

LEARNER AUTONOMY FROM PERSPECTIVES OF EFL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS: AN INVESTIGATION IN A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the views and attitudes of teachers and students on the issue of self-study English in a university student at a private University of the Mekong River Delta. There are 40 teachers and 60 second-year students are not English majors at Tay Do university in a study group is designed according to the method described. The tools used in this study is a questionnaire for teachers and students was conducted at the beginning of the semester to examine the perspectives of teachers and students in the implementation of the method, manner study of the teaching and learning of English at the University of amateurs. After that, at the end of the semester, a number of teachers have teaching experience are invited to answer the questionnaire survey aimed at awareness and attitude of teachers for self-study in English not specialized to be reviewed objectively and insight into this issue. In addition, through questionnaires and interview process, the study also pointed out the ways and methods of dissemination, and fits in effective self-study for students not specializing in English. The data from these tests and questions were analyzed using SPSS statistical software version 16.0. The study results showed that awareness, views and attitudes of teachers, students and the method, manner active in studying the problem itself is not specialized in English at university.

Keyword: learner autonomy, second-year students, university

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The current globalization of economy and the continuing increase in international communication in various fields have resulted in greater demand for English as a foreign language (EFL).

Learner autonomy has been one of the most popular terms in the language learning field especially for the last three decades. A lot of researchers have been conducting studies to investigate various aspects of learner autonomy, and to bring practical suggestions to teachers to promote learner autonomy in their classrooms. One of the most important points emphasized by researchers is that the concept of learner autonomy can be interpreted differently in different cultural and educational settings (Holliday, 2003; Littlewood, 1999). That is, cultural and educational settings of the instruction affect how teachers and students perceive the concept of learner autonomy. In other words, students of a particular cultural background would not show the same level of readiness for learner autonomy as the students of another culture. Therefore, before making any attempt to promote it, students' perceptions related to learner autonomy should be investigated. (Yıldırım, 2008a; Yıldırım, 2008b; Benson, 2001; Cotterall, 1995).

Learner autonomy in English as a foreign language (EFL) education has received great interest from researchers in Europe (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991) and has been further researched and developed by Asian researchers in countries such as Hong Kong (Littlewood, 2007) and Japan (Aoki, 2001). This research recognizes the global trend of an increased approach to learner-centered pedagogy (Benson, 2007).

Since the concept of autonomous learning was introduced into the field of education in 1950's, a wide research at home and abroad has been made in this field. Linguistic scholars began their study on autonomous learning in 1970's, gradually it was accepted that another goal in language learning is to cultivate students' ability of autonomous learning. These researches reflected the transition of teaching emphasis from teacher-centered to students-centered learning. The cause of this transition stemmed from the flaws in traditional teaching methods for instance, those methods couldn't be in accordance with the requirements and learning style of every student, with the consequence that learning became very passive and boring. In order to promote their initiative and creativity, learners must have the ability to manage their learning process, to set a sensible goal, and to evaluate their effectiveness and adjust accordingly. Only under this condition can a learner find different chance of learning, make good use of his (her) time in and outside classroom according to his requirements and style in learning, and finally enhance the ability of language learning. This ability is more important when a learner graduates and enters into society for "learning for lifetime" has become essential for modern personnel.

Learner autonomy has been claimed to be an ultimate goal of education for a long time (Benson, 2001, 2009; Waterhouse, 1990). Particularly in second language learning, the concept has been argued to be very complex (Little, 2003) and socially driven (Smith & Ushioda, 2009). Freedom, choice, and negotiation are often identified as crucial environment factors for learner autonomy development (e. g., Lamb, 2009; Raz, 1986; Sinclair, 2009). Meanwhile, in the context of education in Vietnam generally, students are often described to be passive in class and familiar with rote learning. Teachers are used to dictating the class and do not give students enough opportunities to express themselves. Therefore, this study is to explore possible situational constraints that produce conflicts with the prerequisite notional conditions for learner autonomy. It then proposes suggestions for fostering learner autonomy in the local context to achieve part of the national curriculum objectives and meet the labor market requirements.

This survey was begun with the intent of describing the beliefs of teachers from Vietnamese educational and cultural systems about learner autonomy and practices related to instruction in LLS. This survey project addresses the role of LLS as tools for independent learning in an environment where such learning is necessary for a satisfactory level of progress. The frequency of using LLS has been shown to be positively related to learners' self-efficacy, a construct used to measure the confidence a learner has in approaching language learning tasks (Chamot, Robbins, & El-Dinary, 1993). Teachers of English in Vietnam are well acquainted with the need for greater confidence and autonomy among their students, and have investigated the strategies instruction literature with that in mind. Research on LLS instruction has moved from identifying effective strategies, or what 'good' learners do, to investigating how learners develop their use of strategies and how teachers are finding the means to encourage independent learning along with strategies use. (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1999).

1.2 Aims of the study

The study seeks to investigate the perspectives of teachers and students about ways to encourage learner autonomy in a private university and their perceptions about motivating learners to be autonomous in their learning. In general, the study tries to answer the ensuing research questions:

1. What are teachers' and students' perceptions of learner's autonomy in their context?
2. How is learner autonomy developed in terms of teachers' activities, students' activities, and learning conditions?

1.3 Significance of the study

The findings obtained in this study provide remarkable and valuable information which contributes to the literature and also enhance awareness of learner autonomy. Firstly, the study would support the determination on Learner autonomy which is being used by the students in schools. Secondly, it could encourage the implementation of ways of autonomous learning in classroom frequently and effectively; motivate the students to learn English through autonomous learning. Finally, the findings gained from the study could raise positive effects of learner autonomy in English language study. Therefore, a better use of autonomous learning methods would be considered.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Learner autonomy

The term 'learner autonomy' appeared the first time in the Council of Europe's Modern Language Project in 1979 by Holec. This led to the publication of Holec's 1981 seminal report (Holec, 1981), in which he defined learner autonomy as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (p. 3). In this definition, Holec treated learner autonomy as an attribute of the learner. Following this, various other definitions of learner autonomy have been used. For example, Wenden (1999) indicated the importance of metacognitive awareness when she claimed that true learner autonomy refers to how students reflect on their learning and how they are able to realize when they have effective learning opportunities. In another

example, Littlewood (1996) took the notion of autonomy as ‘learners’ ability and willingness to make choices independently’ (p. 427). The current researcher believes that a different notion of learner autonomy which has both local and universal values is needed. In the current research, learner autonomy is defined as learner’s willingness and ability to take responsibility to plan implement, monitor and evaluate his/her learning in tasks that are constructed in negotiation with support from the teacher. There is a great interdependence between teacher and learners in this definition of learners’ autonomy. The role of the teacher is to give control to their students so that their students can become autonomous.

The early research on language learning strategies carried out by such researchers as Rubin (1975), Stern (1974), and Frolich Naiman Stern and Todesco, (1978) indicated that good learners have an active involvement with language learning, that they have clear ideas about the best ways for them to go about language learning, and that they set up their own learning objectives in addition to the teacher's objectives. Similar findings are discernible from the more recent work in learner strategies undertaken by such researchers as O'Malley et al, and Wenden. Groups like the Center de Recherches et d'Applications Pedagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) at the Universite de Nancy II in France/ and individuals like Ellis and Sinclair (1989), and Dickinson (1987) see language learning best facilitated by the development of greater independence on the part of the learner, involving the learner in accepting a greater share of responsibility for his own learning.

Benson (2006) often considers learner autonomy as a capacity, consisting of two cyclically interrelated elements, namely “behavioral” and “(meta) cognitive” (Horváth, 2005; Rivers, 2001). These two elements allow individuals to initiate, monitor, and regularly evaluate their learning processes (Little, 1990, 2003) with clear objectives and goals set in advance (Purdie, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Learner autonomy is also manifested by learners’ critical reflections on the course they are involved in and their requests for significant changes (Rivers, 2001).

Benson (2006) views learner autonomy as a “situation” where learners are completely responsible for the performance of their learning activities (Dickinson, 1987). It is a resource rich environment that allows one to select what, when and how to learn to achieve their targets (Oxford, 2003; Pennycook, 1997). Most of the studies adopting this perspective have been conducted in self-access learning centers (SLCs), and they have indicated that authentic materials and personalized learning activities can foster learner autonomy (e.g., Brandon, 2003; Riley & Zoppis, 1985). Therefore, these studies have paid significant attention to the preparation and organization of learning activities as well as technical supports and consultation services provided in each learning environment.

Oxford (2003) construes learner autonomy as a socially-shaped variable (Smith & Ushioda, 2009) which is constructed during one’s negotiation with his/her living environment. Being a member of a community, any individual needs to deal with different matters, people, and relationships on a daily basis; and learner autonomy is acquired during the execution of these processes. This argument acknowledges impacts of both personal and situational attributes to the formation and development of learner autonomy. As a result, research adopting this perspective often provides learners with more contextual choices, dialogic negotiation, interactive activities and critical reflection as autonomy promoting practices (e. g., Little, 2009; Miller, 2009; Sinclair, 2009).

Other researchers may not agree with this definition. Peng Dingjin (2002:16), from the perspective of Chinese students’ characteristics, holds that learner autonomy has the following five aspects: “1. Taking responsibility for learning; 2. Having a clear objective; 3. Making schedules; 4. Evaluating the effectiveness of learning; 5. Adjusting learning strategy.”

2.2 Learner autonomy in Vietnam

Much research has been carried out to explore LA in Asian countries such as Hong Kong (Chan, 2001; Chan et al., 2002; Chan, 2003) Thailand (Dickinson, 1996), or Japan (Aoki, 2001; Aoki & Smith, 1999). Research has shown different types of LA demonstrated by learners in various educational settings. Nevertheless, very little has been done in the Vietnamese educational context. So far Lap’s (2005) work has been the only study focusing on LA in Vietnam. For this reason, it would be necessary and interesting to conduct more research which investigates LA in the Vietnamese learning environment.

Despite the lack of empirical research about Vietnamese learners, some strong claims have been made about LA in Vietnam. For example, Lap (2005) states that “the communicative needs of Vietnamese learners of English and the results from the empirical studies revealed that graduates’ communicative competence is far from satisfactory and that they lack learner autonomy” (p.20). Lap (2005) claim seems to resonate with Riley’s (1988) description of Vietnamese learners who “...said nothing, did nothing... didn’t want to know...” (p.14). It will, therefore, be useful to look into the reliability of such claims, and at the same time, help identify ways of promoting LA among Vietnamese learners.

2.3 Assumptions about Learner autonomy

Based on Gibbs’ (1979, p.119) ideas about an autonomous individual having both independences from external authority and mastery of himself and his powers, Boud (1981), within the educational context, indicates that autonomy is used to refer to “the capacity of an individual to be an independent agent, not governed by others” (p.22). He suggests several

working assumptions related to three perspectives: the nature of autonomous learning in higher education, the characteristics of students, and the characteristics of staff. First of all, the following group of assumptions relates to the nature of autonomous learning: Autonomous learning is a goal to be followed, rather than an absolute standard to be satisfied. Directions for students' responsibility are more important than the degree of the change; the goal of developing student autonomy must be explicitly stated and actively pursued; autonomy in learning does not imply students working in isolation from others. Students should be given an opportunity to choose what they want to learn according to their own needs. Developing autonomy does not mean getting rid of structured teaching; the exercise of autonomy operates in every single part of the learning process, including students making decisions about course content, assessment, and objectives. Autonomous learning engages the whole person, not just his/her intellect. What is to be learned should be based on the style and desires of students; in autonomous learning it is important that the goals of learning derive from students' needs and wants; students should be judged and rewarded on a basis which is consistent with the goals.

The second group of assumptions refers to the characteristics of students, including:

Students' prior learning and experience should be exploited. They know best what they need but rely on the teacher's assistance in identifying those needs; regardless of their ages, all students are capable of working individually at different levels and in various situations. They can facilitate and support each other's learning if they are given a chance to work together. The third group of assumptions is concerned with the staff, specifically as follows:

The presence of teachers who play the role of facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge is indispensable; teachers' competence and authority remains essential in the development of learner autonomy. Teachers themselves need to be autonomous in order to function well in their role of facilitators; the development of learner autonomy should be encouraged in every educational institution however the costs are the same as those required by didactic teaching.

2.4 The role of learner autonomy in education

Some salient features of autonomy described by Dearden (1972) include the feeling of satisfaction and the self-concept or feeling of dignity. A person normally wants to choose to perform their actions rather than to undertake them according to the will of others. He achieves the feeling of pride when he sees his own accomplishments. Furthermore, a person exercising autonomy will feel a sense of personal growth which is respected by others. These values are closely related to education. Dearden (1972) also notes that "to become autonomous is not just a purely maturational process, since plainly many do not become so in any significant degree. It is at least in part a learning task set by a particular ideal of human development" (p. 464). Therefore, the exercising of autonomy must be learnt. Within the educational context a person will have an ample opportunity to practice autonomy by exposing himself to learning tasks. Dearden (1975) believes that autonomy is achieved gradually and exercised correspondingly. Another important point in the development of autonomy discussed by Dearden (1972) is self-knowledge which enables a person to master a variety of social interactions, actions, techniques, learning outcomes, and activities. In Dearden's mind (1975), autonomy should be valued in education because it creates a self-determining person who "can achieve command over his desires and emotions, redirecting them towards a more secure, stable and rewarding object" (p.15). Dearden (1972) suggests that to pursue autonomy as an ideal educational aim, knowledge of the methods, curricula, and patterns of organization need to be taken into consideration. However, Dearden (1975) believes that before cultivating autonomy as an educational aim, the criteria for judgement should be selected (p.18).

Seeing theory of autonomy as part of a theory of education, Morgan (1996) makes a claim that "all truly educated people are autonomous (p.251). Morgan (1996) argues that personal autonomy is consistent with all aspects of a person's identity. Choices are not indispensable in autonomy because they occur from a background of values which rule the alternatives and evaluate a person's choices. A person can still be autonomous even when he does not express some aspects of his personality due to social constraints. A person's identity thus cannot be completely a matter of his choice. However, rationality is an essential aspect of a person's identity though it does not govern the nature of the person. Rationality is associated with critical self-reflection which aims to increase and sustain consistency of the self.

2.5. Perspectives of EFL teachers about learner autonomy

2.5.1 Perception of EFL teachers about ways to encourage learner autonomy

Johnson (2006) described teacher cognition as the area of research which has made the most significant contribution in the last 40 years to our understandings of teachers and teaching. It has been a very productive field of research in language teaching since the mid-1990s and this work has established a number of insights about the nature of teachers' perceptions and their role in language teaching and teacher learning which are now widely accepted (for a summary of these insights, see Phipps & Borg, 2009). For the purposes of this study, two particular points are important. First, teachers' perceptions can powerfully shape both what teachers do and, consequently, the learning opportunities learners receive. Therefore, the extent to and manner in which learner autonomy is promoted in language learning classrooms will be influenced by teachers' perceptions about what autonomy actually is, its desirability and feasibility. Second, teacher education is more

likely to have an impact on teachers' practices when it is based on an understanding of the perceptions teachers hold (Borg, 2011). Understanding teachers' perceptions about autonomy is thus an essential element in the design of professional development activities aimed at promoting learner autonomy (one goal of this project, as we describe later, was to design such activities).

Only a few studies addressing language teachers' perceptions about learner autonomy were available when we embarked on this study and we will comment on each of them in turn. Camilleri (1999) presents questionnaire data collected from 328 teachers in six European contexts (Malta, The Netherlands, Belorussia, Poland, Estonia and Slovenia). The instrument used consisted of 13 items each asking about the extent to which learners, according to the teachers, should be involved in decisions about a range of learning activities, such as establishing the objectives of a course or selecting course content. Although this project was supported by the European Centre for Modern Languages, it is unclear what proportion of the participating teachers actually taught languages (some of the Netherlands sample, for example, taught Economics). In terms of the findings, teachers were found to be positive about involving learners in a range of activities, such as deciding on the position of desks, periodically assessing themselves and working out learning procedures. In contrast, teachers were not positive about learner involvement in the selection of textbooks and deciding on the time and place explain when they do not understand. The teachers in this study also assessed their learners positively on all of the indicators of learner autonomy they were presented with, with the three most highly rated being asking the teacher to explain when something is not clear, giving their point of view on topics in the classroom and using the dictionary well. Finally, teachers made several suggestions for promoting learner autonomy; what was interesting about these is that in several cases the connection between the pedagogical activity being proposed and learner autonomy was not evident; for example, teachers suggested that they could use different types of quizzes and challenging tasks, increase learner talking time or reward learners for good performance. Interviews would have been useful in this study to explore the connections that teachers felt there were between such activities and the development of learner autonomy.

The final study we discuss here is Martinez (2008), who examined, using a predominantly qualitative methodology, the subjective theories about learner autonomy of 16 student teachers of French, Italian and Spanish. These students were studying at a university in Germany and were taking a 32-hour course about learner autonomy at the time of the study. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observations during the course; copies of the instruments were, though, not included with the paper and it was not possible therefore to critique or draw on these in our study. Results showed that the student teachers had positive attitudes towards learner autonomy and that these were informed largely by their own experiences as language learners. The conceptions of autonomy held by the student teachers generally reflected the view that (a) it is a new and supposedly better teaching and learning methodology; (b) it is equated with individualization and differentiation; (c) it is an absolute and idealistic concept; (d) it is associated with learning without a teacher. Such perspectives do not align with those currently promoted in the field of language teaching (and actually reflect several of the claims Esch (1998) above made about what learner autonomy is not).

Methodologically, none of the studies of teachers' perceptions about learner autonomy reviewed here provided any firm direction for this project. The sole qualitative study generated interesting findings but did not publish the instruments used. The remaining four studies were based on questionnaires which were rather limited, methodologically; that used in three of the studies seemed particularly prone to generating socially desirable responses rather than insights which reflected teachers' classroom practices (and it did not actually ask any questions about what of lessons. The latter findings are hardly surprising given that many respondents worked in state schools. Camileri Grima (2007) replicated this study with a group of 48 respondents made up of student teachers and practicing teachers of modern languages in Malta. She compared her results to the Malta cohort in the original study and found much similarity both in terms of the positive overall views expressed by teachers as well as in the specific aspects of autonomy they were more and less supportive of. The more recent group of teachers, though, were seen to be more positive than those in the earlier study towards particular aspects of autonomy, such as learners setting their own short-term objectives, their involvement in the selection of materials, and self-assessment.

The instrument from the above studies was used once again by Balçıkanlı (2010) to examine the views about learner autonomy of 112 student teachers of English in Turkey. Additionally, 20 participants were interviewed in focus groups of four teachers each. The results suggested that the student teachers were positively disposed towards learner autonomy. Rather uncritically perhaps, given the limited teaching experience the respondents had and the typically formal nature of state sector schooling in Turkey, the article reports that 'these student teachers felt very comfortable with asking students to make such decisions' (p.98). More realistically, though, the study does conclude by asking about the extent to which respondents' positive theoretical perceptions about promoting learner autonomy would actually translate into classroom practices. This observation reminds us that in using self-report strategies such as questionnaires and interviews to study teachers' perceptions we must always be mindful of the potential gap between perceptions elicited theoretically and teachers' actual classroom practices.

Al-Shaqsi (2009) was another survey of teachers' perceptions about learner autonomy. This was conducted with 120 teachers of English in state schools in Oman. A questionnaire was devised specifically for this study and it asked respondents about (a) the characteristics of autonomous learners (b) their learners' ability to carry out a number of tasks (each of which was assumed to be an indicator of learner autonomy – e.g. deciding when to use a dictionary or identifying their own weaknesses) and (c) how learner autonomy might be promoted. The three characteristics of autonomous learners most often identified by teachers were that they can use computers to find information, use a dictionary and ask the teacher to teachers do. For the purposes of our study, therefore, although we consulted the instruments available, a new questionnaire was developed. Additional sources, such as Benson (2007a), entitled 'Teachers' and learners' perspectives on autonomy' and a collection called 'Learner autonomy: Teacher and learner perspectives' (Benson, 2007b) were also initially consulted but were found to be largely lacking in empirical data about what learner autonomy means to teachers.

2.5.2 Practice of EFL teachers about ways to encourage learner autonomy

Vietnamese students have been traditionally associated with hard-working, and EFL students are not exceptions. In addition, EFL students are often said to be more open than those in other majors because of reading and discussing about the language whose culture is seen to be more relaxing than their own. In other words, they are not totally passive learners, and their identity change may have been promoted through learning activities. Many of them are supposed to be rooted in traditional rote learning methods, but that cannot always stop them from being active and striving for managing their learning processes more effectively. A student who went online only once or twice a week said that he read books and tried the practice tests in these websites. Meanwhile, some of his peers reported that they came to Google or other English learning sites for materials. EFL students nowadays are also perceived to be active by their lecturers. Traditionally, teachers and lecturers alike expected their students to be quiet, listen attentively to the lecture during class time, and take part in drills when asked to; however, EFL lecturers nowadays agree to give their students more opportunities to deal with the language practically. Interactions between students have been more frequently seen in EFL classes. Group presentations and project work have also been employed here and there.

Being strongly considered part of the Eastern culture, the popular philosophy of educational practices in Vietnam is more associated with absorbing and memorizing than experimenting and producing knowledge. Although a lot of investments and efforts (e. g., MOET, 2008; World Bank, 2006) have been made to improve the perspectives of local learners, teachers and stakeholders on learning, classroom practices and students' learning activities have not been identified to change much. Communicative language teaching method and student-centered approach in second language training have not consistently been reported to be effective, given various situational problems such as big-size class, rigorous test-oriented system, and heavy learning workload. Therefore, several teaching practices derived from these "new" methods have not been widely accepted or appropriately implemented. In addition, with the adoption of the centralized mechanism, the national education system prescribes almost all of school operation practices. Both managerial and academic activities such as student recruitment processes, training contents, and testing schemes are monitored. Traditionally, lecturers were not encouraged to diversify their class activities and lead class discussions beyond the textbook scope. Although the system has been more open recently, providing the faculty with opportunities to design part of their own courses in line with the guidelines provided by the educational authority, the course contents are still found unsuitable for students (H. T. Pham & Ngo, 2008). Some lecturers have attempted to take risk, changing the contents of some parts or even the whole lesson to facilitate students' learning although they may never officially declare that. Consequently, students have been indicated to fail to obtain the program.

2.6 Perspectives of EFL students about learner autonomy

2.6.1 Perceptions of EFL students about learner autonomy

Comprehensive discussion by Littlewood (Littlewood: *ibid*) warns against setting up stereotypical notions of 'East Asian learners', which, if misused, may make teachers less rather than more sensitive to the dispositions and needs of individual students. In search of a culture-free-definition, Littlewood claims that there are two important points to review: a) the need to reconcile the ideas about the influence of culture with recognition of individual difference, and b) the danger of communicating the implicit assumption that particular forms of autonomy associated with language teaching in the West must of necessity also be appropriate within East Asian contexts. In order for Asian learner autonomy to be precisely observed, he tries to set up a broader framework, suitable for both East Asian contexts and contexts beyond East Asia.

First, he considers autonomy as self-regulation, before moving on to divide the concept of autonomy into two levels of self-regulation 1) proactive autonomy, and 2) reactive autonomy. Littlewood claims that proactive autonomy is the form of autonomy that is usually intended when the concept is discussed in the West. The key words are action-words: learners are able to take charge of their own learning, determine their objectives, select methods and techniques, and evaluate what has been acquired. In this way, they establish a personal agenda for learning which affirms their individuality and sets up directions in the world which they themselves have partially created. For many writers, proactive autonomy is the only kind of autonomy that counts.

A second kind of autonomy may be seen as a preliminary step towards the first (proactive autonomy), or as a goal in its own right. This is the kind of autonomy which does not create its own directions, but rather enables learners to organize their resources autonomously in order to reach their goal once a direction has already been initiated for them. Examples of this would be stimulating learners to learn vocabulary without being pushed, learners going over past examinations on their own initiative, or organizing themselves into groups in order to cover the reading for a particular assignment.

In Littlewood's study (2002), these ten predictions about East Asian students were used as the basis for a ten-item questionnaire given to 50 first-year tertiary-level students learning in Hong Kong. In his discussion of the findings, Littlewood pointed out several implications as follows. The results are often contrary to what commonly-expressed cultural generalizations might lead us to expect and reinforce the message that we should be skeptical of generalizations about how 'East Asian learners' perceive their classroom world. Interestingly, the same kind of questionnaire was conducted for European EFL learners, and the results did not show any significant difference in his follow-up studies. There is a wide range of individual variation in the statements. Thus, stereotypes distort reality and cannot serve as a firm basis for organizing a learner-oriented pedagogy.

2.6.2 Practice of EFL students about learner autonomy

Self-access language learning centres are established to enhance individualization and learner independence (Sheerin, 1997). In terms of individualization, these centres can cater for learners' different needs, interests, and learning styles. Regarding learner independence, self-access learning centres encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning. However, self-access centres do not automatically yield independent learning. They remain a practical tool to achieve independent learning provided learner training, learner development activities, and constant teacher support are available (Sheerin, 1997; Sturtridge, 1997).

Self-access language learning centres are subject to criticism for their organization and activities in use. Little John (1997) criticizes self-access centres for inhibit in learners' creativity. The tasks and activity types that learners perform at self-access language centres engage them in reproductive language use which is limited to the tasks rather than in creative language use. Littlejohn (1997) argues that in order to provide more opportunities for LA, language use, and learning there should be a reorientation in task and activity types. The learners should be encouraged to perform more active and creative roles rather than responsive and reproductive ones by being provided with open-ended tasks and activities. Additionally, roles at self-access centres should be redefined. Learners are expected to participate in joint decision making, and to shift their role from consumers of self-access centres to that of the producers. This can be carried out by asking learners to give feedback and evaluation of the tasks and activities and by asking them to produce their own tasks and activities.

To foster independent learning through self-access centres, Sheerin (1997) suggests that learners need preparation and training in how to increase awareness of them and to manage their own learning. She makes two recommendations about materials and the role of teachers. The materials should be easily accessible and encourage learners' feedback. Teachers should support learners in setting objectives based on the analysis and re-analysis of their needs, and in evaluating their progress. To create a supportive environment within self-access centres is a recommendation made by Esch (1996). She works out the following five criteria: providing learners with genuine choices on the mode of learning, the time, the materials, the activities, and the kind of evaluation for their learning; developing a flexible structure which allows learners to self-repair or change their options; adjusting and responding to learning plans and strategies; encouraging learners to reflect on their learning experience through a learning advisory service; providing learners with an opportunity to work together and share activities and problems with one another.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research aim

The main purpose of the research is to address the perspectives of teachers and students about ways to encourage learner autonomy in a private university and their perceptions about motivating learners to be autonomous in their learning.

3.2 Research question

The following questions were addressed in the study:

1. What are teachers' and students' perceptions of learner's autonomy in their context?
2. How is learner autonomy developed in terms of teachers' activities, students' activities, and learning conditions?

3.3 Research Design

This study is designed as a descriptive one. The major approach is a mix of quantitative and qualitative. The research is carried out in a private university in Mekong Delta. There are 40 teachers of English and 60 second-year students chosen in the study.

3.4 Participant

The participants are 40 teachers of English who have taught English for over 5 years in universities and colleges, and 60 non-English major students in one class at a university in the Mekong Delta region. Their major is in business administration. These students started learning their three sections of general English in the first three semesters of the academic year 2013-2014. All the students of the class were engaged in this study. Their average age was ranged from 19 to 21. They all studied English at high school and have to study English in three semesters at the university. This research was conducted in 12 weeks during the second term of the school year 2013-2014. The researcher is the teacher who taught students general English in classroom at that time.

3.5 Instrument

The instruments include questionnaire (for students and teachers) and the interview for teachers helped collect quantitative data. Each of these instruments was used at different phases of the study and for different purposes. The questionnaire for teachers and students were taken at the middle of the course in order to collect the perceptions as well as their attitudes toward learner autonomy in many ways. Then the interview was delivered a week after the course to investigate the teachers' viewpoints towards the autonomous learning. It was used to measure teachers' perception of learner autonomy in more detail.

Different data sources and analyses from these instruments could result in a reasonable measure of reliability in the findings. These research instruments will be described in detail in the following parts.

3.5.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administrated to provide more reliable information. In the study, questionnaire was applied for collecting data on students' attitudes towards learner autonomy in English with a 5-point Likert scale: (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neutral, (2) disagree, and (1) strongly disagree. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) stated that surveys are used so frequently in education and others fields "because accurate information can be obtained for large numbers of people with a small sample". The reason for using this questionnaire as one of the instruments for data collection was that it allowed for collection of significant amounts of data economically and efficiently. At the same time, the questionnaire was a kind of controlled format in which all respondents were asked the same questions and were exposed to the same response options. In this study, there were two types of questionnaire: one for students (the questionnaire on learner autonomy from perspectives of EFL students) and one for teachers (the questionnaire on learner autonomy from perspectives of EFL teachers). There were totally 25 items in each type of questionnaire. The items for students measured four aspects such as (1) Outside classroom learner autonomy, (2) Inside classroom learner autonomy, (3) The benefits of learner autonomy, (4) Learner autonomy might be promoted. The items for teachers measured five aspects such as (1) The definitions of learner autonomy, (2) The role of teacher in learning autonomy, (3) What teachers do to promote learning autonomy, (4) What students do to promote learning autonomy and (5) Conditions for developing learning autonomy. Then the questionnaire items were translated into the participants' native language, Vietnamese, in order for them to complete the questionnaire at ease. The translation was then examined by three English language teachers and later revised for clarity of the questions asked. The data could be statistically analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 16.0.

The organization of the questionnaire is briefly described in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2

Table 3.1: Clustering the questionnaires for students

	Name of cluster	Question
1	Outside classroom learner autonomy	Q1, Q13, Q15, Q18, Q25
2	Inside classroom learner autonomy	Q2, Q3, Q7, Q8, Q12, Q17, Q20, Q21
3	The benefits of learner autonomy	Q4, Q6, Q9, Q11, Q22
4	Learner autonomy might be promoted	Q5, Q14, Q16, Q19, Q23, Q24

Table 3.2: Clustering the questionnaires for teachers

	Name of cluster	Question
1	The definitions of learner autonomy	Q3, Q18, Q24
2	The role of teacher in learning autonomy	Q14, Q19, Q23, Q25
3	What teachers do to promote learning autonomy	Q4, Q7, Q9, Q11, Q13, Q17, Q22
4	What students do to promote learning autonomy	Q5, Q8, Q12, Q15, Q16, Q21
5	Conditions for developing learning autonomy	Q1, Q2, Q6, Q10, Q20

3.5.2 Interview

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview conducted to acquire the teachers' opinion on the learner autonomy of EFL students. The interview included five questions seeking for (1) the benefits of being autonomous in learning; (2) the factors that affect to self-study; (3) teacher's role in learner autonomy; (4) the ways teachers assess autonomous learning and (5) teacher's suggestion to learners of English who are not autonomous in learning. The interview questions were translated into Vietnamese in order for the interviewees to feel convenient and self-confident in providing as much information as possible. The translation was done with the help of two experienced English teachers. These interviewing questions could be seen at the appendice part.

3.6 Materials

The materials were drawn from different sources. The main textbook used for the program was *General English level 1, General English level 2* which composed by Faculty of Linguistics and Literature of a private university. *General English level 1&2* student's book was used as the course book for non-English majored students. The book consisted of 4 parts such as (A) Everyday conversation, (B) Grammar, (C) Reading, and (D) Writing. The book had 7 lessons for skill development. Students had to learn this entire book in the second semester. Besides, the printed papers used for questionnaires and interview are also some kinds of the study's materials. In addition, the articles and other online resources on the Internet also used in order to do this research.

3.7 The pilot study

Piloting the questionnaire for teachers

There were 40 teachers who teach in the same school. They had the same level of English proficiency as masters of TESOL are given the questionnaires on teacher's perception about learner autonomy. This meant to check the questionnaire's reliability before it was used to collect the data.

Piloting the questionnaire for students

There were 60 students who had the same level of English proficiency with the participants in the main study are given the questionnaires on student's perception about learner autonomy. This meant to check the questionnaire's reliability before it was used to collect the data.

Results of the pilot study

The researcher used the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 to calculate the reliability and validity of questionnaires. Firstly, the computed result showed that the questionnaire on teacher's perception about learner autonomy could be used in the study their internal consistency Cronback were 0.79. Secondly, the reliability of the questionnaire on student's perception about learner autonomy was proven to be acceptable for collecting data of the study with its internal consistency Cronback was 0.80.

3.8 Procedures

First of all, the researcher asked the participants (students) to give their ideas about learner autonomy in learning English at the beginning of the semester. Next, before administrating the questionnaires and interview, the participants (teachers) of the study were asked to make their observation to students' behaviors concerning ton learning autonomy inside and outside classroom. The observation took about 10 weeks during the semester. What teachers observed from students' behaviors about learner autonomy helped them answer the interview questions later. The questionnaires and interview were developed

by the researcher depending on the study's objectives. After 10 weeks for teaching and observing students, the questionnaire and interview for teachers were administered to get deep information about learner autonomy from teachers' viewpoints.

Each class meeting was carried out two hours a week. The semester lasted for 12 weeks. The first week was devoted to the administering of questionnaire on students' perceptions of learner autonomy. The observation of students' behaviours about learner autonomy started in the second week as an orientation session so that the teachers had much information for completing the interview at the end of the semester. From week 11 to week 12, the interview was administered to the teachers.

Apart from the quantitative data obtained from the sample tests and pilot questionnaires, qualitative data was also collected for data analysis. The questionnaire items included in the guideline mainly concern the teachers' and students' perceptions of learner autonomy.

Table 3.3: Time of research activities

Time	Research activities
Week 1	Questionnaire for the participants (students)
From week 2 to week 10	Teaching and making observation to students' behaviors relating to learner autonomy inside and outside classroom (teachers)
Week 11	Questionnaire for the participants (teachers)
Week 12	Interview for the participants (teachers)

Administering the questionnaire. To ensure the willingness in the study, the researcher asked the students and teachers whether they would like to join the study. Before the questionnaires were conducted, the researcher had explained to the participants the intention study. Then, the researcher also explained the tasks they would be required to perform. However, the participants were not informed that how many people and who would be given the questionnaires with the same format in order to ensure that the participants would not try to copy or memorize the questionnaire items during the time for collecting data. Next, to ensure the participants' full comprehension of the instructions, the researcher explained the instructions in Vietnamese. For questionnaires, the participants were given one week to complete them.

Administering the interview. After completing the questionnaire teacher's perception about learner autonomy, the interview was given to 20 participants chosen from 40 teachers in the study. This activity was conducted in a classroom after the teachers had completed their teaching course in class and had finished their questionnaire. The researcher informed to participants about the purpose of the interview and asked them to read the questions carefully and responsibility. The participants were also reminded that their responses were to refer only to the teacher's perception about learner autonomy in learning English inside and outside the classroom. The participants were encouraged to choose their answers honestly and they also asked about any questions they did not understand clearly.

Summary of research methodology

This part mentions the research methodology consisting of research design, participants, instruments, procedure, materials used for the research and the description of how to conduct the questionnaire and interview to participants. The results that were obtained from the analysis of the data will be reported and summarized in the next part.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Questionnaire on students' viewpoints toward LA

The statistical analyses of the questionnaires were aimed to answer the research question 1. Students' perception of learner autonomy was measured by the Questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha formula was used to determine the internal reliability of the collective pool of the 25 items in the questionnaire. The reliability coefficients for the total 25-item questionnaire

reached 0.802. The mean score for the composite questionnaire items was 3.00 on a 5-point Likert scale. These findings demonstrated that, overall, students had a favorable perception of LA. Students’ responses to the questions such as positive perception, even though some disadvantages of LA were mentioned. Disadvantages included frustration in dealing with too much unfamiliar vocabulary on the Internet, confusion in selecting and synthesizing relevant information for the classroom tasks, difficulty in working with group members for collaborative presentation, and how to do homework effectively when being alone or get together.

The questionnaire consisted of 25 items which focused on 5 aspects: (1) Outside classroom learner autonomy (Q1, Q13, Q15, Q18, Q25), (2) Inside classroom learner autonomy (Q2, Q3, Q7, Q8, Q12, Q17, Q20, Q21), (3) The benefits of learner autonomy (Q4, Q6, Q9, Q11, Q22), and (4) Learner autonomy might be promoted (Q5, Q14, Q16, Q19, Q23, Q24). It was rated by scale with five levels: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The reliability of the questionnaire is .802.

The mean score for the questionnaire items showed that the students had a positive attitude towards the use of WebQuests in teaching and learning reading in general (M=3.37, SD=.406), t=7.106, p=.00 as in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2.

Table 4.1: Mean score for students’ perceptions on learner autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mean	60	3.3733	.40697	.05254

Table 4.2: One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3						
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Mean	7.106	59	.000	.37333	.2682	.4785

The descriptive statistics of students’ attitudes toward LA for the overall 25 items were presented in Table 8. The item Q21 “I learn best in class when I participate in related activities” had the highest means of all (M=4.05). Meanwhile, item Q9 “When I study alone, I remember nothing” was the least valued with the mean (M=2.50). To some extent, the results indicated that students had positive perceptions about LA in teaching English in classroom. The specific facts for each aspect will be reported in the following parts.

Table 4.3: Students’ attitudes toward learner autonomy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
q1	60	2	5	3.75	.914
q2	60	1	5	3.37	.882
q3	60	1	5	3.03	.780
q4	60	1	5	2.90	.858
q5	60	2	5	3.37	.938
q6	60	2	5	3.40	.694
q7	60	1	5	3.38	.940
q8	60	1	5	3.57	.909
q9	60	1	5	2.50	1.112
q10	60	1	5	2.73	1.071
q11	60	1	5	3.47	1.186

q12	60	1	5	2.82	.965
q13	60	2	5	3.47	.947
q14	60	1	5	3.48	1.000
q15	60	1	5	3.83	1.137
q16	60	1	5	3.28	.976
q17	60	1	5	3.15	1.117
q18	60	1	5	3.40	1.012
q19	60	1	5	4.02	.873
q20	60	1	5	3.30	.962
q21	60	1	5	4.05	.946
q22	60	1	5	3.78	1.136
q23	60	1	5	3.47	.965
q24	60	1	5	3.53	1.016
q25	60	2	5	3.28	.885
Valid N (listwise)	60				

4.1.1.1 Outside classroom learner autonomy

The information about students’ evaluation about LA, shown in table 9 and 10, was identified by five variables (Q1, Q13, Q15, Q18 and Q25). The means of these items were ranged from 3.28 to 3.83. Their average mean was 3.54 (SD=.595). The item Q15 “I enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates” was ranked the highest mean of all. The second ranks were item Q1 “I like activities where I am part of a group which is working toward common goals”. But the item Q18 “I make good use of my free time in English study” had the lowest mean in this category. The results showed that the participants made positive comments on learner autonomy in learning English outside the classroom, especially in working in group of two or three to do assignment. In generally, they seemed to have good evaluation about learner autonomy outside classroom.

Table 4.4: Mean score for students’ viewpoints about learner autonomy outside classroom

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster1	60	3.5467	.59588	.07693

Table 4.5: One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
meancluster1	7.106	59	.000	.54667	.3927	.7006

4.1.1.2 Inside classroom learner autonomy

Shown in table 9 and 10 was the information about inside classroom learner autonomy identified by eight items (Q2, Q3, Q7, Q8, Q12, Q17, Q20 and Q21). The means of these items were ranged from 2.82 to 4.05. Their average mean was 3.33 (SD=.447). The item Q21 “I learn best in class when I participate in related activities” was ranked the highest mean of all.

The second rank was item Q8 “In the classroom I feel very concerned to perform well and correctly in what I do”. But the item Q12 “I understand things better in class when I participate in role-playing” had the lowest mean in this category. The results showed that most participants made positive comments on learner autonomy in learning English inside the classroom, except for learner autonomy by role-playing. In generally, they seemed to have good evaluation about learner autonomy outside classroom.

Table 4.6: Mean score for students’ viewpoints about LA inside classroom

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster2	60	3.3333	.44784	.05782

Table 4.7: One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
meancluster2	5.765	59	.000	.33333	.2176	.4490

4.1.1.3 The benefits of learning autonomy

The information about the benefits of learner autonomy, shown in table 9 and 10, was identified by six items (Q4, Q6, Q9, Q11 and Q22). The means of these items were ranged from 2.50 to 3.78. Their average mean was 3.21 (SD=.589). The item Q22 “I get more work done when I work with other students” was ranked the highest mean of all. The second rank was item Q11 “I feel strong motivation to follow through learning tasks of which I perceive the practical value”. But the items Q9 “When I study alone, I remember nothing” had the lowest mean in this category. The results showed that the participants made positive comments on LA in learning English in the case of studying with other people beside classroom instructions. In generally, they seemed to have good evaluation about the benefits of learner autonomy.

Table 4.8: Mean score for students’ viewpoints about benefits of learner autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster3	60	3.2100	.58966	.07612

Table 4.9: One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
meancluster3	2.759	59	.008	.21000	.0577	.3623

4.1.1.4 Learner autonomy might be promoted

The information about Learner autonomy might be promoted, shown in table 9 and 10, was identified by six variables (Q5, Q14, Q16, Q19, Q23, Q24). The means of these items were ranged from 3.28 to 4.02. Their average mean was 3.52 (SD=.494). The item Q19 “I expect the teacher (rather than me myself) to be responsible for evaluating how much I have learnt” was ranked the highest mean of all. The second ranks were item Q24 “I practise using English with friends”. But the item Q16 “I keep a record of my study, such as keeping a diary, writing review etc” had the lowest mean in this category. The results showed that the participants did not totally make positive comments on LA, especially in what LA being promoted.

Table 4.10: Mean score for students’ viewpoints about promoting learner autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster4	60	3.5250	.49463	.06386

Table 4.11: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
meancluster4	8.222	59	.000	.52500	.3972	.6528

4.1.2 Questionnaire on teachers’ viewpoint toward learner autonomy

Teachers’ perception of the LA was also measured by the Questionnaire. Cronbach’s alpha formula was used to determine the internal reliability of the collective pool of the 25 items in the questionnaire. The reliability coefficients for the total 25-item questionnaire reached 0.798. The mean score for the composite questionnaire items was 3.00 on a 5-point Likert scale. These findings demonstrated that, overall, students had a favorable perception of learner autonomy. Teachers’ responses to the questions such as positive perception, even though some disadvantages of learner autonomy were mentioned. Disadvantages included spending much time focusing on learners’ interests and needs, confusion in selecting and synthesizing relevant information for the tasks, difficulty in working with group members for collaborative reading, and access failure or slow access to some of the Web materials.

The questionnaire consisted of 25 items which focused on 5 aspects: (1) The definitions of learner autonomy (Q3, Q18, Q24), (2) The role of teacher in learning autonomy (Q14, Q19, Q23, Q25), (3) What teachers do to promote learning autonomy (Q4, Q7, Q9, Q11, Q13, Q17, Q22), (4) What students do to promote learning autonomy (Q5, Q8, Q12, Q15, Q16, Q21) and (5) Conditions for developing learning autonomy (Q1, Q2, Q6, Q10, Q20). It was rated by scale with five levels: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The reliability of the questionnaire is .798.

The mean score for the questionnaire items showed that the teachers had a positive attitude towards the use of learner autonomy in teaching and learning in general (M=3.72, SD=.214), t=21.452, p=.00 as in Table 4.12 and Table 4.13.

Table 4.12: Mean score for teachers’ perspectives toward learner autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
mean	40	3.7270	.21433	.03389

Table 4.13: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
mean	21.452	39	.000	.72700	.6585	.7955

The descriptive statistics of teachers’ attitudes toward learner autonomy for the overall 25 items were presented in Table 4.14 The item Q8 “Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy” had the highest means of all (M=4.30). Meanwhile, item Q23 “Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.” was the least valued with the mean (M=2.03). To some extent, the results indicated that most teachers had positive perceptions about the use of LA, especially LA in group work activities in classroom. The specific facts for each aspect will be reported in the following parts.

Table 4.14: Teachers’ perceptions toward learner autonomy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
q1	40	3	5	4.10	.632
q2	40	3	5	4.12	.607

q3	40	3	5	3.90	.744
q4	40	2	5	3.90	.709
q5	40	3	5	4.12	.648
q6	40	1	4	2.60	.810
q7	40	2	5	4.10	.810
q8	40	3	5	4.30	.608
q9	40	3	5	3.90	.744
q10	40	3	5	4.12	.563
q11	40	2	5	4.03	.800
q12	40	2	5	3.78	.947
q13	40	1	5	2.92	1.269
q14	40	2	5	3.78	.891
q15	40	1	5	2.57	1.174
q16	40	3	5	4.22	.733
q17	40	1	5	3.75	.954
q18	40	1	5	2.43	1.174
q19	40	3	5	3.82	.675
q20	40	1	5	3.93	.764
q21	40	3	5	4.20	.791
q22	40	2	5	4.22	.800
q23	40	1	5	2.03	1.121
q24	40	3	5	4.13	.648
q25	40	3	5	4.20	.564
Valid N (listwise)	40				

4.1.2.1 The definitions of learner autonomy

The information about teachers' evaluation about learner autonomy, shown in Table 4.15 and Table 4.16, was identified by three variables (Q3, Q18 and Q24). The means of these items were ranged from 2.43 to 4.13. Their average mean was 4.07 (SD=.374). The item Q24 "Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching" was ranked the highest mean of all. The second ranks were item Q3 "Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn". But the item Q18 "Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher" had the lowest mean in this category. The results showed that the participants made positive thoughts on learner autonomy. In generally, they seemed to have good evaluation about the effect of learner autonomy in teaching English.

Table 4.15: Teachers' definitions about learner autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster1	40	4.0700	.37499	.05929

Table 4.16: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
meancluster1	18.047	39	.000	1.07000	.9501	1.1899

4.1.2.2 The role of teacher in learning autonomy

In table 4.17 and 4.18, the role of teacher in learning autonomy were identified by the items Q14, Q19, Q23 and Q25. The means of these items were ranged from 2.03 to 4.20. Their average mean was 3.89 (SD=.388).

Most the items of this category had the means which were above 3.00. The most valued item was Q25 “The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy” (M=4.20). It meant that the teachers considered their roles very important in supporting students in LA. Besides, the one of the two highest means Q5 “Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher” (M=3.82) showed that without the help of teachers, students found it very difficult to develop their learner autonomy. Moreover, the item Q23 “Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms” was the least valued with the mean (M=2.03) which strongly indicated that traditional classrooms (teacher-centred classrooms) cannot help their learner autonomy be promoted.

Table 4.17: The role of teacher in learning autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster2	40	3.8964	.38819	.06138

Table 4.18: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
meancluster2	14.605	39	.000	.89643	.7723	1.0206

4.1.2.3 What teachers do to promote learning autonomy

The category consists of seven items (Q4, Q7, Q9, Q11, Q13, Q17, Q22) which mentioned about What teachers should do to enhance learning autonomy of learners in university. The mean of this category was 2.63 (SD=.792, t=2.943, p=.005) which was below the test value 3.00. These items were designed to investigate the teachers’ self-evaluation of their difficulties in promoting learning autonomy. The mean indicated that there were a great percentage of teachers who did not admit the ways to promote students’ learner autonomy. For example, the item Q13 “Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy” had the lowest mean of all (M=2.92). This fact strengthened that there were difficulties in giving tasks to students for applying LA in the classroom. In other words, not many teachers agreed with some solutions for developing learner autonomy.

Table 4.19: Teachers’ perceptions of promoting learning autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster3	40	2.6312	.79257	.12532

Table 4.20: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
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	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
meancluster3	2.943	39	.005	.36875	.1153	.6222

4.1.2.4 What students do to promote learning autonomy

The category named students’ opinions about promoting their LA had six items which revealed more clearly about students’ thoughts of learner autonomy inside and outside classroom (Q5, Q8, Q12, Q15, Q16, Q21). Table 4.21 presented the mean of this category (M=3.80). Most of these items had positive viewpoints about LA and its convenience. For example, the most valued item was Q8 “Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy” (M=4.30) which emphasized the importance of co-operative group work which helps students develop their LA. In addition, students also gave out their feelings through the item Q12 “Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy” (M=3.78), Q16 “To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning” (M=4.22) and the item Q21 “The ability to monitor one’s learning is central to learner autonomy” (M=4.20). It seemed that the students liked to do tasks by themselves inside and outside the classes for promoting their learner autonomy. Moreover, the other item Q15 showed the negative opinion “Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy”. Therefore, its mean score (M=2.57) was the least valued one of the group items. In fact, this indicated that some students nearly disagreed with the idea “Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy”. In other words, library is not an ideal place for students to enhance their learner autonomy.

Table 4.21: Students’ activities about promoting learner autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster4	40	3.8000	.34010	.05377

Table 4.22: One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
meancluster4	14.877	39	.000	.80000	.6912	.9088

4.1.2.5 Conditions for developing learning autonomy

These items Q1, Q2, Q6, Q10 and Q20 which had the mean score 4.075, $t=15.120$, $p=.00$ were in the category “Conditions for developing learning autonomy”. With the mean score 4.075, it confirmed that teachers paid much attention toward some specific conditions for developing learner autonomy. The item Q2 (M=3.90) said that Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated while the Q6 raised the idea “Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence”. Moreover, the item Q10 “Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other” and item Q1 “Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy” were considered a conclusion of students after they had known and understood well about the learner autonomy. These above items insisted the preference of teachers toward learner autonomy in learning English in university.

Table 4.23: Teachers’ perception about conditions for developing learner autonomy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
meancluster5	40	4.0750	.44968	.07110

Table 4.24 One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3						
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	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
meancluster5	15.120	39	.000	1.07500	.9312	1.2188

In short, the results obtained from the questionnaire analysis provided insights into the participants' perception of learner autonomy in teaching English as foreign language in universities, its effects on learners' learning ability, the difficulties and benefits of learner autonomy inside and outside the classes.

The responses to the questionnaire survey prove that the teachers not only significantly believed in learner autonomy but also had positive attitude towards the ways to improve and enhance learner autonomy in teaching English.

4.1.3 Results from the interview

Perspectives from the participants involved in the study towards the learner autonomy were also collected by a semi-structured interview which was conducted on six participants who are the most experienced teachers at a private university. These participants were randomly appointed pseudo-names for the interviewed citation as teacher A, B, C, D, E and F.

4.1.3.1 Students' proficiency gained from autonomy in learning

The teachers were asked if their students gained higher proficiency from autonomous in learning English. Generally, these participants' reaction was positive. Six of six teacher agreed that the students in would have higher proficiencie when they got more and more autonomous in learning English. The reasons for their preferences were almost similar to some ideas of the teachers and students had been analyzed from the questionnaires before. That was to say, thanks to learner autonomy, they could gain much more knowledge about English vocabulary, grammar uses and also necessary expressions. In short, participants admitted that students would develop their proficiency through process of learner autonomy.

4.1.3.2 Factors affecting self-study

The participants were questioned about what factors that affected their students' self-study. These kinds of factor were listed in the teachers' answers helped them have a deep thought as well as adjusted their teaching process inside and outside classrooms. Commonly, these following factors were generally stated from the participants' responses: Learning environment, students' personality, classroom facilities, motivation, methods and instructions from the teachers, time management and coursebook.

4.1.3.3 Teacher's role in student's learner autonomy

Participants also provided responses for the question about what teacher's role in students autonomous learning. Most participants indicated an agreement that teacher's role in student's learner autonomy was very significant and could enable students to learn better. When being asked what role of teachers in the process of student's learner autonomy, teacher A specified that:

The teachers play an important role in this issue. First, they should tell students benefits of self-learning. Then, they have to guide students how to conduct effective self-learning. They also need to encourage their students regularly and finally check and give feedback to the result of the student's self-learning.

(Extract from teacher A)

At the meantime, teacher D reported that:

Teachers should be a good instructor, undstanding student's ability so that they give their students suitable tasks to do. Teachers should teach them necessary knowledge which helps them have enough ability to self-study.

(Extract from teacher D)

With teacher's role in such learning, teacher F gave her idea which was also remarkable:

It depends on the student's current proficiency. If the student's command of English is low, it is very important for the teachers to provide detailed instructions for the students to be able to work at home by himself/herself. Otherwise, he/she can get lost and feel discouraged. For students whose level of English is higher, the teachers should provide them with some suggested resources to work with and also five them independence for self-discovery.

(Extract from teacher F)

Other participants only listed the teacher's role in learner autonomy specifically such as an instructor, a facilitator, guider, prompter, supporter and an advisor.

The role of the teacher in such learning should be the instructors (the guiders).

(Extract from teacher C)

4.1.3.4 The ways teachers assess whether students are autonomous or not

When being asked about their opinion towards the assessment to know whether the learners are autonomous or not, one of the participants reported that the teachers can assess the learners are autonomous through their thoughts, their presentations, the ways of the learners solve the problem and their study results. In other words, that teacher demonstrated a precise understanding on what activities of learner autonomy are.

They often question their teachers. The questions are often very profound or go beyond the lessons in the classroom. Moreover, they can digest or understand the lessons easier and more quickly than the others. Basing on these facts can help the teachers know whether the students are autonomous or not.

(Extract from teacher A)

The other participants possessed similar point of view towards the learner autonomy. They indicated that some of the strategies were easy to understand and apply in assessment the learner's autonomous learning; however, there remained several strategies which could make them a bit confused. Nonetheless, the participants reflected a positive viewpoint that they could manage to understand the confusing strategies. One of these participants explained:

By providing them more exercises on each lesson, giving the plan of the course in the course outline at the beginning of the term, asking them to submit their homework through mails, encouraging them to show their difficulties in LA so that I can help them to adjust their way in self-study immediately.

(Extract from teacher B)

Being different from the abovementioned students, one of the participants found it difficult to assess such learning.

It is not easy to make such kind of assessment. Anyway, self-study can be shown through note-taking and progress in performance.

(Extract from teacher F)

4.1.3.5 Teacher's suggestions for non-autonomous learners

The participants were also asked to give their suggestions or what strategies they used during their teaching process to help students who were not autonomous became more and more independent in learning. Most of the participants revealed a noticeable fact that they felt confident and motivated regarding using their strategies or solutions in their teaching. These teachers expressed a fact that students should not depend much upon the teachers and classroom lectures. They believed that learners would be more autonomous by their own activities' management inside and outside classroom.

I think the learners should not depend upon the teachers and the classroom lectures. The learners should train self-study ability by set up the clear goals, study in group, get information and knowledge via computer and Internet.

(Extract from teacher C)

The other participant gave her idea:

First, we must encourage them to study more at home, tell them the benefits of doing so. We may set a rule, a reward or a punishment to motivate them. Moreover, we should also design good lessons so that they can help to compensate the knowledge that the students have got as for self-learning.

(Extract from teacher A)

They need to know how to take notes effectively and if they really want to get ahead in their study, they need to spare time for self-study and exploration at home.

(Extract from teacher E)

In short, the results from the interview data revealed that most of the participants appreciated the benefits of learner autonomy in teaching and learning English at universities. Therefore, they expressed positive attitudes towards the ways for

self-study or the solutions for developing learner autonomy inside and outside classroom. In addition, most of these participants reported their own experiences toward learner autonomy which was considered an useful way for students improving and enhancing their study. However, as to the problem met by most participants, learner autonomy time was hoped to be taken into consideration.

4.2 Summary

Generally, this part provides the results collected from the research instruments. The results from the questionnaires were analyzed and discussed to investigate the perspectives of teachers and student about learner autonomy in teaching and learning English at universities. Similarly, the part continues with the analysis and discussion of the semi-structured interview in order to identify the opinions, the difference, if existed, in teacher's solutions of learner autonomy. Finally, data from these above is also addressed to see the attitudes of the participants held towards the learner autonomy in classroom or out of the classes.

4.3 Discussions

In investigating the effects of learner autonomy in teaching and learning English for students at a university in the Mekong Delta region, this research found that the perspectives of the participants were positive in common. However, the strongly significance was that the study helped the researcher have a deep understanding about learner autonomy in teaching and learning English as well as some solutions for enhancing learner autonomy.

Improvement in students' self-study could be due to the practice of the present Vietnamese educational environment which played an important role in the teaching and learning process.

Being strongly considered part of the Eastern culture, the popular philosophy of educational practices in Vietnam is more associated with absorbing and memorizing than experimenting and producing knowledge. Although a lot of investments and efforts (e. g., MOET, 2008; World Bank, 2006) have been made to improve the perspectives of local learners, teachers and stakeholders on learning, classroom practices and students' learning activities have not been identified to change much. Communicative language teaching method and student-centered approach in second language training have not consistently been reported to be effective, given various situational problems such as big-size class, rigorous test-oriented system, and heavy learning workload. Therefore, several teaching practices derived from these "new" methods have not been widely accepted or appropriately implemented.

In addition, with the adoption of the centralized mechanism, the national education system prescribes almost all of school operation practices. Both managerial and academic activities such as student recruitment processes, training contents, and testing schemes are monitored. Traditionally, lecturers were not encouraged to diversify their class activities and lead class discussions beyond the textbook scope. Although the system has been more open recently, providing the faculty with opportunities to design part of their own courses in line with the guidelines provided by the educational authority, the course contents are still found unsuitable for students (H. T. Pham & Ngo, 2008). Some lecturers have attempted to take risk, changing the contents of some parts or even the whole lesson to facilitate students' learning although they may never officially declare that. Consequently, students have been indicated to fail to obtain the program objectives (for more details, see Hoang, 2008; P. Nguyen, 2008; Thanh, 2008).

Besides, Vietnamese students have been traditionally associated with hard-working, and EFL students are not exceptions. In addition, EFL students are often said to be more open than those in other majors because of reading and discussing about the language whose culture is seen to be more relaxing than their own. In other words, they are not totally passive learners, and their identity change may have been promoted through learning activities. Many of them are supposed to be rooted in traditional rote learning methods, but that cannot always stop them from being active and striving for managing their learning processes more effectively. A student who went online only once or twice a week said that he read books and tried the practice tests in there. Meanwhile, some of his peers reported that they came to Google or other English learning sites for materials.

EFL students nowadays are also perceived to be active by their lecturers. Traditionally, teachers and lecturers alike expected their students to be quiet, listen attentively to the lecture during class time, and take part in drills when asked to; however, EFL lecturers nowadays agree to give their students more opportunities to deal with the language practically. Interactions between students have been more frequently seen in EFL classes. Group presentations and project work have also been employed here and there.

Coordinating attributes from the three dimensions of the framework effectively plays a significant role in promoting learner autonomy. In a situation of limited resource options at a school library as such, some students opt to internet resources while others have to end up with no reference materials or those that are not of their interest. In addition, if their teachers' class activities require work beyond the materials available to them, they may be suffered from frustration. Therefore, the lecturers should, for example, facilitate and students should be informed of attempts to collect and use materials

collaboratively to resolve the problem. The lecturers should also adjust their lectures and course materials to help students take advantage of the resources currently available to them more efficiently. To implement these suggested plans properly, the lecturers will need to include students' voice and involvement in their action. However, if they choose not to modify their course requirements to suit the resources possibly available for students, the opportunity for monitoring learning processes, for example, becomes limited, and learner autonomy can be probably hindered.

While it is difficult for lecturers to negotiate with the educational authorities, negotiation with students is in lecturers' power. A student can become passive if he/she is framed in a locally so-called well-disciplined environment; however, he/she can become active and more involved in a learning process if he/she is adequately encouraged to participate in. It of course takes time for these explicitly dialogic negotiations and interactive activities to demonstrate effects in teaching and learning practices, especially when both students and teachers in the local context need to change some of their traditional learning routines and perspective on learning philosophy. Therefore, the lecturers should be able to determine their students' level of learner autonomy and have an appropriate course design to facilitate their engagement. Once students are able to modify their learning habits and move through their zone of proximal development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), their learner autonomy capacity will be acquired and gradually enhanced.

To understand students' level of learner autonomy and provide suitable facilitations, the lectures need to take into account of the local socio-cultural characteristics. For example, people at these students' age in the local community are generally given limited choices in their daily life because they are believed not to be mature enough to control their behaviors. They are also expected to learn the knowledge from their teachers and take it as the only one correct source. Therefore, if too many options are suddenly given to them in a course, they may become confused and find it difficult to deal with. They may also find the course uninteresting because they are asked to look for and do with different knowledge resources while they are only familiar with learning from their teachers. As a result, they may not benefit much from the course.

Although learner autonomy is constructed, nurtured, and developed during one's interactions with the environment, it is a personal ability which is produced and performed by each individual in a certain context.

One can exercise his/her learner autonomy at a high level in this context does not necessarily have to achieve the same level in other contexts. Similarly, the same situational facilitative attributes may have dissimilar effects on the development of learner autonomy of different members in that immediate context. Therefore, autonomy-promoting teaching practices need to provide learners wider opportunities for negotiations and choices to help them find their own learning path. This meta cognitive process of interpreting and internalizing social attributes also needs to be nurtured and monitored properly.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary

5.1.1 Summary of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students at a university in the Mekong Delta region about learner autonomy. There were 30 teachers and 90 non-English major students attending an descriptive study with one group design. The instruments used in the study were the questionnaire on teachers' and students' perceptions toward learner autonomy in studying English in school. The research took place in 12 weeks including the teachers' answers to interviewing questions at the end of the semester. Questionnaires and interview helped the researcher gain depth-understanding about learning autonomy in a private university. The data from questionnaire were statistically analyzed by SPSS English version 16.0.

5.1.2 Summary of findings

The finding was shown by the questionnaire on teachers' and students perceptions regarding learner autonomy as well as ways of autonomous learning. Additionally, the outcomes of the questionnaire indicated students' positive attitudes about English autonomous learning in classroom. Specific information showed in questionnaire did promote positive perceptions as well as students' difficulties towards learning autonomously. This finding is also confirmed through the information from the teachers' answers to interviewing questions. The majority of students reported that their language skills gradually throughout the application of ways of learner autonomy. As a result, these findings illustrated the effectiveness of learner autonomy in English in many ways.

5.2 Implications

Structuring lessons in such a way as to shift responsibilities from the teacher to learners seemed to be beneficial. The success of the MT appeared to be closely linked to the gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to learners, one of the most rigorous strengths of SBI acknowledged by Gu (2007). The responsibility was shared with learners by the teachers

who engaged them in the stages of which the Vietnamese teacher is normally in charge, such as giving new inputs or theoretical background for an item. Acceptance of responsibility, which facilitates the management of learning and the right to make decisions in learning, is fundamental in the exercise of LA (Little, 1999; Scharle & Szabo, 2000). In the learner autonomy literature, there has been ample evidence that a well-balanced lesson where the responsibility is shared and is gradually shifted from the teacher to learners would be beneficial (Cunningham & Carlton, 2003; Dam, 1995; Nix, 2003; Stephenson & Kohyama, 2003). It is vital that there be a proper transfer of responsibility from teachers to learners (Chan, Spratt & Humphreys, 2002). Hence, while planning their lessons, teachers should keep in mind that learners need to be involved and have a job to do in every stage of a lesson.

Having articulated the objectives of the lessons explicitly seemed to make a contribution to enhanced learner autonomy in the EG. According to the educational psychology of learning (Gagne, 1974), statements of learning objectives are essential not only for the teacher but also for the learner. He argues that “for the students, appropriate communication of learning objectives may be an important element in the establishment of motivation and the feedback from completed learning” (p. 74). This suggests that explicit articulation of objectives was crucial for learners. It is commonly observed that in the Vietnamese classroom, especially at a tertiary level, teachers do not tell their students about the objectives of each lesson. They might either perceive this to be a point for students to think about, or be influenced by the implicitness of the Vietnamese culture where most people prefer their interlocutors to arrive at conclusions or draw implications from what is said or taught by themselves. It is explicitness rather than implicitness that would orient the students to the main points of the lessons and “push” them towards the objectives of a lesson. For this reason, irrespective of learners’ level of maturity and proficiency, it is suggested that teachers openly and repetitively state the objectives of each lesson as well as of each new item.

5.3 Limitations

Despite the significant findings of the study in terms of students’ improvement in reading ability and their favorable attitudes towards learner autonomy, it should be admitted that the study has following limitations.

The first limitation is the size of the experiment; the study involved one group of 100 participants (40 teachers and 60 students) received the descriptive treatment. Moreover, the proficiency levels were at elementary in their second year, this narrow range of students’ level partly prevented us from getting a full idea of perceptions of autonomous learning at varying levels of proficiency. Therefore, we do not know yet whether students at different levels at the college would make any progress if they participate in this program. It may be more effectively used by more students in English.

The second limitation is attributed to the subjects’ gender, 63% of the subjects are females. Hence, we could not make sure whether or not the similar effect can happen to a wider range of gender.

The third limitation lies in the fact that the data was conducted for a period as short as twelve weeks to answer the questionnaires and interview. This time limit made a hedge for the researcher to study the participants’ background such as their personality, motivations and so on.

Last but not least, for the time constrain, the teachers who were asked to answer questionnaires and interview with only 40 ones not all of the teachers in the university. This did not make a straight line in creating learning styles for students. It would be better if the author could apply questionnaires and interview for more than 40 teachers and more than 120 students to get the data more accurately.

5.4 Suggested further research

It could be noticed from the literature and the current research findings that learner autonomy in teaching and learning English has an impact on language learning in general and in students’ reading skill in particular. Therefore, it would benefit to test the effect of learner autonomy in teaching all language skills such as writing, speaking and listening or in an integrated language class in further research for getting insight into the effect of using ways to encourage autonomous learning. In addition, taking into consideration the role of factors effected students’ learning autonomy to learn English, it is suggested that learner autonomy should be taken into consideration with factors such as individual’s learning style, cultural background, and gender in further research. Finally, since a case study with small subjects did not give a full picture of the matter, further research in the field should be conducted with larger population including English-major students for making generalization. Since generalization is one of the important factors in making a good research, such a wider sample would be effective in giving a holistic view of using learner autonomy in teaching and learning English in university.

5.5 Conclusion

In the present study, the author has conducted as a descriptive research which investigates the perceptions of teachers and students about leaner autonomy in studying English at a private university. The study was carried on 40 teachers and 60 second-year students at a university in the Mekong Delta region. The findings show some aspects about learner autonomy

from the points of view of teachers and students. The survey questionnaire and the data from interview provided the favorable responses of the teachers and students toward the learner autonomy which strongly supported the findings.

However, the statistically significant difference could not be enough to come to conclusion that the ways of autonomous learning is effective in classroom, because it is this research's limitation in terms of sample size and other uncontrollable variables. But the significance of the findings lies in the fact that teachers and students had favorable attitudes towards the learner autonomy in teaching and learning English which motivated them in study.

Moreover, the study also provides information related to problem faced by the teachers and students during the experiment of learner autonomy in teaching and learning English as foreign language. Consequently, these problems will be considered in the future researches in the field.

The paper has also discussed some advantages and disadvantages of learner autonomy promotion in Vietnamese EFL education and suggestions for its implementation. While it does not attempt to investigate a particular case, it addresses most of the typical issues associated with the facilitation of this construct in the local context. Further research needs to examine and document the local students' perceptions of learner autonomy attributes and their manifestation at both immediate and general level in the local context. That will help inform teachers, policy makers, and stakeholders of feasible and workable practices.

Finally, the results of the study lay foundation for further research in a wider range of population and varying English proficiency levels. The study is hoped to increase the interest of ways of autonomous learning in teaching English and in English language teachers for better quality of education in Vietnam.

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