect LA very much.” (S9)*

Four participants mentioned language proficiency as one theme in the interviews. In their viewpoints, LA contributed to the improvement of language proficiency, but a high level of language competence was not necessarily a prerequisite of the development of LA which was subject to many other prioritized factors such as motivation, objectives, self factors, and desire. The following quote clarifies their views:

*“In fact, there is no need to have a good language proficiency to cultivate LA. For example, there is a student who is proficient in English. Sometimes, he makes incautious decisions and feels no need to learn anymore. That is how each person perceives their learning process. Language proficiency can be improved, but LA depends on motivation, desire, and self-discipline.” (S12)*

Regarding external factors, the interview data indicated five significant themes including teachers, socio-cultural environment, peers, families, and curriculum. Moreover, one interviewee may have listed more than one factor; for example, S3 discussed three external factors including teachers, friends, and curriculum. Nine students regarded teachers as one external factor relevant to LA. Some of them ( $n = 6$ ) noted that teachers wielded great influences on their exercise of LA. Accordingly, their teachers helped them to increase their motivation by designing suitable activities, sharing experiences with them, and giving them necessary encouragement. Those students believed that if the teachers could not do that, it

would have hindered the development of LA. S8 said that in class, teachers with experiences should promote active learning and nudge students in the right direction, thereby promoting LA; otherwise, the teachers failed to facilitate learners' successful autonomous language learning. S10 added that teachers created a stimulating educational environment, talked to students about language learning experience, gave advice, and helped them feel confident. However, three students did not think that teachers had much impact on their LA. They emphasized that to develop LA, their own effort was the main factor, whereas teachers only contributed a really small part in their learning process.

The second theme is about the socio-cultural environment where students' learning process took place ( $n = 5$ ). They asserted that the current socio-cultural environment in Vietnam, although there were a variety of chances to learn English on the Internet and/or in language centers, appeared to be a barrier to LA. All five interviewees shared that the environment might cause some difficulties to their language learning because not many people around them could use and speak English fluently and there were not many foreigners in Vietnam that they could approach and communicate with to practice English and become motivated and autonomous. They sometimes found it quite boring to learn English without interactions with foreigners.

Another theme to concern is about friends and peers ( $n = 5$ ). The interviewees believed that their friends contributed to motivating them to learn better and cultivate LA if those friends were good at English and willing to share. On the contrary, if those friends' tendency were to seek pleasure and to avoid learning or were not competent at English, it would spoil students' LA and the effective language learning process. To exemplify, one participant (S4) referred to one famous Vietnamese saying that “*gàn mực thì đen gàn đèn thì rạng*” which means evil communications corrupt good manners.

Fourthly, some interviewees ( $n = 5$ ) paid attention to the effect of curriculum on LA promotion. Sharing the same opinion with S12, S3 postulated that

*“...The courses or language programs at university are expected to meet our needs and goals, design interesting activities that are relevant to real life situations, and help us raise awareness of useful learning strategies. The curriculum should sometimes allow us to choose and reflect on something that we like and do.”*

Those five students noted that their current language program focused more on vocabulary and grammar and spent little time developing English skills so that they could do well in exams. That negatively influenced their cultivation of LA. However, they affirmed that such an influence was not too remarkable and the determining factor was their own efforts.



Last but not least, familial relationships were reported to affect the participants' LA ( $n = 3$ ). S12 contended that,

*"...parents usually expect their children to be good at English so that they can find a well-paid job and lead a better life in the future. Therefore, the parents may become an enabling factor when providing the best conditions for their children's education; however, at the same time, those parents may be a hindrance to LA if they put a lot of pressure regarding success of academic achievements on their children.....However, such influences on LA from parents were not as considerable as those from students themselves which I mean self-determination, self-initiation, self-activation, self-regulation, self-actualization, or something like that."*

Having the same idea, S9 and S13 postulated that their LA might be under positive or negative influence of parents, but that impact was not much. The main thing was the learners' self factors to control their learning.

Turning to students' evaluation of two types of factors above mentioned, notably, all the interviewees concluded that although external factors they mentioned, to some certain extent, affect their LA and learning process, internal ones served a determining role. As presented by S1,

*"Well, in my opinion, external factors such as teachers, friends, or environment around me can hold sway on my LA and my progress in learning English. They cannot be separated from my life. However, I always believe that internal factors such as motivation, self-initiation, and self-discipline decide whether I am an autonomous learner or not. Other people or factors from outside cannot do things for me and help me to make decisions but it is me, myself that decides on my learning. I do not overlook external elements that do affect either negatively or positively my LA but their influences are not much. The main part belongs to the internal parts."*

## **6.7. Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented findings from the interviews with 13 undergraduates about their perceptions of LA regarding its definition, its roles, and characteristics of autonomous learners. The chapter has also delineated the interviewees' aspects of LA conceptualized in this study which are beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation and desire, metacognition (i.e., metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills), and freedom. Moreover, the chapter has reported external and internal factors that influence the development of LA as perceived by those interviewed students.

The findings show that in general, the students seemed to take a positive view of LA and they perceived LA in different levels and aspects. Regarding beliefs about teacher's roles, they appeared to be aware of their own responsibility; however, teachers still played really vital roles as facilitators and guide providers in the students' learning process. In terms of motivation

and desire, the interviewees demonstrated a high level of motivation and desire to learn English. Their motivation tended to be professional and academic reasons. Turning to metacognition, the students interviewed were aware of their selves such as strengths and weaknesses and the broad context where the language learning took place, but seemingly they lacked MK about language matters and learning processes. They also showed a lack of MS (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating).

When it comes to freedom, the interviewees enjoyed their freedom in learning English to a large extent; however, their activities outside classes which were mainly focused on entertainment and not truly diverse. With regard to factors influencing LA, the findings pointed out internal and external elements. The former embodied motivation, desire, learning objectives, self-regulation and language competences, whereas the latter consisted of teachers, friends, socio-cultural environment, families, and curriculum. As evaluated by the students, internal factors which determined the nurture of LA played a more important role than external factors.

## CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

*The chapter's purpose is to interpret the combination of quantitative and qualitative results in this study on the participants' perceptions of LA in terms of its conceptualization, their beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation and desire to learn English, metacognition in language learning, and freedom as well as on their perceptions of elements that have influences on their exercise of LA. Then the chapter discusses the important points regarding the research questions so that responsible pedagogical implications can be offered for different stakeholders to foster LA in language education.*

### 7.1. Learner autonomy and its conceptualization

The findings of the current study indicate that the participants in the interviews held positive viewpoints towards LA. Specifically, they defined LA in a proactive sense (see more at Littlewood, 1999) that students learned English in their own initiation and regulation without too much interference from teachers. The students believed that LA represented many different aspects such as self-consciousness, self-discipline, self-reliance, self-regulation, motivation, desire, and metacognition. It was noted that LA did not mean entire independence from teachers, but the teachers worked as facilitators. Autonomous learners, from the students' perspective, had noticeable features regarding observable autonomous activities, personal qualities, successes, metacognitive and affective aspects. Notably, all the interviewed participants acknowledged the important role of LA in learning English, emphasizing themselves as decision-making agents in any learning process.

It is clearly seen that the participating students in this study defined LA from the psychological perspective (see more at Benson, 1997; Oxford, 2003). They did not describe LA from the technical perspective which emphasizes physical conditions of the environment and the critical perspective which values power and freedom to control learning. Some of the students mentioned LA from the socio-cultural perspective which highlights social interactions with friends, peers, or even teachers to develop LA. Arguably, during the time at universities or even high schools, students were informed of the self factors that needed attention when entering universities because the teaching and learning methods there were totally different from those at high schools. If the self elements were overlooked or ignored, students would have been left behind. The social interactions with other friends were stimulated thanks to development of social media, group assignments, presentations, and so forth. Therefore, LA was usually defined in a psychological mode and sometimes in a socio-cultural perspective.

Identifying the perspective which implies Vietnamese students' conceptualization of LA is of great importance to understand how they interpreted the concept because the types of perspectives would determine the aims and focus of each program to promote LA. Accordingly, the researchers and educators could formulate ideas, activities, programs, and curriculum that might concentrate on students' certain qualities such as desire and metacognitive capacities. When those qualities are nurtured, their LA develops.

It is apparent that the students' viewpoints of autonomous learners well reflected the definitions of LA as well as their opinions of successful language learners around them in the socio-cultural context of Vietnam. The examples can be people that the students know in real life or people that they get to know from the Internet. The stories about the successful people, each of whom has an outstanding feature such as self-discipline, effective strategies, and high motivation are spread widely on social media. Also, the characteristics of those autonomous learners would be examples for the students to follow and become successful and autonomous.

Undeniably, all participating students stressed the critical importance of LA in contributing to their language learning process's success which was determined by themselves. This point was aligned with A. Le (2018) and V.Q. Nguyen (2019) in the broad context of Vietnam. It seemed that according to the students, the role of LA in language learning was equivalent to that of English nowadays. As a matter of fact, thanks to globalization and internationalization, English has become increasingly popular (A. Phan, 2021) and played a dominant role in Vietnam compared to other foreign languages (T. Le & S. Chen, 2018). It can help students get access to the human beings' knowledge and competences for self-development. English is also one mandatory requirement when students apply for overseas universities especially in the English speaking countries. Moreover, it serves as an added bonus for those who are seeking employment to get a better-paid job in the international labour market. The above-presented points are to name some of the benefits that English may bring about to English language learners in Vietnam where global integration and cooperation are being actively and strongly promoted. Notably, one of the most important essential for successful English language learning is LA (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010), so raising awareness of how significant LA in the current era is totally explicable.

To summarize the students' perceptions of LA, the ways they defined LA, described the autonomous learners, and mentioned the significance of LA were remarkably consistent. Specifically, they tended to put an emphasis on learners' self-discipline, self-activated, and self-regulated factors or the psychological mode of LA. It is implied that understanding the student's perceptions is important because they may help the students reflect on what they have

experienced so far in their language learning process. They also mirror what the students expect and prefer to achieve when they learn English. Therefore, such perceptions could become suggestions for the educators to orientate the syllabus and the pedagogical activities, thereby satisfying the students' expectations and preferences. To illustrate, the interviewees conceptualized LA in mainly the psychological view, so learning strategies, defined as "specific steps or plans people use to enhance their learning", should be employed as ways to achieve LA (Oxford, 2003, p. 84). Those strategies may include goal-setting, planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. They can be taught through strategy instruction and learner training (Chamot, 2014; Q. Le, 2013; Oxford, 2003; Sinclair, 2000a).

Also important is the role of motivation in learning strategy use, which has been empirically investigated (Oxford, 2003). Therefore, the EFL teachers and educators can focus more on training learners with learning strategies and enhancing their level of either internal or external motivation. The training sessions need to refer to the principles of learner training for learner autonomy such as being informed and explicit, diagnostic, interactive, reflective, and contextualized (see more at Hsu, 2005; Q. Le, 2013). Besides, the teachers and educators should raise the students' awareness of other perspectives of LA (see more at Oxford, 2003) and approaches to foster LA (see more at Benson, 2011a) so that the students can get a broader overview of LA, a critical capability that Vietnam wishes to cultivate in higher education (T. Dang, 2012)

## **7.2. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire**

I examined the reliability and validity aspects of the questionnaire, which aimed at investigating non-English-major tertiary students' perceptions of LA in language learning in a sample of Vietnamese students. The questionnaire development started with a critical review of the relevant literature, followed by a careful selection of items and an addition of appropriate items. The literature review enabled me to develop an operational definition of LA in this study. Despite the existence of a variety of definitions of LA, a specific definition would help researchers to clarify exactly what is developed and measured (Macaskill & Taylor, 2010). Autonomous learners in English learning, thus, hold rational beliefs about teacher roles, have both motivation and desire to learn the language, have sufficient metacognitive knowledge along with metacognitive skills, need freedom to take over their language learning and as a result, learn foreign languages effectively and fulfill their needs. Therefore, there were six aspects which made up six initial scales of the questionnaire. They specified beliefs about

teacher role, motivation, metacognition (i.e., metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills), freedom, motivation, and desire.

In terms of validity, five aspects of validity from Messick's (1995) framework were explored. They were content, substantive, structural, external, and consequential. Three of these including content, substantive, and consequential were satisfied and well-explained. The structural aspect of validity at the EFA level using PA was adequately fulfilled, and there was support for the five-factor, 40-item model that underlies the LAPQ. Six factors representing six scales at the beginning turned into five factors. Items under "motivation" and "desire" loaded into only one factor which was named "motivation and desire" in the end. This was in line with previous studies that investigated both motivation and desire as one category (R. Gardner, 1985; Hsu, 2005; Masgoret & R. Gardner, 2003). Indeed, the PA analysis of those five factors yielded some sufficient psychometric quality of the results. However, at the CFA level, the hypothesized model was not truly well-fitted to the data. The absolute fit indices were all good, but the comparative fit indices were close to the cut-off values. The external aspect was demonstrated through the confirmation of convergent and discriminant evidence. Those bodies of evidence were successfully obtained with the support of various values, such as CR, AVE, cross-loadings, and the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

After the validity analyses, the revised 40-item version of the questionnaire demonstrated an excellent level of overall Cronbach's alpha. All the scales had very good CR values as well as average inter-item correlations, good and acceptable values of internal consistency, and rho\_A reliability. The evidence of discriminant and convergent validity as well as the average inter-item correlations contributed to strengthening the theoretical relationships which were positive among the components of LA in a model of structural and functional dynamics (Tassinari, 2012; Tassinari, 2015; Tassinari, 2018).

The present research has several implications for future studies. A specific operational definition offered was twofold. Firstly, I was able to develop the research instrument and validate it throughout the project. Secondly, the definition may serve as a useful reference for further studies on LA because it seemed to cover quite a few aspects of LA. Moreover, as an accurate method in factor analysis, PA which has not been widely used was employed in this study to accommodate retention of components and it is suggested that future studies can use PA more for analyzing factors. The study also contributes to the literature by validating a newly compiled questionnaire to explore LA among university students in a Vietnamese sample. The findings provide the first psychometric or validation evidence for the five-factor, 40-item LAPQ to examine students' perceptions of LA from different aspects in an Asian sample.

Future research should build on the current findings to revalidate the scales for a more psychometrically sound questionnaire and to empirically explore the relationships among the sub-scales constituting the operational definition. Studies should be replicated to find out how it works in other contexts. More importantly, the study also provides researchers, educators, and teachers with a practical survey tool to attain a comprehensive overview of students' LA, which is seen to be a key to success at college and in life (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). Then, they can help their students to raise their own awareness of LA in terms of which beliefs about teacher's role the students should adhere to, how teachers can enhance metacognitive proficiency, how they can give their students more freedom, and how students can develop the motivation and desire to learn languages. In this regard, those English learners will be empowered to learn foreign languages better and then use them better in the future.

There exist some caveats in this study which call for further attention. The first is the proposed model of LA in this study, which did not show sufficient goodness-of-fit. This could be due to a failure to estimate the direct relationships between factors and items that led to model misspecification. Another possible explanation was that the scales should be validated in different contexts with various populations (see more at Teo, 2013). Students with different backgrounds may thus demonstrate differences in their LA perceptions. Moreover, it is widely accepted that responses depend on the target sample (Horwitz, 2008; Park, 2014). The same construct interpretations may vary among different groups, so there is no such thing as an absolutely validated questionnaire survey (Gu, 2018). It is, therefore, highly recommended that the questionnaire validation process be as iterative as possible.

Secondly, although psychometric quality was amply ensured, one scale indicated moderate Cronbach's alpha and rho\_A; thus, some revisions would be needed for future research. Thirdly, I could not take on the generalizability aspect of validity in Messick's (1995) framework of validity because this study recruited participants who are mostly from the northern and central regions of Vietnam. In addition, the universities are all in the north of the country, so those from other parts were not included in this research. The results can only be generalized through more research. Broadening the questionnaire to other populations can help determine the reliability of the tool for other groups (Habók & Magyar, 2018). It is also advisable to formulate and validate new versions of the LAPQ for high school students. This is because they need to be ready for LA at university as a transitional stage, which is a determinant of future academic and socio-economic status (C. Pham & White, 2018). Last but not least, to my best knowledge, there are various aspects of LA from previous studies, but

those researchers only examined some aspects that are relevant to the context. Further studies will involve more explorations of other angles or corners of LA to enrich the literature.

In conclusion, after the revisions, the new version of the questionnaire with 40 items achieved a solid level of reliability, and the majority of aspects of validity were tested in the current study, suggesting that it can be used to investigate students' LA in tertiary language education.

### **7.3. Components of LA defined in this study**

#### **7.3.1. Beliefs about teacher's roles**

The aim of this study was to explore the beliefs about EFL teachers' roles from Vietnamese university students' perspectives. The results show that undergraduates in the Vietnamese sample of this study had a widely-held but not-clear-cut view of their EFL teachers' role and responsibilities. As for the sample in this study, to some extent, gender and previous English marks affected their beliefs about teacher's roles.

The findings showed that the teachers were considered dominant figures in setting the learning objectives and process in the classroom. It was also evident that the sample in this study held more teacher-centred beliefs about teaching roles. Specifically, in the teacher-centered classroom, to be successful, students adapt to and depend on teachers (Fatt, 2000; Kahl Jr. & Venette, 2010) and the instruction as well as management of the learning process is done by teachers (W. Chen & Yu, 2019; Schuh, 2004). In the scale data, the participants scored high on all the aspects surveyed in descending order:

- I need a lot of guidance in my learning English.
- The teachers should choose what materials to use.
- The teachers should explain everything to us.
- The teachers should correct all my mistakes.
- The teachers should set my learning goals.
- The teachers should ensure my progress in learning English.
- The teachers should decide how long to spend on each activity.
- The teachers should decide the objectives of my English courses.

Nearly three-quarters of the participants believed that lots of guidance was vital to their learning, and materials should be selected by the teachers. A high proportion of students strongly agreed that the teachers should explain everything to them and correct all their



mistakes. Also, other aspects revealed substantial levels of *agree* and *strongly agree*. The interview data clearly indicates the participants' wish for teacher's support and guidance. They believe themselves to be guide followers and knowledge absorbers. The interview results contributed to strengthening the results of the quantitative strand. There were a number of indications from the statistics and the thematic data that some of the students are aware of their own learning. However, most of them hold high expectations for their teachers, and assign numerous responsibilities to them such as guide, motivate, facilitate, transmit knowledge and so forth. This echoes the findings of H. Trinh and L. Mai (2018) that students expect teachers to know everything and to manage the class.

The data analysis revealed that during the learning process, the students appeared not to be able to learn English well without much guidance from the teachers, and they seemingly relied on the teachers who would explain everything to them, and provide them with a guide in their English learning. At this point, both the quantitative and qualitative strands show a remarkable consistency in responses. Although to some extent, some students reported a sense of responsibility for learning, the teachers were seen as decision-makers with regards to the materials used during the lessons, and feeders to indicate and correct all their mistakes (Chan et al., 2002). They showed a marked preference for crucial teachers' roles in setting goals and ensuring their English learning progress. Besides this, quite a few students believed that their teachers played an important role in deciding the objectives of the English courses and how long to spend on each activity. However, the number of students who remained neutral in these two issues was considerable. In addition, some students in the interviews found the question of responsibilities difficult for them. This meant that those participants were not entirely sure about the roles of teachers and learners in some aspects.

The findings from this present study are in line with those from previous studies (Abdel Razeq, 2014; Alrabai, 2017; Bekleyen & Selimoğlu, 2016; Bozkurt & Arslan, 2018; Chan, 2001; Chan et al., 2002; Cirocki, Anam, & Retnaningdyah, 2019; Édes, 2009; Dişlen, 2011; Hozayen, 2011; Januin, 2007; Joshi, 2011; Q. Le, 2013; Lin & Reinders, 2019; Mehrin, 2017; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017; Rungwaraphong, 2012; Şenbayrak, Ortaçtepe, & Trimble, 2019; Sönmez, 2016; Üstünlüoğlu, 2009; Vieira & Barbosa, 2009; J. Yao & X. Li, 2017). The commonality is that most participants viewed their EFL teachers as a really important person to their English language education. Those teachers were expected to guide, support, teach the students, and make them better English learners. They should explain the points to the students, select learning materials for classes, correct all their mistakes, set learning goals, guarantee

their students make progress, decide the length of class activities, determine the objectives of courses, motivate their students, and teach what they do not know.

Intriguingly, these results do not support Cotterall's (1995b), Littlewood (2000), V. T. Nguyen's (2011), and Yan's (2007) findings in the way that their participants did not show a heavy reliance on their teachers. They accepted the shared responsibilities with the teachers (Cotterall, 1995b; V. T. Nguyen, 2011), and they had a negative attitude toward the teachers' traditional roles (Yan, 2007). The discrepancies can be explicated by the fact that the participants of the studies themselves came from different backgrounds. Cotterall (1995b) conducted her study on students in an English-speaking country (New Zealand) whose students were supposed to be independent of the teachers. V. T. Nguyen (2011) and Yan (2007) surveyed postgraduate students who no longer appeared to prefer teacher-centeredness. Also, V. T. Nguyen (2011) did not specify the majors and the universities from which the students came.

In general, this study generated a student profile that resembled that of other studies, mostly in Asian contexts (see more at Pratt et al., 1999; Subramaniam, 2008; T. Tran, 2012). These studies propose that Asian students in general and Vietnamese students in particular tend to be oriented to accepting power and authority (Chan et al., 2002; Littlewood, 1999; Loh & Teo, 2017; Zhang, 2015). This point manifests the dimension of power distance by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010). Accordingly, Vietnam got high scores on the Power Distance Index, so there is inequality in the teacher - student relationship, and teachers are the only knowledge source (N. Bui, 2018). They enjoy listening and complying to teachers (K. Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Pham, 2010). This can be explained by the socio-cultural context under the deep influence of Confucianism (Q. Le, 2013; Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006; T. Tran, 2012; N. Truong, Hallinger, & Sanga, 2017).

One of its principal features is "teachers are expected to be at the centre of authority in terms of both knowledge and power; they are expected to be responsible in every aspect of studying and to be decision-makers in almost all academic matters" (N. Bui, 2018, p. 160). Moreover, the participants are non-English-major students who are required to learn English as one component of their degree (Ngo, Spooner-Lane, & Mergler, 2017), so their level of English proficiency is limited in spite of having nearly 10 years of secondary education (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018). Besides, as stated in the contextual background, the students are in large-sized classes, and there is a lack of facilities for learning and teaching, so the main methods are lectures and discussions (see more at W. Chen & Yu, 2019; Hansen & Stephens, 2000; Plessis, 2020). As such, it is understandable that students regard their teachers as pivotal figures in ELT

classes who would help them better their English. Those teachers give the students guidance and explanations for everything, choose the learning materials, correct all the mistakes, and so forth. Therefore, the majority of participants in this study appeared not to be ready for LA (see more at Cotterall, 1995b; Riley, 1997; Rungwaraphong, 2012).

Thanks to westernization and technological advances, the learning modes may be more diverse. For example, in Western countries, different approaches (e.g., student-centered approach) have been taken for a long time (de la Sablonnière, Taylor, & Sadykova, 2009) and exerted influences on such countries like Vietnam (T. Le & S. Chen, 2018; A. Phan, 2021). Moreover, the availability of technological devices may facilitate language education beyond classrooms (Bond & Bedenlier, 2019). Consequently, the views of teachers' dominant role may change, but from the students' viewpoint, the teachers remain an indispensably important role in their learning processes. It is also noteworthy that the teachers' roles now are expected to be counselors, facilitators, and resources (N. Bui, 2018; Fumin & Z. Li, 2012; Mousavi Arfae, 2017; Voller, 2013) to promote LA efficiently and effectively, rather than what students believed including knowledge transmitters who explain everything and rectify students' mistakes.

There was a significant difference between males and females in beliefs about teachers' roles in the whole scale. The mean ranks of the female students were lower than those of the male group. This points out to the fact that male students in this sample were more dependent on the teachers than their female counterparts. This is reasonably consistent with Aldosari (2014), Ehrman & Oxford (1995), and Kobayashi (2002), who contended that female learners tend to take more positive attitudes towards aspects of language learning than males. Moreover, with regard to the socio-cultural context, females tended to make more efforts and be more determined in schooling attainment as a way against discrimination (Vu & Yamada, 2020).

The findings confirm Bozkurt and Arslan's (2018) in Turkey, and Cirocki, Anam, and Retnaningdyah's (2019) in Indonesia that male students depend more on the teachers than female students. The difference was that the researchers conducted their studies on secondary school students. However, they were not aligned with Abdel Razeq (2014) and Üstünlüoğlu (2009), who found no gender difference in beliefs about teachers' roles. The explanation can be that Yan (2007) investigated postgraduate participants, and the other two conducted research on the freshmen who appeared not to be familiar with responsibilities at higher education.

The study sought to identify any differences in beliefs about teachers' roles among different groups of mark achievements. It bears noting that there was a significant statistical difference among the groups of marks. The mean ranks of the groups with higher marks were lower than

those of the groups with lower marks. As a result, the low-achieving students were more likely to report a dependence on teachers than those with higher marks. The participants with lower marks tended to need more guidance and explanations in learning English. They expected the teachers to set their learning goals, ensure their progress, and determine the objectives of English courses more than the high-achieving counterparts. This inference agrees with Musa, Lie, & Azman (2012), who concluded that low achievers are more dependent on the teacher as an authority. Future research is advised to focus more on this prospect for further comparisons.

The present study indicated no significant difference in beliefs about teacher's roles among groups of students in their years of study (from year 1 to year 5). Accordingly, the variable of years of training does not influence how the students believe their roles and their teacher's roles. This point can be explained by the evidence that beliefs regarding teaching and learning such as teacher's responsibilities appeared to be stable (Kramsch, 2003; Mercer, 2011; Zhong, 2015) due to their origin from cultural values. In fact, the learning habit of Vietnamese students was influenced deeply by hierarchy which emphasizes the relationship between the senior ranks (e.g., teachers) and the lower ranks (e.g., students) (T. Truong, 2013); hence, beliefs about teacher's roles seemed unchanged when students were in their later years of study.

This study provides a Vietnamese perspective to the national and international bulk of research on learners' beliefs. Firstly, the beliefs of the subjects in this investigation show a remarkable degree of consistency with many previous studies. Future research needs to extend to other aspects of language learning, other groups of students, and other research sites, so that the findings can be generalised.

Secondly, the results can be used as references for teachers. The teachers should be more friendly when sharing, and understand more about their learners' beliefs so that they may take transferring responsibilities into account when necessary to promote LA. Indeed, if their students' beliefs are not student-centered, they are not ready for autonomous learning. Moreover, teachers need to be well-informed about their roles as facilitators, counselors, and resources in their students' learning process because if teachers keep working as knowledge providers, students themselves will be more likely to stick to teacher-centered beliefs (see more at McCombs & Whistler, 1997; Schuh, 2004).

Thirdly, the stakeholders such as researchers, educators and programme developers may delve into learners' beliefs, thoughts, and needs so that they can adjust the current teaching activities, and design appropriate English learning programmes. It is advisable that from the very beginning of the courses, EFL students should be well aware of the teachers' and their own roles in the learning process. Therefore, the stakeholders should insert training sessions

on roles and LA into the curriculum, which will contribute to the enhancement of LA and student-centeredness.

### **7.3.2. Motivation and desire to learn English**

My aim in this part was to investigate the motivation and desire to learn English among a sample of non-English-major students at seven public universities in Vietnam. The findings provided considerable evidence that the students were highly motivated to learn English. They reported a high level of IM. For example, the students found the English language intriguing. Moreover, the participants demonstrated a really high level of EM. For instance, they were strongly motivated to learn English to improve their academic studies. The students in this study had higher level of EM than IM, which was aligned with the findings in the previous studies (e.g., Bradford, 2007; M. Liu, 2007; H. Ngo et al., 2017; L. Vu & Rochelle, 2015). Arguably, although the students themselves were interested in learning English, they raised awareness of the importance of English to their academic and career paths in the 21st century (see more at Crystal, 2003; Gnutzmann, 2005). According to the interviews, other people inspired them to learn English such as friends, peers, someone on the Internet, teachers, and parents. Interestingly, although many students wanted to pass English examinations, they confirmed that it was not their main motivation. The students also disagreed that they learned English to please their family or to get along with the university requirements, which was consistent with the thematic data.

According to the theoretical background, those non-English majors have two main reasons for learning English: (1) intrinsic motivation, and (2) integrative motivation (see more at Kyriacou & Kobori, 1998). They also express their ideal L2 self (see more at Yashima, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005; Csizer & Kormos, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). Specifically, that ideal L2 self (i.e., aspirations, hopes, and wishes) motivates them to learn English because they find it interesting, they wish to communicate with foreigners, and more notably they believe that it will help them become successful in the future and will aid them in becoming more proficient in English like someone they know (Dörnyei, 2009). Meanwhile, they did not demonstrate the ought-to L2 self (see more at Cho, 2020; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Tseng, Cheng, & Gao, 2020), as they indicated that they learned English not because of expectations, duties, obligations, or avoidance of negative outcomes. Arguably, their demonstration of L2 self was a positive sign because as a powerful motivator, the ideal L2 self reduces the difference between actual and ideal selves (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013).

The results of the present study differ from the preconceptions of previous research in which non-English-major students are not motivated to learn English or they learn English because it is compulsory (T. T. Tran & Baldauf, 2007). The reasons may be due to the students' awareness of the importance of English in the era of the fourth industrial revolution and the integrated learning mode at universities that is different from the traditional language teaching approach (Oxford, D. Lee, Snow, & Scarcella, 1994; Su, 2007). However, the findings are in line with those of previous studies (e.g., Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Bradford, 2007; Chairat, 2015; J. Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005; Köseoğlu, 2013; M. Liu, 2007; M. Liu & Huang, 2011; H. Ngo et al., 2017; Rahman, 2005; Vaezi, 2008; L. Vu & Rochelle, 2015; Warden & Lin, 2000) in which the main motivation among non-English-major students is professional development. Such motivation demonstrated by the students can be explained by the socio-cultural context in which English holds a dominant position (T. Le & S. Chen, 2018; N. Nguyen, 2017), which ultimately fosters cultural exchanges, overseas studies, and good jobs.

Regarding MI, due to the influence of the socio-cultural context in Vietnam aforementioned (see more at T. Le & S. Chen, 2018; A. Phan, 2021), the students in this study were fully aware of the significance of English. Accordingly, the students desired to achieve the following: learn English to make friends with English-speaking people, attend English classes under any circumstances, use English as much as possible, and volunteer for more tasks. It is noteworthy that IM and MI were strongly positively correlated, whereas the relationship between EM and MI was weak (see more at H. Ngo et al., 2017; Noels, 2001). Thus, a higher level of IM would probably lead to an increase in MI.

The statistics indicated significant differences in motivation and desire to learn English according to years of training and marks in the previous English course. Accordingly, the mean ranks tended to decrease when students became more senior, which means the second-year students had the highest mean ranks in motivation and desire. This can be explained by the fact that English is a minor part which belongs to general subjects in their degree, so normally, the second-year students are learning English at university the most, they may be inspired by class activities, and they are more informed of the importance of English. Meanwhile, seemingly, the students in their later years of study are busy with workload of specialized courses, field trips, internships, not to mention the fact that most of them have completed all the English courses at university. Another point to concern is that the stronger motivation and desire, the higher the marks achieved previously. This finding is consistent with that in previous studies (e.g., Binalet & Guerra, 2014; S. Li & Zheng, 2017; Polat, 2011). In fact, when the students

are motivated to learn English and they desire to do so, they tend to make more efforts; as a result, they may achieve good results.

However, there was not a significant difference in motivation and desire score between males and females. Although many studies found out that females are more motivated than males (e.g., Sikhwari, 2014), I would argue that in Vietnam, both male and female students have equal opportunities to learn or use English and succeed in their career. This may be caused by the fact that Vietnam is making progress in diminishing gender inequality in the labour market (International Labour Organization, 2020). Therefore, both males and females felt motivated and desired to learn English without any influences of gender roles. The results regarding the differences call for further studies on the same topics so that generalization can be made.

In this sub-study, there are two limitations worth noting. First, the scales and interviews did not cover many other aspects regarding the motivation and desire to learn English. Thus, future research should broaden the range of aspects and issues, such as motivation or demotivation, so that more high-quality findings can be produced. Second, there are individual variables, such as age, English proficiency, and attitude, which should be taken into account. Hence, future studies should delve into these variables.

Overall, the present study makes two main contributions to the ELT field and to the literature on motivation. First, academically, since it fills the gap in the research on motivation in a Vietnamese context, it can serve as a source of reference on the motivation to learn English in Vietnam. The study brought an insert to the extensive literature on motivation to learn languages from different perspectives. Second, pedagogically, various stakeholders, such as EFL educators, decision-makers, and curriculum developers, can take this study's findings into consideration to understand more about their students in terms of psychological issues and to design appropriate programs that can increase their learning motivation.

Finally, what the stakeholders do actually impacts (either positively or negatively) students' motivation. In other words, English tertiary education must be supported to develop students' motivation and to unlock their potential. For instance, since the students in this study were highly motivated to learn English, EFL educators could make the syllabi less examination-oriented and more flexible to encourage more learning activities. Besides, English tertiary education must shift from linguistic and examination-oriented content to English for career development and communicative purposes (see more at T. Bui, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2018) to promote the two types of motivation among non-English majors.

Moreover, interactions with selected virtual sites and foreigners should be included in language programmes to facilitate authenticity and participation in the language practice community. With technological advancements, many young people all over the world engage with online communities to learn English that are proven to promote self-regulated learning and facilitate effective learning (Lan, M-C. Liu, & Baranwal, 2020). Hence, although participating in such communities have not been widely known and spread, language instructors had better get to know them and involve students in the communities as a way to help enhance their motivation through intercultural experience (see more at N. D. Nguyen, Liwan, & T. Mai, 2020; T. Mai, Wiest, & N. D. Nguyen, 2020). Another implication is that due to potential reasons, the motivation and desire may decrease in the later period of their training (years 4 or 5). The educators should pay attention to this fact, formulate learning communities, and design learning platforms that promote continuous language learning or lifelong learning to help the students keep themselves motivated to learn English and be prepared for their future studies or jobs.

### **7.3.3. Metacognition in language learning**

This study has provided insights into two general constituents of metacognition in English language learning among non-English-major students (i.e., metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills). The former manifests itself in MK about self, language, learning context, and learning process, whereas the latter refers to three important skills, namely planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Both MK and MS perform a crucial role in the achievement of language learners.

MK about self is advantageous for learners, as they “can adjust their own cognition and thinking to be more adaptive to diverse tasks and, thus, facilitate learning” (Pintrich, 2002, p. 222). Arguably, it becomes obvious that students had a clear viewpoint of self because it is no one but themselves who can well understand their strengths and weaknesses. Also, MK about physical, political, social, and cultural learning context is vital (Hsu, 2005; Q. Le, 2013; Sinclair, 2000a, 2000b) in the current context of globalization which necessitates high English language competence. As previously stated, the majority of the non-English majors were well aware of their self and the learning context, whereas there were still a number of students who had insufficient knowledge of these two aspects.

MK about language matters refers to language awareness which can be delineated as reflectivity in, sensitivity to, and ability to explore matters of language/language learning



(Dufva, 1994). This type of MK was believed to develop students' thinking skills, to help them gain insights into and link aspects of language learning (van den Broek, Oolbekkink-Marchand, van Kemenade, Meijer, & Unsworth, 2019), and to increase motivation, as a result of task-based activities to promote student involvement by enhancing the inductive learning of language rules (Carter, 2003). Hence, students should be encouraged to compare and contrast languages (e.g. Vietnamese and English) and given tasks that enable them to analyze the language (Dufva, 1994).

MK about learning process, as I would argue, embodies "how best to approach language learning" (Wenden, 2014, p. 46) with "strategies which are likely to be effective in achieving certain goals and undertaking certain tasks" (Cotterall, 2009, p. 89). In other words, students are advised to gain more and more MK about learning process for increased effectiveness of language learning. Nevertheless, the students' MK about language matters and MK about learning process were not comprehensive enough, as remarked by disagreements with and uncertainty about aspects of these MK.

There is a recognition that metacognitively skilled students will learn better than those without MS (Öz, 2005). MS exerts a positive impact on the development of critical thinking (Magno, 2010). Notably, MS helps students to transfer what they learned from one context to the next, or from a previous task to a new task (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2019). However, non-English-major students lacked MS of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. This skills shortage can be attributed to the lack of MK and the influence of MK on MS (Flavell, 1979; Jacobs & Paris, 1987; Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters, & Afflerbach, 2006; Wenden, 1998; Wenden, 2014).

Quite a few students were uncertain of, had inadequate understanding about, and even did not practice these skills during their learning process. They, despite valuing MS of planning, did not get familiar with it. It has yet to become one part of their learning, whereas goal setting in planning is one of the factors in language learning that determine the extent to which students persist in their efforts to become more proficient (Dörnyei, 2001). Although metacognitive monitoring has a decisive influence on learning (Loizidou & Koutselini, 2007), the students were not skilled enough in monitoring, either. They shared too general information on how they monitor learning, their responses showed remarkable uncertainty, and a number of students did not exercise monitoring. Evaluating is defined as "appraising the products and efficiency of one's learning, such as re-evaluating one's goals and conclusions" (Vrugt & Oort, 2008, p. 126). Good language learners need to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of their learning more than poor learners (Anderson, 2005). The students acknowledged the role of

evaluating; however, apparently, evaluating was not a frequently practiced and familiar skill among them.

The roles of MK and MS are widely recognized. Nonetheless, the non-English-major students lack some aspects of MK and MS. I strongly emphasise the deficiency of MS in planning, monitoring, and evaluating as well as that of MK about language matters, and learning process. These shortages can be explicated by the following reasons. Firstly, students did not have chances to approach the notions of metacognition during their previous educational experiences. English language learning at high schools is described by limited time, inadequate language learning conditions and exam-oriented systems (C. Pham & White, 2018). Students are under pressure from heavy workloads from many subjects and a lot of examinations. Upon entering university, time allocation for English language courses is quite modest and those students have to deal with a totally different environment and workloads from general subjects.

Secondly, teachers of English struggle to cover all the contents required and to develop students' communicative competence, so they, particularly those who are in charge of large-sized classes and many classes simultaneously, cope with considerable pressure (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018). Thirdly, pre-service and in-service teacher training programs are proven not to be adequate (C. V. Le, 2020a; C. V. Le, 2020b; L. T. Q. Mai & T. T. Pham, 2018), so teachers may not familiarize themselves with training metacognitive practices in order to help their students with these useful procedures. I believe that if teachers lacked preparedness in metacognition, there is not much likelihood that they can introduce it to their students.

The statistical tests pointed out significant differences in MK and MS according to three demographic variables (i.e., genders, years of training, and marks in the English course). To be more specific, firstly, male students scored higher in both MS and MK than their female counterparts. One possible reason for this finding is that owing to the deep influence of Confucianism, females are described as more dependent than males and they have more limited choices and resources (T. Vu & T. T. Pham, 2021); as a result, despite the progress in gender equality, males appeared to score higher in some aspects of learning (e.g., metacognition). However, this finding is comparable within this study only. More studies are called for to confirm the finding and reach any generalizations.

Secondly, like the finding in the section of motivation and desire, the later the years of study, the lower the mean ranks of MK and MS. This can be understood based on the fact that English has not been the senior students' concern anymore because most of them have taken all the English courses at universities and apparently they are dealing with other subjects, courses,

and programs upon graduation. Therefore, they do not tend to accumulate MK and practice MS and their existing MK and MS seem to fade away. It is advisable that the educational stakeholders and investors should design and provide metacognition-supporting programs or online platforms to maintain and enhance the level of metacognition among the EFL learners whenever they need.

Thirdly, the students with higher marks in the previous English course had higher scores in MK and MS. This entails that the better the marks, the better MK and MS. As I would argue, metacognition has been recognized as a key part in the language teaching and learning success and good language learners are those who possess a certain level of metacognition (Anderson, 2005; Pawlak, 2018), so it becomes convincing that the students who had more remarkable MK and MS did better and got higher marks.

Another purpose of this study is to offer some recommendations regarding metacognition for the stakeholders in English tertiary education. At macro level, policy makers need to include the hotly discussed topics in ELT such as metacognition or autonomy into teacher training programs on the basis of an eclectic approach, so that pre-service teachers may acquire some basics of these fields and utilize them in future teaching. Also, in-service teachers need more opportunities for PD because “they have to work in isolation with minimum support for PD from the education system” (C. V. Le, 2020b, p. 74). Experts in these topics can be invited to train the teachers via lectures, seminars, practical workshops, or webinars. Besides, “everyone in the learning community needs to speak and do metacognition” (White & Frederiksen, 2005, p. 211), so along with other contents of language elements and language skills, the concept of metacognition should be introduced in the syllabi of English courses subject to informed pedagogical methods and socio-cultural factors. Then, the experts in metacognition will give advice on how to integrate greater metacognition into these syllabi.

At the meso level, universities should technically and financially support teachers’ participation in PD programs regarding metacognitive expertise. Also, higher education institutions can develop research initiatives to investigate metacognition to contribute Vietnamese perspectives to the extensive literature and to enhance metacognitive practices in their contexts. The authorities are encouraged to better learning conditions and to consider reducing the number of students in each class so that teachers can manage classes and promote metacognitive aspects. Additionally, the English course syllabi, especially assessments, should be flexibly revised to provide more space for teachers to harmonize metacognition and development of language skills.

At the micro level, teachers need to be aware of their roles in developing students' metacognition (Anderson, 2005; Dufva, 1994; I. Lee & Mak, 2018; Öz, 2005). Teachers should self-equip and be equipped with proper understandings of metacognition in order that they may apply these theoretical backgrounds into real teaching. One of the classroom practices is learner metacognitive training (see more at Hsu, 2005; Huang, 2005; Huang, 2006b; Q. Le, 2013) because I argue that language education signifies coaching and training more than teaching and learning. Teachers should help students to understand and control the language learning process rather than only focus on language issues learning knowledge for exams. Training and practising MS and MK are considered crucial parts of instructional time (Anderson, 2012; Dhieb-Henia, 2003; Wenden, 1998). These trainings should be conducted on a regular basis and on each learning activity. Teachers can clarify goals, help students plan strategies, try reciprocal teaching in reading, and employ visual materials to facilitate MS (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2019). Several pedagogical choices are suggested to enhance metacognition, including language learning surveys, learning journals, self-evaluated video, the groupwork evaluation form, think aloud protocols, self-assessments (Anderson, 2005), and feedback for reflection (Coutinho, Wiemer-Hastings, Skowronski, & Britt, 2005). The training and the tool utilizations need frequent revisions and reflections to improve the quality of metacognitive expertise.

#### **7.3.4. Freedom**

Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated a high level of consistency in the findings to answer the research questions. To be more specific, more than half of the participants surveyed and most of the interviewees shared that they were permitted to learn English outside class and work with their fellows in class activities. They enjoyed the freedom they had outside class to control their language learning issues. Besides, the data from the surveys and the interviews both indicated the lack of usage of English in class, to a certain extent, caused by diverse levels of English competences. Furthermore, the findings from both strands of data revealed that visiting the teacher for inquiries about their language learning process did not appear to be popular among many students owing to their assumptions and fear.

Regarding activities beyond classrooms, the emerging theme from the interviews showed that there was not a wide range of activities carried out by the interviewed students. The most frequently reported activities were for relaxation including listening to music or watching movies, whereas skill-based activities such as reading and writing were not popular.

Communicating with foreigners to practice speaking skills was preferred by quite a few students. The findings are aligned with that in the previous studies such as Abdel Razeq (2014), Alrabai (2017), and Chan et al. (2002).

The sharings of the students in this part mirror English tertiary education in Vietnam along with Vietnamese cultural features. It is obvious that EFL lessons are organized to provide learners with chances to work with classmates in pairs, teams, discussion, and presentation and learn with authentic materials (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018) because the group work activities are proved to support LA in both research and practice (see more at Palfreyman, 2018). This may be the result of the attention paid to teacher training programs from the policy level (T. Le & S. Chen, 2018). However, language learning among Vietnamese students are mainly restricted to the classrooms (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018), so activities outside classes are not disturbed by teachers and are totally decided by students themselves. Being consistent with LA defined, the autonomy-supportive activities to learn English reported by the students were self-initiated and self-regulated without any interventions, which was known as demonstration of proactive autonomy defined by Littlewood (1999). However, the students did not do many activities outside class to practice English and enhance language proficiency. This may be due to their desire, motivation, preferences, and workload at university. As I would argue, this is both an advantage and a disadvantage.

When it comes to a benefit, students might enjoy the freedom in their learning, as illustrated in the interview excerpts above. This point refers to the political-critical perspective of LA which describes learners as those who can control their learning situation and be free from other people (N. Bui, 2018; Pennycook, 2013). Regarding the disadvantage, students' learning outside classrooms may be disregarded and lack of orientation. This can help explain why there is a deficiency of practical skills and strategies to support communications in English among Vietnamese EFL learners (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018).

In addition, although in English language lessons, English itself was not used much in the classes. The reason for this was explicated by several interviews above and also the fact that levels of language proficiency, especially among non-English-major students in Vietnam were low and uneven (Nguyen, 2018; To, 2010; H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018; B. Truong & Jennifer, 2018), which prevented EFL teachers from speaking English all the times during the lessons. They delivered bilingual lessons with support of Vietnamese native language so that students, particularly weak ones, could follow instructions.

In regard to approaching the teachers to ask about English lessons, the students' viewpoints in this study echo hierarchy or power distance (see more at T. Truong & Hallinger, 2017;

Vasavakul, 2019) and collectivism. The former typifies unequal social relations between teachers and students in the Vietnamese culture (see more at T. Truong & Hallinger, 2017; Vasavakul, 2019). Accordingly, the EFL teachers in this case who have a higher social status should be respected by the students with a lower rank, so the teachers' voices are supposed to precede those of the students (N. Tran, Hallinger, & T. Truong, 2018) instead of students asking first. Vietnam is regarded as a collectivistic community with low scores on individualism index, so people including students tend to prefer harmony and avoid losing face and conflicts (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Understandably, many students in this study, as individuals in a collectivistic society, showed reluctance and uncertainty about seeing and asking their teachers about English lessons and their progress, not to mention suggesting something to their teachers.

The inferential statistics revealed significant differences in the students' perceptions of freedom according to genders and years of training. Accordingly, the score of male students in the sub-scale of freedom was higher than that of female students. It can be explicated by the long-established Confucian beliefs of male dominations in the Vietnamese culture (see more at Grosse, 2015; T. Vu & T. T. Pham, 2021), so it seems that males enjoyed the feeling of freedom investigated in this study more than their female counterparts. However, further considerations should be taken into so that the findings on the same issue can be confirmed. Moreover, the students in the later years of training scored lower than those in their early years of study. It is argued in the same way as in metacognition, motivation, and desire that English has not any longer been a mandatory part and their time is being spent on other businesses such as projects, internships, and field trips.

According to the statistical test, the viewpoints towards freedom were not significantly different among the students with different marks in the previous English course. Understandably, the freedom examined in this study was offered to every student regardless of their achievement. Specifically, the students had equal chances to self-study English with friends and work in groups in class. They could approach their teachers to ask about their studies or suggest something to their teachers. Also, the fact that English is used or not used much in class would be felt the same by students regardless of their marks. Nonetheless, every single quantitative result in the study needs further research to compare and contrast.

There are some implications in this part. Firstly, at the macro level, the policy makers should integrate LA more into the curriculum so that the students will have chances to exercise their LA in classrooms. The curriculum and the syllabus need flexibility; as a result, both the teachers and the students can conduct autonomous learning activities on the basis of three dimensions of control which embody control over learning management through self-

directions and learning strategies; control over cognitive processing through directing attention, reflection, and metacognitive knowledge; and control over learning content concerning what and why of language learning (see more at Benson, 2011a). Although the curriculum is usually prescribed with a set of standards, knowledge, skills, and activities that require the teachers and students to cover, the policy-making stakeholders can give the teachers more political autonomy (i.e., power and freedom) via the adaptable curriculum and syllabus to transfer responsibility and autonomy to their learners. Also, PD programs for both pre-service and in-service teachers are crucial so that they can get familiar with and encourage LA in their own teaching contexts. Besides, the technology-enhanced infrastructure should be upgraded to unlock its potential for growth of LA (V. Q. Nguyen, 2019; Tseng, Liou, & Chu, 2020). Furthermore, there should be methods such as placement tests so that the universities can classify the students based on their real level of proficiency and the teachers can manage their class more professionally and use appropriate amounts of English subject to the students' level of English.

Secondly, at the meso-level, the teachers should raise awareness of providing their students with rights and responsibilities to enhance their LA. The long-established learning habits of the students can be changed positively thanks to the teachers' purposely-designed activities and scaffolding (V. Q. Nguyen, 2019). Moreover, the teachers need to take into account adequate usage of English in classrooms to make it a real language class as a way to engage the students and encourage their LA. The teachers should also be friendly, open, and responsive to criticism (N. Bui, 2018) and they ought to consider the students as co-learners that can support and learn from each other, rather than a hierarchy between a superior rank and an inferior one. They can recommend valuable sources of materials, reliable websites, and high-quality groups to learn as well as use English better to the students.

Thirdly, at the micro-level, the students themselves should be aware of the freedom that they have in the learning process and grasp the opportunities offered to become more autonomous. They should bear in mind that they are in a learning community and along with the extent of respect, they can regard their teachers as warm friends to ask, share with, and discuss learning issues and make suggestions in an open learning atmosphere. It will be a good way to be responsible for their studies. Due to time constraints in class (H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018), the students are advised to be involved in more language learning activities, both receptive and productive, outside classrooms with the support of the teachers and peers if necessary.

#### **7.4. Factors that influence the development of LA**

Both qualitative and quantitative data show remarkable consistency to elucidate the research question concerning which internal and external factors exert influences on LA.

Generally, the students concurred that internally, motivation and desire to learn English had the greatest impact on their LA, whereas language proficiency influenced LA the least. The quantitative results indicated that metacognitive skills and metacognitive knowledge were rated by quite a few respondents and the qualitative findings pointed out objectives in learning and self-regulation. I would argue that metacognitive knowledge and skills (i.e., metacognition) are, to a large extent, relevant to self-regulation and objectives in learning (see more at Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009). In fact, formulating objectives in learning is one of the dimensions of metacognition (Flavell, 1979; Haukås, 2018; Wenden, 1998). Besides, metacognition and self-regulation are not different concepts but they are “subtypes of the same general abstract phenomenon of self-regulated action” and they can be distinguished by “the purpose of engagement” (Kaplan, 2008, p. 483). Therefore, qualitative and quantitative data was in line with each other. Concerning the external factors, the results from both strands of data revealed that from the participants’ viewpoints, three factors that impacted their exercise of LA the most consisted of teachers’ activities, socio-cultural environment where language learning took place, and curriculum. Two types of data also highlighted peers or classmates as influencing factors. On the basis of the students’ evaluation, they believed that the internal factors outweighed the external elements in terms of the influences on the development of LA.

The findings are aligned with the conceptualization of LA in this study. The students put an emphasis on internal factors including motivation, desire, and metacognitive factors (e.g., knowledge, skills, learning objectives, and self-regulation) which were three components of LA in this study. Also, teachers’ activities and peers were reported as external elements. Those internal and external factors reflected the operational definition that LA embodies acting independently and in cooperations with others (Dam, 1995). Motivation was proven to play an important role to LA in the previous studies such as Aoki (2002) and T. Dang (2012) and the relationship between LA and motivation have been discussed in sections 3.1.2.3.2.1 and 3.2.3.1.2, chapter 3. Moreover, the students believed that the curriculum and the environment which, I think, they referred to the society might mediate or constrain their LA. In fact, LA can be nurtured through the curriculum (see more at Benson, 2013; Cotterall, 2000; McCarthy, 2010; Mynard & Stevenson, 2017; Reinders, 2010; Tseng, Liou, & Chu, 2020; Sieglöva & Stejskalova, 2021; Smith & Craig, 2015).



The curriculum-planning principles for LA can include: (1) The course reflects learners' goals in its language, tasks, and strategies; (2) Course tasks are explicitly linked to a simplified model of the language learning process; (3) Course tasks either replicates real-world communicative tasks or provide rehearsal for such tasks; (4) The course incorporates discussion and practice with strategies known to facilitate task performance; (5) The course promotes reflection on learning (Cotterall, 2000, pp. 111–112). The following list of criteria can be used to check whether the learning process following that curriculum is autonomous or not: (1) the syllabus is designed on the basis of topics of interests instead of grammatical mastery; (2) students are not forced to speak but voluntarily; (3) teacher employs different methods to make input comprehensible; (4) students are exposed to various reading materials to choose for self-reading; (5) students should be made to develop intermediates, those who know enough of the language so that they can continue to improve on their own, after the program has ended (Krashen, 2006, p. 3). Moreover, curriculum-based approaches can be referred to foster LA on the basis of negotiation and scaffolding structures (Benson, 2011a). Therefore, it is advisable that the curriculum planners and course developers should integrate the principles and criteria above into the language education curriculum so that the curriculum itself can help to promote LA among students in English classes.

The students' perceptions of the external mediating or limiting factors well demonstrate two layers in Benson's (2012) model including teachers and curricula. It is true that the teachers contribute to constructing students' social and intellectual experiences (Farmer, Lines, & Hamm, 2011). The teachers influence their students through instructions, pedagogical activities, motivation, encouragement, and support in class. LA among students can be developed using teacher-based approaches which emphasize teacher roles, teacher autonomy and teacher education (Benson, 2011a). Therefore, the EFL teachers are advised to be well aware of their roles in students' autonomous learning as facilitators, counsellors, and resources (Voller, 2013). They should also foster LA among students in their classrooms by technically

- helping learners to plan and carry out their independent language learning by means of needs analysis (both learning and language needs), objectives setting (both short- and long-term), work planning, selecting materials, and organizing interactions;
- helping learners to evaluate themselves (assessing initial proficiency, monitoring progress, and peer- and self-assessment);
- helping learners to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to implement the above (by raising their awareness of language and learning, providing learner training to help

them to identify learning styles and appropriate learning strategies) (Voller, 2013, p. 102).

The teachers psycho-socially help their students by paying attention to:

- the personal qualities of the facilitator (being caring, supportive, patient, tolerant, empathic open, and non-judgemental);
- a capacity for motivating learners (encouraging commitment, dispersing uncertainty, helping learners to overcome obstacles, being prepared to enter into a dialogue with learners, avoidings manipulating, objectifying or interfering with, in other words controlling, them);
- an ability to raise learners' awareness (to 'decondition' them from pre-conceptions about learner and teacher roles, to help them perceive the utility of, or necessity for, autonomous learning) (Voller, 2013, p. 102).

They also should take teacher autonomy into consideration (see more at Benson, 2011a, 2011b; Gao, 2018; La Ganza, 2008; T. Lamb, 2008; Little, 1995, 2000, 2004; Raya, T. Lamb, & Vieira, 2007; Wiśniewska, 2007).

Regarding teacher's role to foster LA in language classroom, without teacher autonomy, LA does not likely exist because "it is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if themselves do not know what it is to be an autonomous learner" (Little, 2000, p. 45) so teacher's autonomy-oriented roles are important in fostering LA among students (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2020; Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021; T. Q. Tran & T. M. Duong, 2020). This point is to inform the policy makers of the importance of teacher autonomy and learner autonomy in the teacher education programs so that pre-service teachers can have chances to experience autonomy in activities such as negotiation, taking initiatives, collaboration, self-assessment, reflection, and making choices (see more at Haapaniemi, Venäläinen, Malin, & Palojoki, 2021; Hacker & Barkhuizen, 2008; Little, 2003; Little, Dam, & Legenhausen, 2017; Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011; Reinders & Lewis, 2008; Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020; Vieira, Barbosa, Paiva, & Fernandes, 2008).

More notably, the teachers should support students' LA outside the classroom through some activities such as (1) raising learners' awareness of metacognitive aspects in language learning as illuminated and discussed in this study, (2) supporting them affectively, and (3) giving them guiding information about learning strategies and resources and helping them to check whether those strategies and resources work with them or not (Carson & Mynard, 2012). In the era of the fourth industrial revolution, information technology becomes more and more important in

education (A. Nguyen & Habók, 2021; Selwyn, 2012), so technology can be researched, considered, and then integrated into the educational programs especially in informal contexts to foster LA (Lai, 2019). Several ways to support LA with technology are academic advising, learner training, teachers' contribution, using resources, and designing environment (see more at Lai, 2017; Reinders & Hubbard, 2012; Villanueva, Ruiz-Madrid, & Luzón, 2010; T. N. Vu, Chi, H. Nguyen, T. T. M. Phan, 2022). Hence, the policy makers should pay attention to and organize frequent PD programs such as conferences, webinars, and short training courses concerning LA, teacher autonomy, and technology for in-service EFL lecturers at universities, particularly for non-English-major students who account for the majority of undergraduates in Vietnam and for whom LA and English play important roles in their career path and life.

Besides, this study's results show an alignment with those in some previous studies (e.g., Chan et al., 2002; Huang, 2006b; N. T. Nguyen, 2012) which indicated the role of the socio-cultural environment for LA. It became a barrier for the EFL learners in this study to exercise their LA because they did not have many chances to practice English with foreigners except for international companies and pedestrian zones where tourists gather. Another fact is that there have been more and more English centers across the country and they tend to employ English native teachers whose quality may be questioned. Sometimes those people are tourists or international students without adequate qualifications (T. Le & S. Chen, 2018). Therefore, it is implied that EFL teachers should perform the roles of being a counsellor and a resource who can help their students become autonomous beyond classrooms in such a socio-cultural environment.

If the offline environments to communicate face-to-face with foreigners are unavailable and inconvenient, the alternative good choices may be the virtual ones (see more at Hamilton, 2013). The teachers can refer the students to trustworthy web-pages or partners to help them find appropriate environments and practice English better. One example is the virtual space where students can connect with people from other countries in the world to use English for cultural exchange (N. D. Nguyen, Liwan, & T. Mai, 2020). The policy makers at universities can broaden internationalization to cooperate with foreign partners and have exchange programs so that experts can be hosted and get involved in English language activities with students.

It is noteworthy that a LA-supportive environment can be created on the basis of five criteria concluded by Esch (1996) including: (1) choice, or the provision of genuine alternatives; (2) flexibility by which learners can modify their learning options such as objectives and content based on their needs and interests (see more at I. Lee, 1998); (3) adaptability/modifiability

which refers to the environment's capacity to change to suit learners' plans and strategies; (4) reflectivity/negotiability which addresses the environment's ability to give learners methods of reflection upon their learning experience in a negotiated way using target language; (5) shareability which typifies the environment's ability to enable learners to share their learning experiences such as activities and challenges with others.

One more factor that externally influences LA, according to the students, was their peers. Arguably, being an autonomous learner does not mean learning alone in an isolated environment and exclude peer support because it is important that students communicate, collaborate with, and learn from their peers to develop LA through peer scaffolding in a collaborative environment (Blidi, 2017). The impact of peers can be referred to the concept of tandem learning delineated by Lewis (2005) as an activity that lets "two people who are learning each others' language work together to help one another" (p. 165). The original format was face-to-face meetings (Benson, 2011a); however, thanks to technological advancement, there have been more formats of tandem learning available such as emails, chat systems, audio-conferencing, and video-conferencing (see more at Lewis & Walker, 2003; L. Mai, Wiest, & N. D. Nguyen, 2020; Mullen, Appel, & Shanklin, 2009; N. D. Nguyen, Liwan, & T. Mai, 2020; Ushioda, 2000). This type of learning has been proven to be effective due to its three principles of LA, reciprocity, and bilingualism (Little, 2001; Schwienhorst, 2003). Therefore, the educational stakeholders should use their network and introduce groups of different EFL learners to promote collaboration and tandem learning in both offline and online environments.

From the perspectives of some participants interviewed, parents contributed to their development of LA in both positive and negative ways through encouragement and pressure. This point shows a consistency with the conclusions in the previous studies such as Delos Reyes & Torio (2021), Kemala (2016), Lai (2017), Ng, Kenney-Benson, & Pomerantz (2004), and Pierson (1996) that along with peers, parents were reported as a factor that potentially influenced students' autonomous learning. The recommendation is that the educators should take into account the complex social network with actors such as teachers, students, and parents, which impacts students' thoughts, and choices (Sade, 2014). This would help the educators provide the parents with pieces of practical advice regarding their children's language learning process. Besides, it can be assumed that the parents should provide their children with affordances to learn English and develop autonomous learning by encouraging them, giving them more choices in life, and financially supporting their studies.

Another notable point is that the participants did not mention the washback effect of exam-oriented programs on their LA, which is quite different from the conclusions of some other

studies (e.g., Benson, 2000; Benson, 2012; Nakata, 2011; Q. Le, 2013; Micallef, 2016; N. T. Nguyen, 2014; H. Tran, 2019). Arguably, it is the students' awareness of definitions of LA and importance of LA that did not draw their attention to the effect of examination. As they shared in the interviews and surveys, they did not learn English under any pressure of tests and exams. It can be seen that although education in general and language tertiary education in particular in Vietnam is deemed testing-oriented (EU-Vietnam Business Network, 2018; H. Trinh & L. Mai, 2018), the participating students in this study identified their language learning process as independent from that washback effect. The process was majorly determined by their self factors. It can be implied that the self factors should be promoted to limit other constraining factors.

When it comes to the question which has an impact on their LA more, external or internal factors, the students in this study appreciated the internal elements more highly than the external ones. This concluding remark is consistent with their definition of LA mainly from the psychological perspective which values personal qualities or factors of "self". Therefore, this study suggests that the policy makers should be aware of the students' perceptions and evaluations to have proper understanding of what really influences the students' development of LA. Such understanding would enable the educators to make decisions on rational approaches to cultivate LA among their students. In this case, I would argue that the learner-based approaches which aim for learner development and training of knowledge and skills should be mainly employed, whereas the other approaches based on teacher, technology, resource, classroom, and curriculum cannot be overlooked. In fact, the main approach and the other combined approaches need considerations subject to the context in which students are learning English.

## **7.5. Chapter summary**

The chapter has so far revisited and discussed the findings of two data strands when they were mixed to answer the research questions relating to the students' perceptions of LA and the affecting factors. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data indicated a high level of consistency. Besides, the quantitative strand provided evidence of reliability and validity of the survey questionnaire and differences in the perceptions of LA among groups, whereas the qualitative strand pointed out the descriptions of LA in terms of its definition, its significance, and autonomous learners. The chapter also brought about quite a few implications for the

stakeholders at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels to enhance the students' LA on the basis of its components.

Exploring the reliability and validity of the LAPQ was accommodated by CR, rho\_A reliability index, Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , inter-item correlation, and the Messick's (1995) framework of validity. The questionnaire, after the validation process, has reliable 40 items and valid data to elucidate the research questions quantitatively.

LA, in the participants' viewpoints, was a construct associated with the self factors (e.g., self-discipline and self-regulation), motivation, desire, and metacognition. Their understandings of LA and autonomous learners conformed to the psychological perspective of LA indicated by Benson (1997) and Oxford (2003) and the proactive sense of LA outlined by Littlewood (1999). Those understandings are aligned with the conceptualization of LA in this study which emphasized LA's components. The teacher's role was to support and guide their learning in class.

Concerning the students' beliefs about teacher's roles, although many of the students in the sample were aware of their responsibility for the success of the language learning process, they tended to be into "assigning" the responsibilities in some stages of the learning process to their teacher to help and provide guidance. In general, the students did not appear to be too passive learners as assumed previously but they still considered their teacher indispensable roles.

Regarding motivation and desire to learn English, the students were motivated both internally and externally to learn English. Their motivation can be observed by the desire or motivational intensity and internal motivation likely leads to stronger desire. Arguably, the demonstration of that motivation and desire reflects the increasing popularity of English as well as the current demand for high-quality labour force with language proficiency for international cooperation.

In terms of metacognition, two types of MK about the self and the learning context appeared to be considerable enough among the participants. However, the students appeared to lack MK about language matters and learning process and MS planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Such a deficiency may be the result of inadequate training and information. This requires attention from the educational stakeholders.

The students agreed that they enjoyed freedom to work and use English with classmates outside classrooms and in teamwork sessions; however, they seemed to prefer more usage of English in class because they did not have many opportunities to communicate in English outside class and the main out-of-class activities were inclined to be receptive. Meeting and

sharing with the teachers were not favourite activities; as a result, both the teachers and the students needed to understand and change the roles to student-centeredness.

It is worth attention that the students indicated motivation, desire, metacognitive dimensions as the most influencing internal factors although as an internal factor, language proficiency affected LA but not that much. Teachers' work, curriculum, socio-cultural environment, and peers served as the most influential external elements.

The quantitative findings indicated that the perceptions of LA regarding its aspects determined in this study differed significantly in genders, years of study, and previous marks in the English course. However, no differences were found in MK and freedom according to the marks.

All the findings above provided a comprehensive overview of the students' perceptions of LA revealing that the students raised awareness of and had positive views towards LA. They had a sense of responsibility in their learning process, but preferred responsibilities from their teacher. They showed internal and external motivations as well as motivational intensity or desire to learn English. Also, they were probably proficient in MK about the self and the learning context. Besides, the students carried out some autonomous learning activities outside classrooms. The points aforementioned were positive signs of the students' LA that needed more encouragement and enhancement. However, the students still regarded their teacher as an essential part in the learning stages. They lacked MS and MK about the language matters and the learning process. Approaching their teacher for learning matters and offering suggestions to their teacher were not familiar to them. All the negative elements mentioned might stem from the deeply-rooted learning route that the students have been familiar with so far and from the fact that they did not accumulate, were not informed of, and got enough training in knowledge and skills to be confidently take charge of their learning. Therefore, those points required much more attention and actions from the stakeholders.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

*This final chapter aims to summarize the research aims and key findings. It also discusses the limitations as well as the contributions of the research project before it recommends the prospects of further studies. Finally, the chapter ends with some concluding remarks.*

### 8.1. Research aims

The primary aims of this research were to investigate the perceptions of LA among non-English-major students and to explore the factors that influence the development of LA from the students' perspective. The two main research questions included: (1) *What are the non-English-major students' perceptions of LA?*; (2) *What are the factors that influence students' LA?*". These two questions were addressed through the main objectives as following: (1) provide a conceptualization of LA used in this study with its components; (2) investigate non-English-major students' understandings of LA and of its manifestation in the components above mentioned; (3) explore the students' viewpoints of the enabling or limiting factors towards their LA; (4) offer responsible implications for fostering LA in the context of English language tertiary education in Vietnam.

### 8.2. Research findings

The following main findings were accomplished from the research project:

1. LA was conceptualized as a complex construct with components including beliefs about teacher's roles, motivation, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive skills, desire to learn English, and freedom. After LA was theoretically defined, it was tested empirically and the aspects of LA consisted of beliefs about teacher's role, motivation and desire to learn English, metacognition in language learning, and freedom. The understanding reflected mainly the psychological perspective of LA.

2. The questionnaire used to investigate the students' perceptions of LA in terms of some aspects aforementioned demonstrated an excellent level of reliability and a high level of validity. This means it is a good questionnaire to examine LA.

3. From the interviewed students' perspective, LA was defined in a proactivity and associated with the self factors (e.g., self-discipline, self-reliance, and self-regulation). Some other relevant aspects included desire, motivation, and metacognition. This finding was consistent with the previous one. Autonomous learners had some typical features revealed in



autonomous activities, personal traits, metacognitive and affective dimensions, and achievement. Furthermore, LA played an important role in the English learning process.

4. In terms of beliefs about teacher's roles, although to some extent, the students were aware of their responsibilities, they still regarded their teachers as a really significant figure in their learning process and held more teacher-centered beliefs about roles. Though they did not totally rely on their teachers, the students expected a lot from their teachers to guide and help them and preferred shared responsibilities with teachers in many aspects of learning. There was a significant difference in beliefs about roles among groups of students with different marks in the previous English course. The higher the marks were, the less likely the students reported a dependence on their teachers. Besides, the beliefs about teacher's roles in some elements were significantly different between males and females in that male students appeared to be dependent on their teachers more than the female counterparts. Those statistical results call for further studies so that they can be generalized.

5. With regard to motivation and desire to learn English, the students showed high levels of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The former represented their interests in language and language learning and their motivation to communicate with international friends, and to enjoy themselves. Meanwhile, extrinsically, the students were motivated to be successful in their studies and career, and by other people such as parents, peers, friends, teachers, and famous figures. Furthermore, the students had a strong desire or motivational intensity to learn English in any cases, make friends with those who can speak English, use English as much as possible, and voluntarily do more tasks. In addition, there was a strong relationship between desire and intrinsic motivation and a weak relationship between desire and extrinsic motivation.

6. When it comes to metacognition in language learning, the students were well aware of their self including strengths and weaknesses and the context, which means they had adequate MK about self and context. However, they lacked MK about language matters and learning process. The students also appeared to lack MS of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. The findings, therefore, suggested that the students need to pay more attention to dimensions of metacognition that they were not proficient enough at.

7. Turning to freedom, the students enjoyed the freedom to learn English beyond classrooms and group-work with classmates. There was an insufficient usage of English in classrooms due to different levels of proficiency. Meeting the teachers to talk about English learning issues and making suggestions to the teachers were not predominant among the students. The most popular out-of-class activities were for recreation (i.e., listening to music and watching films

on the Internet) and the other activities concerning English language skills were not frequently practiced.

8. The students believed that there were certain factors that might mediate or limit the development of their LA. The internal factors consisted of desire, motivation, metacognition to learn English effectively and language competence was one of those factors but did not exert a great influence on their LA. Meanwhile, the external elements comprised the teacher's work, the environment, the curriculum, and the peers. From the students' perspective, the internal factors had a greater impact on their LA than the external ones.

9. The study also indicated a significant difference in beliefs about teacher's roles, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive skills, and freedom between males and females. There was a difference in beliefs about teacher's roles, metacognitive skills, motivation, and desire to learn English among the students with different grades in the previous English course. All the components of LA characterized in this study saw a difference among the groups of students in different years of study.

10. On the basis of the findings, the profound implications for the relevant educational stakeholders were discussed so that LA can be better fostered among the non-English-major students.

### **8.3. Limitations**

It is true that the limitations are ineluctable in every single study. Although in the previous part of interpretations and discussions I considered several limitations, there are some general limitations of the whole project.

Firstly, the study was limited to the non-English-major students at public higher education institutions in Vietnam. It did not include students from other types of universities such as private universities or international universities in Vietnam. Besides, the participants came from different parts of the country, which means their socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds really varied. As a result, the findings from the students' responses and the reliability and validity of the questionnaire are only compared and contrasted within this study itself. It is necessary to have future studies that investigate LA among students from different groups to provide a more comprehensive overview of LA perceived and performed in the context of Vietnamese higher education.

Secondly, the study did not consider many other variables that may have relationships with and affect LA such as demographic information, anxiety, and language proficiency. Such a

complex construct as LA should be explored in the dynamics with other variables. However, the study only focused on what LA meant to the students and which factors influenced LA. Hence, further studies are suggested to examine the relationships between LA and the associated variables.

Thirdly, the items in the questionnaire and the interview questions in the study were adapted and developed from the contexts other than Vietnam, although I made efforts to develop the questionnaire systematically and ensure reliability as well as validity so that the items and questions became more relevant with the participants in this study. Thus, it is recommended that the other researchers can formulate, develop, and pilot the items and questions raised from the context of Vietnam.

Fourthly, translation of the term “learner autonomy” from English into Vietnamese became a limitation of this study. Specifically, it is difficult to find an equivalent term with LA in the Vietnamese language and it really depends on each researcher’s understanding of the term. LA may be *sự tự chủ* which emphasizes the situation or *tính tự chủ* which highlights the personality and characteristics (N. T. Nguyen, 2014). I decided to employ *tính tự chủ* as it is commonly used in the legislative documents (H. Phan & Hamid, 2017) and it hopefully enabled the participants to get familiar with the term. The word *tự* in the Vietnamese language means “by one’s self” (N. T. Nguyen, 2014; H. Tran, 2019), so in my opinion, it helped to explain why the interviewees described LA with some self elements such as self-discipline, self-regulation, and self-reliance. This point is in line with the limitation that H. Tran (2019) indicated.

Finally, one limitation came from the interviewees. In fact, the participants interviewed came from different institutions, which represented diversity. However, the number of students interviewed was limited due to the low response rate to my invitations. I sent invitations to many students but a small percentage replied and only some of them agreed to participate in the interview.

## **8.4. Contributions**

Despite the above-presented limitations, the study made some contributions theoretically and methodologically.

### **8.4.1. Theoretical contributions**

The study conceptualized LA that was relevant to the Vietnamese sample from a definition adapted from another context. The definition was analyzed on the basis of the literature so that

the components of LA were understood. Finally, LA in this study was structured by some parts namely beliefs about teacher's role, motivation and desire, metacognition, and freedom. These concepts are not uncommon in the field of language education, but to the best of my knowledge, this study is the first one to clarify the components which LA manifests itself in and to test them empirically. Then each component was investigated separately so that the overview could get more details. Therefore, the conceptualization of LA in this project would be useful for references to gain better understandings of a multifaceted construct and nurture it better among language learners.

The research findings revealed differences in the components of LA among different groups of participants (i.e., genders, years of study, and marks in the previous English course). Those points provided an insert to the literature on exploring the relationship between LA and some demographic variables.

The research project also contributed to the literature on potentially mediating factors and barriers that might influence the performance of LA from the perspective of learners. The students' viewpoints towards those factors would allow the stakeholders at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels to better understand how LA works and is exercised in the specific context of higher education in Vietnam.

The study is one of few studies that focus on non-English-major students who account for a large proportion in the population of undergraduates in Vietnam. Those students will become a major part of the labour market in the future, so their voices should be listened to. Therefore, understanding their perceptions of LA in its aspects and the influencing factors would help inform the society, the universities, and the families of the directions for better development of LA as an essential to succeed in language learning. It is also a way to enhance the quality of the future labour force.

#### **8.4.2. Methodological contributions**

The number of studies on LA is still limited in Vietnam. The questionnaire adapted, constructed, and developed in this study hopefully becomes a useful source of reference for other research on the same topic in the Vietnamese context. The questionnaire used in this study along with that in T. Dang (2012) may be compared, contrasted, and further employed in the studies which share the research contexts with similar socio-economic and socio-cultural features. Having the same idea with T. Dang (2012), I argue that the items can be applied in

other disciplines other than English language education such as Mathematics and Psychology so that autonomous learning behaviors can be explored in the same approach.

The second contribution in terms of methodology pertains to the application of mixed-methods approach to acquire a deeper understanding of the research problem (J. Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). As presented in the theoretical part (Chapter 3), LA represents itself in levels, constructs, and perspectives and it is understood differently by different people in different contexts (T. Dang, 2012). Therefore, to enhance the quality of the data and improve the validity of the findings, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously and analyzed them separately before making any interpretations. Two types of data demonstrated remarkable consistency, which enabled me to answer the research questions. Some emerging themes in the interviews provided me with insights into the students' understandings of LA in some components and the affecting elements on their LA. Therefore, the mixed-methods approach with convergent parallel design and questionnaires and interviews as instruments can become a good reference for other studies.

### **8.5. Directions for future studies**

Due to the importance of LA especially in the current situation of COVID 19 pandemic which prevents teachers and students from going to schools and having offline lessons, there is a need for more studies in the context of Vietnam. The future studies can focus on the following directions.

1. This study aimed to investigate the students' perceptions of LA only, so future research can explore the ways LA is performed and the relationship between the perceptions and the performances of LA. The LA performance can be investigated used observations and interviews, as suggested by H. Tran (2019).

2. Because this study's participants were merely non-English-majors, further investigations should consider the perceptions of LA among English-major students and compare and contrast with those among non-English-major students to reflect on the differences and suggest ways to foster LA for both groups that teachers can use.

3. The future studies need to investigate the relationships between LA and other factors that are believed to affect LA in the international literature such as academic achievement (e.g., Ozer & Yukselir, 2021), anxiety (e.g., H. Liu, 2012), and self-efficacy (e.g., H. Chen, 2015). The more relationships found, the more factors influencing LA, and the easier to foster LA based on those factors.

4. More studies are needed to examine how technology can support or constrain LA in the situation of COVID 19 pandemic which boosts the use of technology for online learning all over the world.

## **8.6. Concluding remarks**

This research project investigated the perceptions of LA in the context of EFL tertiary education in Vietnam as well as the factors that may facilitate or hinder the development of LA among non-English-major students. The conceptualization of LA is consistently both theoretically from the literature and empirically. LA defined in this study consisted of four related facets including beliefs about teacher's role, motivation and desire to learn English, metacognition in language learning, and freedom. In general, the participating students described proactive autonomy and showed the positivity to LA; however, as they perceived, they appeared to lack LA in several ways.

The students demonstrated high levels of motivation and desire to learn English and sound metacognitive knowledge about the self and the learning context. Still, they believed that the teachers were really of importance to their learning process and they held high expectations for their teachers. Besides, there was a lack of metacognitive skills (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating) and metacognitive knowledge about language matters and learning process. Moreover, communicating with the teachers with regard to learning issues was not undertaken as it should be. The out-of-class activities were not frequently engaged in, except for two entertaining activities.

Their exercise of LA, from their perspective, was affected by two types of factors, namely internal (e.g., desire, motivation, metacognition, and language proficiency) and external (e.g., teacher's activities, social environment, curriculum, and peers). The former was believed to exert a greater influence on LA than the latter. On the basis of the students' understandings of LA and the LA-influencing factors, the study offered fundamental implications about how to cultivate the students' LA, which is considered an important capacity to promote in tertiary education, both inside and outside classrooms, as one way to nurture lifelong learning (Dam, 2012; Yurdakul, 2017). Therefore, the involvement of many different stakeholders in the educational system is really necessary.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Information sheets

#### Appendix A1: Information sheet for student participants



UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

#### INFORMATION SHEET OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

**Title:** *Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*

**Researcher:** Nguyen Van Son

**Supervisor:** Dr. Anita Habók

**Course:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Reference Number:** 12/2019

The study entitled “*Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*” is carried out by Mr. Nguyen Van Son during his PhD studies, under the supervision of Dr. Anita Habók, Institute of Education, University of Szeged, Hungary. This research is funded by the Tempus Public Foundation under the grant of the Stipendium Hungaricum program during the period of 2018 – 2022. It aims at investigating the perceptions of non-English major students of learner autonomy in language learning and exploring the factors that influence their learner autonomy.

This study will help students reflect on their perceptions of learner autonomy, and mediating factors as well as constraints on their learner autonomy. Therefore, they have the chance to raise awareness of learner autonomy and influencing factors, which hopefully brings about more effectiveness to their English learning process, and thereby, contributing to their future success in the era of globalization.

Participation in the project will involve responding to a questionnaire. The

questionnaire items ask the participants to rate on the statements about their perceptions of learner autonomy and choose from the list which factors may impact their learner autonomy. The questionnaire is written in Vietnamese and can be completed in 20-30 minutes during class time. The researcher will be present in the class to answer all the questions or concerns that the participants may have. Besides, some of the participants will be randomly selected for individual semi-structured interviews with the researcher. This can be 20-30 minutes long, out of class time and in the school campus. The interviewees will be asked about what learner autonomy means to them and which factors promote or hinder their learner autonomy.

The questionnaire data will be quantitatively analyzed. The interview data will be transcribed and be translated into English by the researcher. Only the researcher and his supervisor will get access to the data. The participants' personal information will be kept confidential, and the data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the university and a computer file with a password. The results of the research will be published in a dissertation and in journal articles or presented at conferences. However, at no time will participants' identity be revealed. The results of the study and personal data during the research period will be available to the participants on request.

Participation in the study is totally voluntary and every participant may withdraw from the research at any time during the data collection period. If the questions/statements make participants feel uncomfortable, they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer such questions/statements. They also have the right to request that data from their participation are not used in the research project, provided that this right is exercised within four weeks of the completion of the data collection period. If they wish to withdraw from the research, they are asked to complete the "Consent Form Withdrawal" or to inform the researcher by e-mail or telephone that they wish to withdraw their consent for their data to be used in this research. There are no disadvantages, consequences, or inconveniences for not participating or for withdrawing from the research.

Any questions related to this project may come to the researcher, Mr. Nguyen Van Son, email address: [nvson@tlu.edu.vn](mailto:nvson@tlu.edu.vn) or telephone: (+36) 204879299, or Dr. Anita Habók, Assistant Professor, Institute of Education, University of Szeged, email address: [habok@edpsy.u-szeged.hu](mailto:habok@edpsy.u-szeged.hu).

If the participants have any complaints or queries related to the research that the researcher cannot answer to their satisfaction, they may contact the Institutional Review Board, Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged, e-mail: [fuzne.piko.bettina@med.u-szeged.hu](mailto:fuzne.piko.bettina@med.u-szeged.hu).



In order to participate in this study, participants are kindly asked to complete a signed consent form and return to the researcher.

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

## Appendix A2: Information sheet for university participants



UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

### INFORMATION SHEET OF UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANTS

**Title:** *Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*

**Researcher:** Nguyen Van Son

**Supervisor:** Dr. Anita Habók

**Course:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Reference Number:** 12/2019

The study entitled “Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students’ perceptions” is carried out by Mr. Nguyen Van Son during his PhD studies, under the supervision of Dr. Anita Habók, Institute of Education, University of Szeged, Hungary. This research is funded by the Tempus Public Foundation under the grant of the Stipendium Hungaricum program during the period of 2018 – 2022. It aims at investigating the perceptions of non-English major students of learner autonomy in language learning and exploring the factors that influence their learner autonomy.

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time. The researcher will be present in the class to answer all the questions or concerns that the participants may have. Besides, some of the participants will be randomly selected for individual semi-structured interviews with the researcher. This can be 20-30 minutes long, out of class time and in the school campus. The interviewees will be asked about what learner autonomy means to them and which factors promote or hinder their learner autonomy.

The questionnaire data will be quantitatively analyzed. The interview data will be transcribed and be translated into English by the researcher. Only the researcher and his supervisor will get access to the data. The participants' personal information will be kept confidential, and the data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the university and a computer file with a password. The results of the research will be published in a dissertation and in journal articles or presented at conferences. However, at no time will participants' identity be revealed. The results of the study and personal data during the research period will be available to the participants on request.

Participation in the study is totally voluntary and every participant may withdraw from the research at any time during the data collection period. If the questions/statements make participants feel uncomfortable, they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer such questions/statements. They also have the right to request that data from their participation are not used in the research project, provided that this right is exercised within four weeks of the completion of the data collection period. If they wish to withdraw from the research, they are asked to complete the "Consent Form Withdrawal" or to inform the researcher by e-mail or telephone that they wish to withdraw their consent for their data to be used in this research. There are no disadvantages, consequences, or inconveniences for not participating or for withdrawing from the research.

Any questions related to this project may come to the researcher, Mr. Nguyen Van Son, email address: [nvson@tlu.edu.vn](mailto:nvson@tlu.edu.vn) or telephone: (+36) 204879299, or Dr. Anita Habók, Assistant Professor, Institute of Education, University of Szeged, email address: [habok@edpsy.u-szeged.hu](mailto:habok@edpsy.u-szeged.hu).

If the participants have any complaints or queries related to the research that the researcher cannot answer to their satisfaction, they may contact the Institutional Review Board, Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged, e-mail: [fuzne.piko.bettina@med.u-szeged.hu](mailto:fuzne.piko.bettina@med.u-szeged.hu).

In order to participate in this study, the university is kindly asked to write a letter to the researcher, announcing that the university would like to take part in the research and allow him to get access to the university for data collection. Thank you very much for your cooperation!

## **Appendix B: Invitation letters**

### **Appendix B1: Invitation letters for student participants**



**UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED**

#### **INVITATION LETTER TO STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

**Title:** *Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*

**Researcher:** Nguyen Van Son

**Supervisor:** Dr. Anita Habók

**Course:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Reference Number:** 12/2019

Dear Students,

My name is Nguyen Van Son, a lecturer of English in Vietnam. I am currently doing a research entitled "*Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*" for my Ph.D degree, under the supervision of Dr. Anita Habók, Institute of Education, University of Szeged, Hungary. This research is funded by the Tempus Public Foundation under the grant of the Stipendium Hungaricum program during the period of 2018 – 2022. It aims at investigating the perceptions of non-English major students of learner autonomy in language learning and exploring the factors that influence their learner autonomy.

In my project, there is a part of data collection from non-English major students. It includes a questionnaire, asking about students' perception of learner autonomy and factors influencing their learner autonomy in their English learning activities. Another other kind of data involves an individual semi-structured interview with me, talking about what learner autonomy means and which factors mediate/constrain learner autonomy. Should you be concerned about the research, please see the attached information sheet.

If you are a non-English-major student completing at least one English course at university and would like to participate in the project, please kindly inform me and you will be

invited. Participation in this research is totally voluntary and every participant may withdraw from the project at any time during the data collection period. There are no disadvantages, consequences, or inconveniences for not participating or for withdrawing from the research.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Nguyen Van Son

PhD Student

Doctoral of Education, University of Szeged

Email: nvson@tlu.edu.vn

Phone: (+36) 20 487 9299

## Appendix B2: Invitation letters for university participants



UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

### INVITATION LETTER TO UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANTS

**Title:** *Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*

**Researcher:** Nguyen Van Son

**Supervisor:** Dr. Anita Habók

**Course:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Reference Number:** 12/2019

Dear Thuyloi University,

My name is Nguyen Van Son, a lecturer of English in Vietnam. I am currently doing a research entitled "*Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*" for my Ph.D degree, under the supervision of Dr. Anita Habók, Institute of Education, University of Szeged, Hungary. This research is funded by the Tempus Public Foundation under the grant of the Stipendium Hungaricum program during the period of 2018 – 2022. It aims at investigating the perceptions of non-English major students of learner autonomy in language learning and exploring the factors that influence their learner autonomy.

In my project, there is a part of data collection from non-English major students. It includes a questionnaire, asking about students' perception of learner autonomy and factors influencing their learner autonomy in their English learning activities. Another other kind of data involves an individual semi-structured interview with me, talking about what learner autonomy means and which factors mediate/constrain learner autonomy.

Therefore, I am writing to request for your permission so that I can come to your university and invite students to participate in the project. If you accept my request, please send me a letter, announcing that I can get access to working with your students to collect data for my project.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Nguyen Van Son

PhD Student

Doctoral of Education, University of Szeged

Email: [nvson@tlu.edu.vn](mailto:nvson@tlu.edu.vn)

Phone: (+36) 20 487 9299

## Appendix C: Student consent form



### UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

**Title:** *Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*

**Researcher:** Nguyen Van Son

**Supervisor:** Dr. Anita Habók

**Course:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Reference Number:** 12/2019

I, ....., have read carefully and clearly understood the information sheet provided by the researcher regarding this research activity, and any of my queries have been answered to my satisfaction.

1. I agree to answer the questionnaires.
2. I agree to interviews being audio-recorded (if I participate in the interview).
3. I agree that the research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers provided that my name is not used, and that I cannot be identified in any other way.
4. I agree to participate in the project, understanding that I may withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection procedure and may request that no data from my participation are used, up to four weeks following the completion of my participation in the research.
5. A copy of the information sheet for this project and this form has been provided to me to keep.



Name of Participant ..... Email.....

Signature ..... Date.....

Name of researcher .....

Signature ..... Date.....

Name of supervisor.....

Signature ..... Date.....

## Appendix D: Students' withdrawal consent form



UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

### STUDENT'S WITHDRAWAL CONSENT FORM

**Title:** *Learner autonomy in English language learning and factors influencing learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam: Non-English-major students' perceptions*

**Researcher:** Nguyen Van Son

**Supervisor:** Dr. Anita Habók

**Course:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Reference Number:** 12/2019

I, ....., would like to withdraw my consent to the use of data from my participation in the research. Data from my participation must not be used in this research as described in the Information Sheet and Consent Form. I am aware that data from my participation will be destroyed provided that this request is received within four weeks of the completion of my participation in this project. I also understand that this notification will be retained together with my consent form as evidence of the withdrawal of my consent to use the data I have provided specifically for this study.

Name of Participant ..... Email.....

Signature ..... Date.....

Name of researcher .....

Signature ..... Date.....

Name of supervisor.....

Signature ..... Date.....

## Appendix E: The survey questionnaire

### Learner Autonomy Perception Questionnaire

The following statements are aimed at investigating your perception of learner autonomy. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements about your English learning by *circling the number that matches your opinion*. **Number 0 is an example.**

1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4=Agree; 5= Strongly agree

| No . | STATEMENTS  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|------|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 0    | I like using Facebook to chat with my friends.  | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | ⑤              |
| 1    | The teachers should explain everything to us.   | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 2    | I learn English because it will help me to get a good job.  | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 3    | When it comes to any English tasks, I work very carefully to make sure I understand everything.                                     | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 4    | If I have any opportunities to use English outside class, I'll use it most of the time and some Vietnamese, if necessary.           | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 5    | I have my own opinions about learning English and can defend them.  | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 6    | The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.   | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 7    | People in Vietnam who can speak English well have a better social status (e.g. they make more money, they are more educated, etc.). | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 8    | I'm determined to achieve the target I've set for my English learning.  | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 9    | I change my learning content and target according to my needs.  | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 10   | I think about the methods I use to learn English and whether they are good.   | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 11   | The teachers should decide the objectives of my English courses.  | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 12   | I learn English because I want to pass exams.   | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 13   | I use my learning style effectively.  | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 14   | The teachers should evaluate my learning.   | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| 15   | I try to listen to English regularly (songs, radio, TV, YouTube, Facebook, etc.).   | 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |

|    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | I have chances to work with my classmates in activities in English class.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17 | I check my English proficiency by taking English tests voluntarily.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18 | Before doing any English tasks, I think about the knowledge I have of the topics involved.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19 | I make good use of materials and resources when studying English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20 | To learn English well, it's important to know one's personality, motivation, personal needs, expectations, learning styles, strengths, weaknesses, etc., in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21 | I try using other methods if one method of learning English doesn't suit me.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22 | The teachers should ensure my progress in learning English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23 | I learn English so that I can communicate with English speakers.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24 | If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra English assignment, I'd definitely volunteer.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25 | It's important to understand every word when you read an English text.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26 | There are a lot of opportunities to learn English in Vietnam.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27 | I know how to set my own learning goals.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28 | I carry out learning plans once they've been made.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29 | I take advantage of opportunities to speak English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30 | I have chances to discuss learning issues with my classmates.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31 | I'd like to have friends from English-speaking countries.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32 | The teachers should decide how long to spend on each activity.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33 | The teachers should ask us to share our views in class.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34 | I learn English because it's a required course at my university.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35 | If English were not taught at my university, I'd try to take English classes somewhere else.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36 | I'd like English to be used as much as possible in English class.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37 | It's necessary to know about English-speaking cultures to learn English well.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38 | My classmates are active English learners.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39 | I make my schedule so I'll have enough time to study English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

|    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40 | I deal with things related to English but not necessarily related to English class.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41 | The teachers should stimulate my interest in learning English.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42 | I understand my own personality.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 43 | I'm responsible for the success of my English learning.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 44 | The university treats English as a very important subject.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 45 | Before doing homework or class work, I think about the skills I have to complete those types of tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 46 | I actively participate in class activities.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 47 | I write in English (emails, a diary, my Facebook status, etc.).  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 48 | I think about my progress in learning English.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 49 | I know how to find my own ways to practice English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 50 | I can go see my teachers about my English learning.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 51 | I believe I have the ability to learn English successfully.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 52 | I learn English because it will help me to be successful in my studies.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 53 | The teachers should correct all my mistakes.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 54 | I learn English because I want to be as good at English as someone I know.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 55 | After I get my English work back, I always read it again to correct my mistakes.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 56 | I learn English because I want to please my family.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 57 | I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 58 | I feel my English teacher is like a friend.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 59 | I plan how I learn English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 60 | I reflect on what I learn and look for something important.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 61 | I read English materials (books, notices, newspapers, online news, etc.).                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 62 | I give myself a reward or treat when I do something well in English.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 63 | I notice my mistakes and use that information to improve.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 64 | The teachers should choose what activities to use to learn English in English class.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 65 | I learn English because I find it very interesting.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 66 | If there were an English club at my university, I'd be interested in joining.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 67 | It's important to have excellent pronunciation in English.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 68 | We use a lot of English in English class at my university.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 69 | I know how to measure my progress.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 70 | I try to study English regularly even with limited time.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

|    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 71 | I have chances to ask the teachers questions when I don't understand something.      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 72 | I check to make sure I've understood what I need to learn.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 73 | I know how to check my work for mistakes.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 74 | The most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 75 | Considering how I study English, I can honestly say that I do just enough to get by. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 76 | I put great effort into learning English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 77 | The teachers should choose what materials to use to learn English in English class.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 78 | The most important part of learning English is translating from Vietnamese.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 79 | I know how to plan my English learning.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 80 | Before I do class work or homework, I analyze what's required.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 81 | I have chances to make suggestions to the teachers.                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 82 | I try to complete things I've decided to do.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 83 | I set my goals in learning English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 84 | It's important to understand every word when you listen to English.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 85 | I need a lot of guidance in learning English.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 86 | The teachers should set my learning goals.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 87 | I have chances to do English self-study with friends.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

### Factors influencing LA in English language learning

In your opinion, which of the following factors will influence your LA? You can choose more than one option if you want and at the same time order them from 1. If the factor that you think influence your LA the most, write 1 on the line. There is an example for you.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_

My family

#### Internal factors

\_\_\_\_\_

My knowledge

\_\_\_\_\_

My skills

\_\_\_\_\_

Motivation

\_\_\_\_\_

Attitudes

\_\_\_\_\_

Preferences

\_\_\_\_\_

Learning styles

#### External factors

\_\_\_\_\_

Culture

\_\_\_\_\_

Society

\_\_\_\_\_

Educational policy  
on language learning

\_\_\_\_\_

Public examinations

\_\_\_\_\_

Testing and  
assessment systems

\_\_\_\_\_

Curriculum

|         |                                 |         |                          |
|---------|---------------------------------|---------|--------------------------|
| _____   | Characteristics                 | _____   | Teachers' work           |
| _____   | Language proficiency            | _____   | School rules/Class rules |
| _____   | Short term/long-term priorities | _____   | Peers                    |
| Others: | .....                           | Others: | .....                    |

## Appendix F: Items and their sources

| Number | Scale                               |                   | Statements  | Sources   |
|--------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|
| 1      | <b>Beliefs about teachers' role</b> |                   | <p>1. The teachers should explain everything to us.</p> <p>11. The teachers should decide the objectives of my English courses.</p> <p>14. The teachers should evaluate my learning.</p> <p>22. The teachers should ensure my progress in learning English.</p> <p>32. The teachers should decide how long to spend on each activity.</p> <p>33. The teachers should ask us to share our views in class.</p> <p>41. The teachers should stimulate my interest in learning English.</p> <p>53. The teachers should correct all my mistakes.</p> <p>64. The teachers should choose what activities to use to learn English in English class.</p> <p>77. The teachers should choose what materials to use to learn English in English class.</p> <p>86. The teachers should set my learning goals.</p> | Adapted from Chan et al. (2002), Le (2013), and Ming and Alias (2007)             |
| 2      | <b>Motivation and desire</b>        | <b>Motivation</b> | <p>2. I learn English because it will help me to get a good job.</p> <p>12. I learn English because I want to pass exams.</p> <p>23. I learn English so that I can communicate with English speakers.</p> <p>34. I learn English because it's a required course at my university.</p> <p>52. I learn English because it will help me to be successful in my studies.</p> <p>54. I learn English because I want to be as good at English as someone I know.</p>  | Adapted from Hsu (2005) and Swatevacharkul (2009)<br>No. 65:<br>Author's addition |



|   |                                       |                                |   |   |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
|   |                                       |                                | <p>56. I learn English because I want to please my family.</p> <p>65. I learn English because I find it very interesting.</p>   |   |
|   |                                       | <b>Desire</b>                  | <p>3. When it comes to any English tasks, I work very carefully to make sure I understand everything.</p> <p>4. If I have any opportunities to use English outside class, I'll use it most of the time and some Vietnamese, if necessary.</p> <p>24. If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra English assignment, I'd definitely volunteer.</p> <p>31. I'd like to have friends from English-speaking countries.</p> <p>35. If English were not taught at my university, I'd try to take English classes somewhere else.</p> <p>36. I'd like English to be used as much as possible in English class.</p> <p>55. After I get my English work back, I always read it again to correct my mistakes.</p> <p>66. If there were an English club at my university, I'd be interested in joining.</p> <p>75. Considering how I study English, I can honestly say that I do just enough to get by.</p> | Adapted from Hsu (2005)                             |
| 3 | <b>Metacognitive knowledge in ELT</b> | <b>About self as a learner</b> | <p>5. I have my own opinions about learning English and can defend them.</p> <p>13. I use my learning style effectively.</p> <p>42. I understand my own personality.</p> <p>43. I'm responsible for the success of my English learning.</p> <p>51. I believe I have the ability to learn English successfully.</p>  | Adapted from Cotterall (1995b, 1999) and Hsu (2005) |

|  |  |                                   |   |  |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|
|  |  |                                   | <p>57. I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English.</p> <p>76. I put great effort into learning English.</p> <p>85. I need a lot of guidance in learning English.</p>  |  |
|  |  | <b>About subject matter</b>       | <p>6. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.</p> <p>25. It's important to understand every word when you read an English text.</p> <p>37. It's necessary to know about English-speaking cultures to learn English well.</p> <p>67. It's important to have excellent pronunciation in English.</p> <p>74. The most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary.</p> <p>78. The most important part of learning English is translating from Vietnamese.</p> <p>84. It's important to understand every word when you listen to English.</p> | Adapted from Dixon (2011) and Hsu (2005)     |
|  |  | <b>About the learning context</b> | <p>7. People in Vietnam who can speak English well have a better social status (e.g. they make more money, they are more educated, etc.).</p> <p>26. There are a lot of opportunities to learn English in Vietnam.</p> <p>38. My classmates are active English learners.</p> <p>44. The university treats English as a very important subject.</p> <p>58. I feel my English teacher is like a friend.</p> <p>68. We use a lot of English in English class at my university.</p>   | Adapted from Hsu (2005)                      |
|  |  | <b>About the learning process</b> | <p>20. To learn English well, it's important to know one's personality, motivation, personal needs, expectations,</p>   | Adapted from Cotterall (1999) and Hsu (2005) |

|   |                                    |                   |  |  |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
|   |                                    |                   | <p>learning styles, my strengths, weaknesses, etc., in English.</p> <p>27. I know how to set my own learning goals.</p> <p>49. I know how to find my own ways to practice English.</p> <p>69. I know how to measure my progress.</p> <p>73. I know how to check my work for mistakes.</p> <p>79. I know how to plan my English learning.</p>   |  |
| 4 | <b>Metacognitive skills in ELT</b> | <b>Planning</b>   | <p>8. I'm determined to achieve the target I've set for my English learning.</p> <p>18. Before doing any English tasks, I think about the knowledge I have of the topics involved.</p> <p>39. I make my schedule so I'll have enough time to study English.</p> <p>45. Before doing any English tasks, I think about the skills I have to complete those types of tasks.</p> <p>59. I plan how I learn English.</p> <p>80. Before I do class work or homework, I analyze what's required.</p> <p>83. I set my goals in learning English.</p> | Adapted from T. Dang (2012) and T. Yang (2007); Nos. 18, 45, 80: Author's addition |
|   |                                    | <b>Monitoring</b> | <p>9. I change my learning content and target according to my needs.</p> <p>19. I make good use of materials and resources when studying English.</p> <p>21. I try using other methods if one method of learning English doesn't suit me.</p> <p>28. I carry out learning plans once they've been made.</p> <p>40. I deal with things related to English but not necessarily related to English class.</p> <p>46. I actively participate in class activities.</p>  | Adapted from T. Dang (2012) and T. Yang (2007)                                     |

|   |                |                   |  |  |
|---|----------------|-------------------|--|--|
|   |                |                   | <p>63. I notice my mistakes and use that information to improve.</p> <p>70. I try to study English regularly even with limited time.</p> <p>72. I check to make sure I've understood what I need to learn.</p> <p>82. I try to complete things I've decided to do.</p>   |  |
|   |                | <b>Evaluating</b> | <p>10. I think about the methods I use to learn English and whether they are good.</p> <p>17. I check my English proficiency by taking English tests voluntarily.</p> <p>48. I think about my progress in learning English.</p> <p>60. I reflect on what I learn and look for something important.</p> <p>62. I give myself a reward or treat when I do something well in English.</p>   | Adapted from T. Dang (2012) and T. Yang (2007) |
| 5 | <b>Freedom</b> |                   | <p>15. I try to listen to English regularly (songs, radio, TV, YouTube, Facebook, etc.).</p> <p>16. I have chances to work with my classmates in activities in English class.</p> <p>29. I take advantage of opportunities to speak English.</p> <p>30. I have chances to discuss learning issues with my classmates.</p> <p>47. I write in English (emails, a diary, my Facebook status, etc.).</p> <p>50. I can go see my teachers about my English learning.</p> <p>61. I read English materials (books, notices, newspapers, online news, etc.).</p> <p>71. I have chances to ask the teachers questions when I don't understand something.</p> <p>81. I have chances to make suggestions to the teachers.</p> | Adapted from Chan et al. (2002)                |

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
|  |  | 87. I have chances to do English self-study with friends. |  |
|--|--|---|--|

## Appendix G: Factor solution, and corresponding LAPQ items

| Factors and items   | Factor loadings |      |      |   |   |
|---|-----------------|------|------|---|---|
|   | 1               | 2    | 3    | 4 | 5 |
| <b>Metacognitive skills</b>   |                 |      |      |   |   |
| I60. I reflect on what I learn and look for something important.                                  | .774            |      |      |   |   |
| I59. I plan how I learn English.  | .730            |      |      |   |   |
| I83. I set my goals in learning English.  | .717            |      |      |   |   |
| I72. I check to make sure I've understood what I need to learn.                                   | .712            |      |      |   |   |
| I70. I try to study English regularly even with limited time.                                     | .697            |      |      |   |   |
| I28. I carry out learning plans once they've been made.   | .690            |      |      |   |   |
| I39. I make my schedule so I'll have enough time to study English.                                | .679            |      |      |   |   |
| I63. I notice my mistakes and use that information to improve.                                    | .663            |      |      |   |   |
| I80. Before I do class work or homework, I analyze what's required.                               | .652            |      |      |   |   |
| I40. I deal with things related to English but not necessarily related to English class.          | .641            |      |      |   |   |
| I55. After I get my English work back, I always read it again to correct my mistakes.             | .590            |      |      |   |   |
| I76. I put great effort into learning English.  | .584            |      |      |   |   |
| I82. I try to complete things I've decided to do.   | .574            |      |      |   |   |
| I62. I give myself a reward or treat when I do something well in English.                         | .561            |      |      |   |   |
| I19. I make good use of materials and resources when studying English.                            | .509            |      |      |   |   |
| <b>Beliefs about teacher's role</b>   |                 |      |      |   |   |
| I86. The teachers should set my learning goals.   |                 | .760 |      |   |   |
| I77. The teachers should choose what materials to use to learn English in English class.          |                 | .675 |      |   |   |
| I53. The teachers should correct all my mistakes.   |                 | .625 |      |   |   |
| I22. The teachers should ensure my progress in learning English.                                  |                 | .611 |      |   |   |
| I85. I need a lot of guidance in learning English.  |                 | .558 |      |   |   |
| I32. The teachers should decide how long to spend on each activity.                               |                 | .537 |      |   |   |
| I11. The teachers should decide the objectives of my English courses.                             |                 | .528 |      |   |   |
| I1. The teachers should explain everything to us.   |                 | .517 |      |   |   |
| <b>Motivation and desire</b>  |                 |      |      |   |   |
| I36. I'd like English to be used as much as possible in English class.                            |                 |      | .771 |   |   |
| I35. If English were not taught at my university, I'd try to take English classes somewhere else. |                 |      | .738 |   |   |

|  |      |
|--|------|
| I65. I learn English because I find it very interesting.   | .735 |
| I52. I learn English because it will help me to be successful in my studies.   | .676 |
| I31. I'd like to have friends from English-speaking countries.   | .613 |
| <b>Freedom</b>   |      |
| I50. I can go see my teachers about my English learning.   | .744 |
| I71. I have chances to ask the teachers questions when I don't understand something.   | .742 |
| I81. I have chances to make suggestions to the teachers.   | .690 |
| I30. I have chances to discuss learning issues with my classmates.   | .678 |
| I87. I have chances to do English self-study with friends.   | .670 |
| I68. We use a lot of English in English class at my university.  | .571 |
| I16. I have chances to work with my classmates in activities in English class.   | .557 |
| <b>Metacognitive knowledge</b>   |      |
| I57. I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English.   | .758 |
| I43. I'm responsible for the success of my English learning.   | .728 |
| I42. I understand my own personality.  | .645 |
| I20. To learn English well, it's important to know one's personality, motivation, personal needs, expectations, learning styles, my strengths, weaknesses, etc., in English. | .573 |
| I26. There are a lot of opportunities to learn English in Vietnam.   | .407 |

**Appendix H: Cross-loadings of the items**

|     | BTR   | F     | M & D | MK     | MS    |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| I1  | 0.517 | 0.095 | 0.036 | 0.087  | 0.045 |
| I11 | 0.528 | 0.068 | 0.081 | -0.002 | 0.056 |
| I16 | 0.069 | 0.557 | 0.303 | 0.141  | 0.264 |
| I19 | 0.107 | 0.297 | 0.261 | 0.132  | 0.509 |
| I20 | 0.291 | 0.123 | 0.193 | 0.573  | 0.156 |
| I22 | 0.611 | 0.045 | 0.131 | 0.193  | 0.121 |
| I26 | 0.006 | 0.156 | 0.126 | 0.407  | 0.139 |
| I28 | 0.075 | 0.401 | 0.189 | 0.186  | 0.690 |
| I30 | 0.185 | 0.678 | 0.350 | 0.265  | 0.412 |
| I31 | 0.170 | 0.225 | 0.613 | 0.267  | 0.248 |
| I32 | 0.537 | 0.103 | 0.171 | 0.111  | 0.005 |
| I35 | 0.144 | 0.198 | 0.735 | 0.245  | 0.314 |
| I36 | 0.285 | 0.264 | 0.771 | 0.211  | 0.391 |
| I39 | 0.223 | 0.407 | 0.372 | 0.423  | 0.679 |
| I40 | 0.056 | 0.294 | 0.412 | 0.207  | 0.641 |
| I42 | 0.108 | 0.164 | 0.071 | 0.645  | 0.187 |
| I43 | 0.265 | 0.239 | 0.324 | 0.728  | 0.284 |
| I50 | 0.171 | 0.744 | 0.313 | 0.234  | 0.488 |
| I52 | 0.253 | 0.267 | 0.676 | 0.313  | 0.218 |
| I53 | 0.625 | 0.064 | 0.159 | 0.169  | 0.130 |
| I55 | 0.308 | 0.391 | 0.347 | 0.156  | 0.590 |
| I57 | 0.182 | 0.235 | 0.258 | 0.758  | 0.399 |
| I59 | 0.138 | 0.387 | 0.265 | 0.320  | 0.647 |
| I60 | 0.139 | 0.467 | 0.337 | 0.377  | 0.774 |
| I62 | 0.045 | 0.354 | 0.107 | 0.161  | 0.561 |
| I63 | 0.138 | 0.385 | 0.287 | 0.254  | 0.663 |
| I65 | 0.194 | 0.370 | 0.735 | 0.184  | 0.454 |
| I68 | 0.212 | 0.571 | 0.275 | 0.239  | 0.268 |
| I70 | 0.088 | 0.365 | 0.364 | 0.210  | 0.697 |
| I71 | 0.194 | 0.742 | 0.199 | 0.177  | 0.467 |
| I72 | 0.152 | 0.490 | 0.404 | 0.284  | 0.712 |
| I76 | 0.108 | 0.319 | 0.239 | 0.227  | 0.584 |
| I77 | 0.675 | 0.239 | 0.266 | 0.297  | 0.213 |
| I80 | 0.188 | 0.365 | 0.271 | 0.277  | 0.652 |
| I81 | 0.194 | 0.690 | 0.156 | 0.143  | 0.392 |
| I82 | 0.168 | 0.347 | 0.251 | 0.211  | 0.574 |
| I83 | 0.191 | 0.351 | 0.374 | 0.345  | 0.717 |
| I85 | 0.558 | 0.146 | 0.149 | 0.147  | 0.117 |
| I86 | 0.760 | 0.244 | 0.257 | 0.201  | 0.203 |
| I87 | 0.103 | 0.670 | 0.165 | 0.167  | 0.377 |



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