UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
PROGRAM OF LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

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

PHD DISSERTATION SUMMARY
By
NGUYEN VAN SON

SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. DR. HABIL. ANITA HABÓK

SZEGED, HUNGARY, 2022

PROBLEM STATEMENT, OBJECTIVES, & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Learner autonomy (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; 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 perceptions of LA from non-major students 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.

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 systematically so that an operational definition of LA could be provided and a framework from different perspectives for a questionnaire survey could be established. The survey, then, was tested and delivered in order to generate the dimensions of LA in students' perceptions. The data for this aim was 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 are given to enhance LA for students. These suggestions will be hopefully given in the forms of 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.

In brief, the aims and objectives could be summarized into two main research questions as follows:

1. *What are the non-English major students' perceptions of learner autonomy?*

    1.1. Is the questionnaire used to investigate LA as perceived by students, psychometrically sound?

    1.2. Do genders affect the perceptions of LA in terms of its components?

    1.3. Do years of study affect the perceptions of LA in terms of its components?

    1.4. Do marks in the previous English course affect the perceptions of LA in terms of its components?

2. *What are the factors that influence students' learner autonomy?*

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.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The main content of the thesis includes eight chapters.

The first chapter provides the overview of the research including the research background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, 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, 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 systematic review of studies in the extensive literature. At an end, it comes up with a conceptualization of LA in this study.

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. 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.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To conceptualize LA, the theoretical underpinning of this study has its roots in the Bergen definition as follows: 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). There are three main reasons to choose this definition.

Firstly, it is in line with Holec's (1981) and Benson's (2011) 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 (Yıldırım, 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.

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.

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 transfering 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.

1.2. Motivation

There exists an argument among the researchers toward the question "Which one comes first and which one depends on which one, motivation or autonomy?". M. Lamb (2011) convincingly elucidates the question above (Ushioda, 2011b, 2014). Specifically, he starts with a metaphor of "which came first, the worm or the cocoon?", and then distinguishes two senses of autonomy, one of which refers to taking responsibility for manipulating one's own learning. This notion of autonomy is learner autonomy or language learner autonomy in the words of Little (2007) (Ushioda, 2011a, 2014). 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, to exercise such metacognitive skills and ability, willingness or motivation is a prerequisite, so this sense of autonomy depends on motivation. That is, if learners have motivation or willingness, they will exercise their autonomy to learn the language beyond the basic requirements (M. Lamb,

2011; Ushioda, 2011a, 2011b). As a result, learners are expected to be motivated to develop LA.

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, 2007; 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; 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.

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 1:

Venn diagram on What is capacity of LA? (Adapted from Huang & Benson, 2013)
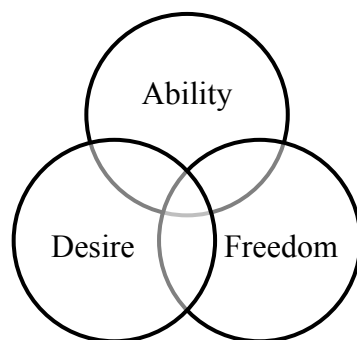
2.1. Ability

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 1:

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; 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 consitent 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.

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.

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 classsification 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 to 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 2:

Conceptualization of Learner Autonomy in this study
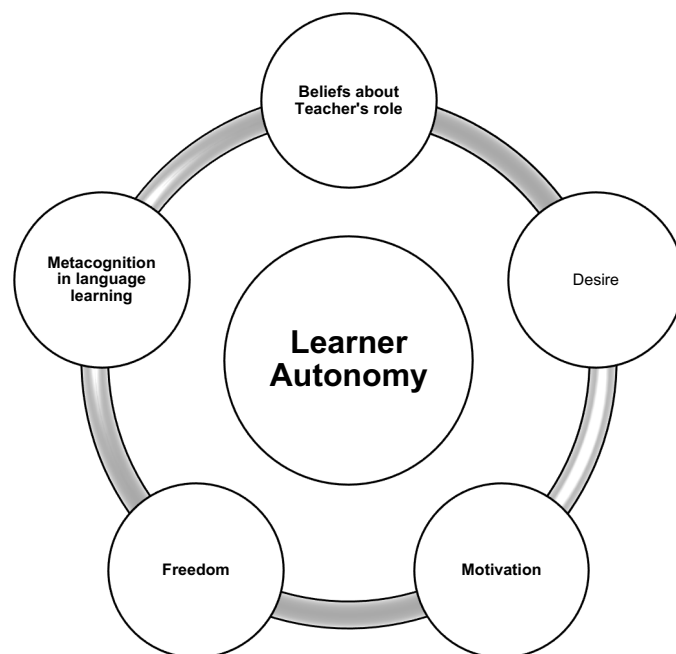
METHODOLOGY

A sample of 1,565 university students in total were voluntarily recruited from seven public universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. They completed and returned the questionnaires to me. 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. 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. Based on convenience sampling and due to the low response rate of the interview invitations , 13 out of 1,565 participants agreed to participate in the interview phase.

Mixed-methods research was employed in this study from the perspective of pragmatism. Two types of data have been collected: quantitative from survey questionnaires (see more at S. Nguyen & Habók, 2021) and qualitative from semi-structured interviews. The critical review of literature formed the basis of the questionnaire's scales and the interview's questions.

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. The final English version of the transcript from the interviews was entered into the ATLAS.ti software for recurrent themes. Owing to the nature of convergent parallel design, after the two strands of data were analysed separately, except for the validational 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.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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 significane, and automomous 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 accomomodated by CR, rho_A reliability index, Cronbach's α, inter-item correlation, and the Messick's (1995) framework of

validity. The questionnaire, after the validational 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 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 was 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 peeers 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 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 the 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 activies 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 a 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.

CONCLUSIONS

The study made some contributions theoretically and methodologically.

Theoretically, 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 mark 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 in the labour market in the future so their voices should be listened to. Therefore, understanding their perceptions of LA in its aspectcs 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.

In terms of methodology, 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.

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. Firstly, 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). Secondly, 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. Thirdly, 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. Fourthly, 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.

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 autonmoy 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 metacognive knowledge about language matters and learning process. Moreover, communicating with the teachers with regard to learning issuse 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

persepctive, 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.

REFERENCES

Benson, P. (2007b). Autonomy and its role in learning. In *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 733–745). Springer.

Benson, P. (2012). Autonomy in language teaching and learning: How to do it "here". In Y.-N. Leung, W.-T. Lee, S.-Y. Hwang, Y.-L. Chang (Eds.), *Selected papers from the twenty-first international symposium on English teaching* (pp. 15–25). English Teachers' Association— Republic of China.

Benson, P. (2013). Learner autonomy. *TESOL quarterly, 47*(4), 839–843. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.134

Benson, P. (2009). Making sense of autonomy in language learning. In R. Pemberton, S. Toogood, & A. Barfield (Eds.), *Maintaining control: Autonomy and language learning* (pp. 13–26). Hong Kong University Press.

Benson, P. (1997). The philosophy and politics of learner autonomy. In P. Benson, & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 18–34). Longman.

Benson, P. (2011). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning* (2nd ed.). Pearson.

Bui, N. (2018). Learner autonomy in tertiary English classes in Vietnam. In J. Albright (Ed.), *English tertiary education in Vietnam* (pp. 158–171). Routledge.

Bui, N. (2016). *Investigating university lecturers' attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam* [PhD Thesis, University of Newcastle, Australia]. NOVA Archieve. http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1342355

Cao, P. T. (2018). Using project work to foster learner autonomy at a pedagogical university, Vietnam: A case study. *HNUE Journal of Science, 63*(5A), 27–37.

Chan, V., Spratt, M., & Humphreys, G. (2002). Autonomous language learning: Hong Kong tertiary students' attitudes and behaviours. *Evaluation & Research in Education, 16*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500790208667003

Chen, H. (2015). The correlations between learner autonomy and the affective factors in college English learning in China. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities, 8*(2), 70–84. https://web.archive.org/web/20180409221323id_/http://www.irssh.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/8_IRSSH-1046-V8N2.31142515.pdf

Cooker, L. (2012). *Formative (self-)assessment as autonomous language learning* [PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham]. Nottingham eTheses Archive. http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/13665/

Cotterall, S. (1995a). Developing a course strategy for learner autonomy. *ELT Journal, 49*(3), 219–227. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/49.3.219

Cotterall, S. (2009). Learner autonomy in a mainstream writing course: Articulating learning gains. In A. Barfield, S. Toogood, & R. Pemberton (Eds.), *Maintaining control: Autonomy and language learning* (pp. 87–108). Hong Kong University Press.

Cotterall, S. (1995b). Readiness for autonomy: Investigating learner beliefs. *System, 23*(2), 195–205. https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(95)00008-8

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. (2018). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.

Dam, L. (1995). *Learner autonomy 3: From theory to classroom practice.* Authentik.

Dam, L. (2012, November 15). Educating students to become lifelong learners. In K. A. Johnson (Chair), *A TESOL symposium: Facilitating learning through student empowerment* [Symposium]. San Juan, Puerto Rico. https://www.tesol.org/docs/default-source/new-resource-library/symposium-on-student-empowerment-8.pdf

Dang, T. T. (2012). *Learner autonomy perception and performance: A study on Vietnamese students in online and offline learning environments* [PhD thesis, La Trobe University]. La Trobe University Research Online Archieve. http://arrow.latrobe.edu.au:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/latrobe:34050

Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-instruction in language learning.* Cambridge University Press.

Dişlen, G. (2011). Exploration of how students perceive autonomous learning in an EFL context. In D. Gardner (Ed.), *Fostering autonomy in language learning* (pp. 126–136). Zirve University.

Dixon, D. (2011). *Measuring language learner autonomy in tertiary-level learners of English* [PhD Thesis, University of Warwick]. University of Warwick Publications service & WRAP Archieve. http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/58287/

Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental inquiry. *American Psychologist, 34*(10), 906–911. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.34.10.906

García Magaldi, L. (2010). Metacognitive strategies based instruction to support learner autonomy in language learning. *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 61*, 73–86. https://riull.ull.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/915/13367/RCEI_61_%28%202010%29_05.pdf?sequence=1

Haque, M. M. (2018). Metacognition: A catalyst in fostering learner autonomy for ESL/EFL learners. *Korea TESOL Journal, 14*(1), 181–202. https://koreatesol.org/sites/default/files/pdf_publications/KTJ14-1web_0.pdf#page=191

Henri, D. C., Morrell, L. J., & Scott, G. W. (2017). Student perceptions of their autonomy at University. *Higher Education, 75*(3), 507–516. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0152-y

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning.* Pergamon Press.

Hozayen, G. (2011). Egyptian students' readiness for autonomous language learning. In D. Gardner (Ed.), *Fostering autonomy in language learning.* Zirve University Press.

Hsu, W. C. (2005). *Representations, constructs and practice of autonomy via a learner training programme in Taiwan* [Unpublished PhD Thesis]. University of Nottingham.

Huang, J., & Benson, P. (2013). Autonomy, agency and identity in foreign and second language education. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 36*(1), 7–28. https://doi.org/10.1515/cjal-2013-0002

Humphreys, G., & Wyatt, M. (2014). Helping Vietnamese university learners to become more autonomous. *ELT Journal, 68*(1), 52–63. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cct056

Lamb, M. (2011). Which came first, the worm or the cocoon? In C. Everard, J. Mynard, & R. Smith (Eds.), *Autonomy in language learning: Opening a can of worms* (pp. 111–113). IATELF.

Lamb, T. (2009). Controlling learning: Learners' voices and relationships between motivation and learner autonomy. In R. Pemberton, S. Toogood, & A. Barfield (Eds.), *Maintaining control: Autonomy and language learning* (pp. 67–86). Hong Kong University Press.

Le, A. (2018). EFL students' voices on learner autonomy at a university in the Mekong Delta. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, 34*(2), 26–38. https://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4244

Le, Q. X. (2013). *Fostering learner autonomy in language learning in tertiary education: an intervention study of university students in Hochiminh City, Vietnam* [PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham]. Nottingham eTheses Archive. http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/13405/.

Lin, L., & Reinders, H. (2019). Students' and teachers' readiness for autonomy: beliefs and practices in developing autonomy in the Chinese context. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 20*(1), 69–89. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-018-9564-3

Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy: Definitions, issues and problems.* Authentik.

Little, D. (2020). Language learner autonomy: Rethinking language teaching. *Language Teaching*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444820000488

Little, D. (2007). Language learner autonomy: Some fundamental considerations revisited. *Innovation in Language Teaching and Learning, 1*(1), 14–29. https://doi.org/10.2167/illt040.0

Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics Journal, 20*(1), 71–94. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/20.1.71

Littlewood, W. (1996a). "Autonomy": An anatomy and a framework. *System, 24*(4), 427–435. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(96)00039-5

Liu, H. (2015). Learner autonomy: The role of motivation in foreign language learning. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 6*(6), 1165–1174. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0606.02

Liu, H. (2012). Understanding EFL undergraduate anxiety in relation to motivation, autonomy, and language proficiency. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 9*(1), 123–139. https://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/v9n12012/liu.pdf

Macaskill, A., & Taylor, E. (2010). The development of a brief measure of learner autonomy in university students. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(3), 351–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903502703

Messick, S. (1995). Standards of validity and the validity of standards in performance assessment. *Educational Measurement: Issues and practice*, *14*(4), 5–8. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3992.1995.tb00881.x

Ming, T. S., & Alias, A. (2007). Investigating readiness for autonomy: A comparison of Malaysian ESL undergraduates of three public universities. *Reflections on English Language Teaching, 6*(1), 1–18. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.583.733&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Mousavi Arfae, A. (2017). *Language learner autonomy in Ontario's ESL context* [PhD thesis, The University of Western Ontario]. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6981&context=etd

Murray, G. (2014a). Exploring the social dimensions of autonomy in language learning. In G. Murray (Ed.), *Social dimensions of autonomy in language learning* (pp. 81–91). Palgrave Macmillan.

Murray, G. (2014b). The social dimensions of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal, 5*(4), 320–341. https://sisaljournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/murray.pdf

Nguyen, H. T., & Hoang, L. T. G. (2010). How to foster learner autonomy in teaching Country Studies at Faculty of English, Hanoi National University of Education. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, 26*(4), 239–245. https://js.vnu.edu.vn/FS/article/view/2569

Nguyen, L. T. C. (2008). Learner autonomy and EFL proficiency: A Vietnamese perspective. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, 18*, 67–87. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v3n2p3

Nguyen, L. T. C. (2009). *Learner autonomy and EFL learning at the tertiary level in Vietnam* [PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington]. Research Archive. http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/1203

Nguyen, L. T. C., & Gu, Y. (2013). Strategy-based instruction: A learner-focused approach to developing learner autonomy. *Language Teaching Research, 17*(1), 9–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168812457528

Nguyen, N. T. (2014). *Learner autonomy in language learning: Teachers' beliefs* [PhD Thesis, Queensland University of Technology]. QUT ePrints Archive. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/69937/

Nguyen, N. T. (2012). "Let students take control!" *Fostering learner autonomy in language learning: An experiment* [Paper presentation]. International Conference on Education and Management Innovation vol. 30 (pp. 318–320), IACSIT Press, Singapore. http://www.ipedr.com/vol30/62-ICEMI%202012-M10063.pdf

Nguyen, S., & Habók, A. (2021). Designing and validating the learner autonomy perception questionnaire. *Heliyon, 7*(4), Article e06831. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06831

Nguyen, V. T. (2011). Language learners' and teachers' perceptions relating to learner autonomy - Are they ready for autonomous language learning? *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, 27*(1), 41–52. https://js.vnu.edu.vn/FS/article/view/1463

Nguyen, V. Q. (2019). *Exploring the learner autonomy of undergraduate EFL students in the Vietnamese university settings* [PhD Thesis, University of Canberra]. University of Canberra Archive. https://doi.org/10.26191/6aa5-pr22

O'Malley, J., Chamot, A., Stewner-Manzanares, G., Kupper, L., & Russo, R. (1985). Learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate ESL students. *Language Learning, 35*(1), 21–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1985.tb01013.x

Oxford, R. L. (2003). Toward a more systematic model of L2 learner autonomy. In D. Palfreyman, & R. C. Smith (Eds.), *Learner autonomy across cultures: Language education perspectives* (pp. 75–91). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ozer, O., & Yukselir, C. (2021). 'Am I aware of my roles as a learner?' the relationships of learner autonomy, self-direction and goal commitment to academic achievement among Turkish EFL learners. *Language Awareness*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2021.1936539

Phan, T. T. (2015). *Towards a potential Model to enhance language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese Higher Education Context* [PhD Thesis, Queensland University of Technology]. QUT ePrints Archive. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/82470/

Pennycook, A. (2013). Cultural alternatives and autonomy. In P. Benson, & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 35–53). Routledge.

Reinders, H. (2011). From autonomy to autonomous language learning. In A. Ahmed, G. Cane, & M. Hanzala (Eds.), *Teaching English in multilingual contexts: Current challenges, future directions* (pp. 37–52). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Rungwaraphong, P. (2012). Student readiness for learner autonomy: Case study at a university in Thailand. *Asian Journal on Education and Learning, 3*(2), 28–40. http://www.thaiscience.info/Journals/Article/AJEL/10836621.pdf

Sinclair, B. (2000a). *Learner autonomy and its development in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).* [Unpublished PhD Thesis]. University of Nottingham.

Sinclair, B. (2000b). Learner autonomy: The next phase? In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath, & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions* (pp. 4–14). Longman.

Sinclair, B. (2009). The teacher as learner: Developing autonomy in an interactive learning environment. In R. Pemberton, S. Toogood, & A. Barfield (Eds.), *Maintaining control: Autonomy and language learning* (pp. 175–198). Hong Kong University Press.

Swatevacharkul, R. (2009). *An investigation on readiness for learner autonomy, approaches to learning of tertiary students and the roles of English language teachers in enhancing learner autonomy in higher education: Research report.* Dhurakij Pundit University. http://libdoc.dpu.ac.th/research/134463.pdf

Tassinari, M. (2012). Evaluating learner autonomy: A dynamic model with descriptors. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal, 3*(1), 24–40. https://sisaljournal.org/archives/march12/tassinari/

Tassinari, M. (2015). Assessing learner autonomy: A dynamic model. In *Assessment and autonomy in language learning* (pp. 64–88). Palgrave Macmillan.

Tassinari, M. (2018). A dynamic model for autonomy: Self-assessment as reflection. *RELAY Journal, 1*(1), 47–54. https://kuis.kandagaigo.ac.jp/relayjournal/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Tassinari-Relay-Journal-47-54.pdf

Teng, M. F. (2019). *Autonomy, agency, and identity in teaching and learning English as a foreign language.* Springer.

Tomita, K., & Sano, M. (2016). Developing learner autonomy: The perceptions and needs of Japanese EFL learners. *Language Education in Asia, 7*(2), 114–130. https://doi.org/10.5746/LEiA/16/V7/I2/A05/Tomita_Sano

Tran, H. T. N. (2019). *English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context: Enabling factors and barriers araising from assessment practice.* [PhD Thesis, The University of Adelaide]. Digital Library Archive. https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/123107/3/Tran2019_PhD.pdf

Trinh, L. Q. (2005). *Stimulating learner autonomy in English language education: A curriculum innovation study in a Vietnamese context.* [PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam]. UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository). https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=d5d936f4-9637-4b13-989a-aea84a94f80e

Ushioda, E. (1996). *Learner autonomy 5: The role of motivation.* Authentik.

Ushioda, E. (2011a). Motivating learners to speak as themselves. In G. Murray, X. Gao, & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, motivation and autonomy in language learning* (pp. 11–24). Multilingual Matters.

Ushioda, E. (2011b). Why autonomy? Insights from motivation theory and research. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 5*(2), 221–232. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2011.577536

Ushioda, E. (2014). Motivation, autonomy and metacognition: Exploring their interactions. In D. Lasagabaster, A. Doiz, & J. M. Sierra (Eds.), *Motivation and foreign language learning: From theory to practice* (pp. 31–50). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Veenman, M. V. (2011). Learning to self-monitor and self-regulate. In R. Mayer, & P. A. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of research on learning and instruction* (pp. 197–218). Routledge.

Wenden, A. (1991). *Learner strategies for learner autonomy: Planning and implementing learner training for language learners.* Prentice Hall International.

Yurdakul, C. (2017). An investigation of the relationship between autonomous learning and lifelong learning. *International Journal of Educational Research Review*, *2*(1), 15–20. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/298782

Yıldırım, O. (2012). A study on a group of Indian English as a second language learners' perceptions of autonomous learning. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry, 3*(2), 18–29. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/tojqi/issue/21395/229368?publisher=tojqi

Zarei, A. A., & Elakaei, A. (2012). Motivation and attitude as predictors of learner autonomy. *Prime Research on Education, 2*(9), 353–364.